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History and Memory: mass expulsions and transfers 1939-1945-1949

- Most radical version of the Nazi *Generalplan Ost* envisaged a 1000 km eastward shift of the German frontier, relocating a population of 31 mln (mainly Poles) into Siberia, as well as subsequently exterminating 5 mln people;
- In the expulsion-gained „new living space” (*Lebensraum*), the ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe being settled. From 1939 to 1944 Nazis displaced, resettled or deported to forced labor 4.2 mln citizens of occupied Poland. At the same time, 631 thousand Germans were resettled into Poland;
- In line with the victorious powers' decisions made in Potsdam, Germans were to leave Poland and Czechoslovakia; 3.2 mln people were expelled from Poland, and another 4 mln escaped during the mass flight to Germany.
- For many years after the war, German society did not want to remember the Nazi mass crimes committed during the occupation; instead, they emphasized the victimhood of German civilian population exposed to the violence and suffering from expulsions;
- In 1958, the Federation of German Expellees (*Bund der Vertriebenen - BdV*) was founded to popularize the expulsion experience of the Germans, whose suffering had been previously erased from the historical narrative;
- *BdV*'s representatives position the German nation as a victim of II World War; by placing it next to the nations mutilated by the German Nazi regime, they try to reshape the „community of victims”; they put the the postwar expulsions of Germans on equal footing with the Nazi drive for creating the “new living space” for Germans.

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Introduction

2008 was a year of a lively discussion on ways to commemorate and present the common Polish-German history both in Poland and Germany. It was triggered by the government of the German Federal Republic which undertook steps to determine how to commemorate the forced resettlement of Germans after the Second World War, and proposed the "Visible Sign" Centre Bill to regulate the foundation and status of the memorial against the flight and expulsion (*Sichtbares Zeichen gegen Flucht und Vertreibung*).

The debate on the legitimacy and form of the commemoration of the German refugees, held in both countries, has revealed the selective character of national collective memory. Its elements and forms of presentation have been chosen according to the national trend of historical creation. Selected and properly highlighted facts make the common (national) memory of the past. Therefore, in the neighbouring countries and nations, a different "truth" of the past might be remembered (and cultivated) and the (hi)stories – each nation writes on its own – might contradict one another.

The presentation of the tangled histories of European nations, especially those related to the tragedy of WW II, requires particular circumspection. The war is one of the points that have influenced the development of the new historical perspectives. Therefore, the sensitivity to how the course and results of the most tragic wars of the last century have been presented seems justified.

The increased caution, Polish society express towards German aspirations to commemorate the war and postwar suffering of the German nation, results from their fear of the possibility to distort the contemporary history of Europe, where the difference between aggressors, who started the war (and embraced the policy of extermination), and their victims might be blurred. All the European nations as well as ethnic and religious suffered as a consequence of the war and its aftermath. Many of them were deliberately exterminated, or experienced mass relocations due to the organized violence of states or international agreements of the Allies. But it was the German Nazi policy that led to the outbreak of WW II, and shaped its destructive course. Poles fear the false changes in history - changes that will call them the perpetrators of mass suffering. Especially since the main burden of martyrdom does not in the least lie with the Germans.

What Poles also fear is that the German suffering, isolated from the context of the war, might create favourable conditions for false and harmful convictions to arise from the negative associations. International press (due to the ignorance of the authors) has released slogans such as "Polish concentration camps", while places like Auschwitz-Birkenau were German Nazi camps established in occupied Poland to exterminate Jews, Poles, the Roma and other ethnic groups, Nazis found unworthy .

The following book is dedicated to the issue of forming historical memory. It examines to what extent the perpetrators, responsible for the displacements of Poles during the Second World War, realize their role in the process, and how the historical memory of the German nation refers to the dishonourable past. All the



problems are discussed in three separate papers. The first paper presents the plans, scale and range of the resettlements Germans implemented on the occupied Polish territories from 1939 to 1945, and the fates of the Polish people who fell victim to the Nazi pursuit of the "new living space" for Germans. Another paper deals with the selectiveness of collective memory. It analyses the changes in German national historical memory related to the process of emphasizing the victimhood and suffering of the German nation, and ways of denying the blame for the cruelties committed during the war. The last paper focuses on the institutionalized (and non-institutionalized) violence of the state and explores its representations in the historical politics of governments and social-cultural identity of nations. It interprets notions used to describe displacements and defines their emotional references. The articles present the problems differently and show different analytical approaches. But set together, they point to the complexities of collective memory and the process of its creation.

Joanna Dobrowolska-Polak



Maria Rutowska
Expulsions and resettlements of people in the German-occupied territories of Poland (1939-1945)

In the countries occupied by the Third Reich, the resettlements of indigenous people were connected with the plans to Germanize the occupied territories and rebuild Europe on the basis of racial principles. The most radical of these resettlement plans was the *Generalplan Ost* (GPO) ["General Plan for the East"], drafted by the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* ["Reich Security Main Office" (RSHA)] in the years 1941-1942. It laid foundations for the reconstruction of Central-East Europe in the spirit of National Socialism and with the view on extending the so-called German *Lebensraum*. It envisaged moving the ethnic borders of the German Reich („*Volkstumsgrenze*") about a thousand kilometers eastwards, and in the South, almost as far as the Crimea. According to the RSHA estimates, the territories were inhabited by 45 million people, including 5-6 million Jews. 31 million were viewed as racially undesirable and intended for the relocation to western Siberia. The rest of the population was meant to be compelled to forced labor. The plans of mass displacement were hinging on the Reich's victory in the war against the Soviet Union¹. As a consequence of the changing fortunes of the military operations in the East, the largest resettlements of indigenous people were eventually carried out in the occupied Polish areas, the Yugoslav and French territories. In the remaining German-occupied, displacements were implemented on a smaller scale.²

Following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 23 September 1939, and the Polish military defeat in the war of 1939, Poland faced both German and Soviet occupation. 51% of the Republic of Poland was annexed by the Soviet Union, and approximately 25% of Polish eastern territories were incorporated into the Reich in October 1939. By Hitler's decree, the remaining territories of German-controlled central Poland were placed under an administration of the *Generalgouvernement* [General Government (GG)]. This political entity was entirely subordinate to the Third Reich. The Polish territories annexed by Germany formed four new administrative units: two provinces —*Gau Danzig-und-Westpreussen* (Danzig-West Prussia) and *Reichsgau Wartheland* (the Warta Country) and two districts — Katowice (*Regierungsbezirk Kattowitz*) and Ciechanów (*Regierungsbezirk Zichenau*).

German plans towards the occupied Polish territories during World War II differed fundamentally from the colonization policy implemented in the Prussian partition area before the First World War. The choice of the new method arose from the national-socialist agenda, which did not expect to germanise the ethnically and racially alien people, but called instead for the "Germanization of Land." The

¹ There were several plans for the colonization of Central and Eastern. GPO comprised in fact four different plans. The literature on GPO is very extensive, e.g.: Cz. M a d a j c z y k, *Faszyzm i okupacje 1938-1945*, v. I. Poznań 1983; H. H e i b e r, *Der Generalplan Ost. Dokumentation*, "Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte" (6)1958;

² Cz. M a d a j c z y k, *Faszyzm i okupacje 1938-1945*, v. II. Poznań 1984, p. 257-280.



removal of the Polish population from the areas incorporated into the Third Reich and the subsequent settlement of German people were basic steps on the way to implement this policy of Germanization. They did not, however, preclude the use of other instruments of NS policy that aimed to reduce the number of Polish people in these areas. These included: the murder of Jews, the extermination of Poles, deportation to forced labor, inclusion in the German People's list, raising the marriage age, etc.

Apart from the long-term plan of expulsions, there were other plans gradually introduced in the annexed territories. The first short-term plan (*1. Nahplan*), implemented between 1 and 17 December 1939, envisioned the resettlement of 87 883 persons from the *Wartheland* to the General Government - most of them Polish, but also of Jewish origin. In the course of the implementation of the second resettlement plan, conducted from the 10th of February to the 15th of March 1940, Germans expelled 40 128 persons.

In March 1940, the resettlements were temporarily suspended. The main reason for that consisted in the preparations for military campaigns in Western Europe. The expulsions were resumed in May 1940. From May 1940 to January 1941, the 121 594 people were moved into General Government. By 12 March 1941, the Warta Country was abandoned by 19 226 people, including 17 086 Poles and 2140 Jews. The total number of people resettled to the General Government from December 1939 to March 1941 was over 280 600 people⁵.

In the remaining area of the annexed lands, the resettlements of Polish people to the GG were performed on a smaller scale. Nevertheless, major actions of resettlement also conducted in the region were. The Germans did not also give up the resettlements to the GG; they were carried out in May, and then in September and October 1940. By March 1941, the total number of people deported in the 'resettlement actions' from the province of Danzing-West Prussia to the General Government was 41 262⁴. The resettlement of the Poles from Upper Silesia to the GG, carried out through the agency of the Central Emigration Office in Łódź, embraced 17 413 people. In the area of Ciechanów District, deportations to the General Government affected the Poles and Jews who had inhabited the district and Małwy town. The first resettlement action, that took place between 10th and 20th of November led to the displacement of 10 700 people. The other action, conducted from 5th to 17th of

³ II World Archive of the Western Institute/quote I.Z.Dok/ sygn. I.Z.Dok. I-152, Monatsbericht der UWZ-Litzmannstadt . October 1944. W. J a s t r z ę b s k i, *Hitlerowskie wysiedlenia z ziem polskich wcielonych do Rzeszy w latach 1939-1945*, Poznań 1968, p. 73-74; M. R u t o w s k a, *Wysiedlenia ludności polskiej z Kraju Warty do Generalnego Gubernatorstwa 1939-1941*, Poznań 2003, p.57-58.

⁴ W. J a s t r z ę b s k i, J. S z i l i n g, *Okupacja hitlerowska na Pomorzu Gdańskim w latach 1939-1945*. Gdańsk 1979, p.141-159; W. J a s t r z ę b s k i, *Bilans rządów na ziemiach polskich wcielonych do Rzeszy (1939-1945)*, in: *Wrzesień 1939 roku i jego konsekwencje dla ziem zachodnich i północnych Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*. (Eds.). R. Sudzińskiego and W. Jastrzębskiego. Toruń Bydgoszcz 2001, p.175-183.



December, embraced 6687 Poles and 3259 Jews. Altogether, 20 646 people from the region were displaced to the GG⁵.

There were several criteria for the selection of Poles intended for expulsion. The relocations embraced Polish people who: had a history of political activity, belonged to Polish intelligentsia, exhibited the potential for leadership or the membership in the national independence conspiracy, and had possessions. Another criteria were: the place of living and the dislike of local Germans. Among those intended for displacement were also people who had settled in the annexed lands after 1918 (the so-called *Kongresspolen*), as well as people referred to as asocial, and criminals. Another group recommended for resettlement were craftsmen, merchants as well as people any property that could be taken over by the settling Germans. In the first period of resettlements, the displaced adults were allowed only hand luggage with a maximum weight of 12 kg, and since the Spring of 1940, the weight of the luggage was 25 – 30kg per adult. As for children, the restriction was a half of the adult allowed weight. Jewelry (except for wedding rings), works of art, foreign currency and other valuables had to be left behind.

On the basis of Himmler's circular letter of 10 November 1939, the abandoned property of the displaced would be appropriated by the Reich. Those individuals who took items other than specified were threatened with a severe punishment. In the first period of the resettlements, Poles were allowed to retain 200 zloty, and Jews 100 zloty per person. Later, the amount was restricted to 50 RM for a Pole and 25 RM for a Jew⁶.

Before each expulsion, Germans surrounded the target village, town or street quarter (in larger cities) with a police cordon. These would usually take place late in the evening or early in the morning. Poles were removed within 15-30 minutes, and only sometimes they were allowed an hour to pack their belongings. Most of the Poles and Jews were first taken to temporary resettlement camps. Although they were known as "transition camps" (*Übergangslager* lub *Durchgangslager*), they were referred to with various names: *Lager* (camp), *Internierungslager* (internment camp), *Umsiedlungslager* (resettlement camp) or *Sammellager* (collection camp).

The resettlements were conducted with the use of multiple Police and paramilitary formations. Due to the fact that they were together with the policy of extermination conducted as a part of the security policy under the auspices of the SS, they would normally have been excessively brutal and did not only carry the threat of the loss of property, but also endangered the life and health of the resettled populations. In the locations with good railway connections, the people would be immediately brought to the train stations and sent to the General Government territory.

The Polish expellees were transported from the annexed lands to the territory of the General Government by train. The journey usually lasted for several days, and the Polish expellees "travelled" crowded in unheated goods wagons or passenger coaches. They

⁵ W. J a s t r z ę b s k i, *Hitlerowskie wysiedlenia...*, p.70-74, 81; Cz. M a d a j c z y k, *Polityka III Rzeszy...*, v. I, p.336.

⁶ BGK, v. XII, p. 24 - 28.



suffered from hunger and the piercing cold, especially during the harsh winter of 1939/1949. Those transported in the summer or early fall suffered from heat, thirst and lack of fresh air. All the circumstances were the direct cause of deaths during transportation, particularly of children, the elderly and sick⁷.

An important chronological caesura in the implementation of deportations was March 1941, when the resettlement of the Polish people to the General Government was suspended (without determining the end of the restrictions). But since the military situation of the Reich did not allow for a return to the previous resettlement arrangements, the Germans decided to continue deportation of Poles to the General Government in a different form.

These new forms included mainly internal displacements (*Verdrängung*) and relocations (*Umquartierung*) of Polish populations which would be conducted within individual counties or districts⁸. These mainly embraced Poles of Jewish descent. The internal resettlements became particularly extensive in 1942. They particularly affected rural people, workers and people without profession. The Polish inhabitants of towns and cities were removed from better flats and houses, and located in primitive abodes in the suburbs. There were people and families who experienced several instances of such "removals".

The extensive literature on the subject refers to various and often very different figures and estimates concerning the displacements and resettlements of Polish citizens from the German controlled territories of Poland between 1939-1945. In order to specify the number of the organized displacements, researchers have used the data from the reports of the Central Emigration Office (*UWZ*). It shows that from December 1939 to March 1941, 365 thousand people were displaced from the areas annexed to the Reich to the GG, and by the end of 1944, 843 thousand were resettled and expelled.

⁷ At the Berlin conference of RSHA called by A. Eichmann on 4 January 1940, the officer responsible for expulsions SS-Hauptsturmführer Möhr said: „People were closed in the wagons for several days where they had no possibility to relieve themselves. Moreover, during the great cold 100 froze to death in one of the transports.” (BCK, v. XII/1960, doc. no 12, p.56.)

⁸ Cz. M a d a j c z y k, *Polityka III Rzeszy...*, v. I, p. 320.



Table 1. The expulsions into the GG and the internal displacements of Polish people in the territories incorporated to the Reich between 1939-1944 (numerical summary)

Region	Number of people resettled to the GG (from December 1939 to 5 March 1941)	Number of the relocated and expelled from the inhabited regions	Total number of expellees
Warta Country (Watherland)	280 609	345 022	625 631
Danzing-West Prussia	41 262	70 000	111 262
Upper Silesia	22 148	59 191	81 339
Ciechanów District	20 646	4 000	24 646
Total (people):	364 665	474 213	842 878

Source: I.Z. Dok.I-152, Monatsbericht der UWZ –Litzmannstadt. Oktober 1944; Cz. M a d a j c z y k, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce*, v. I. Warszawa 1970, p. 336, table 30; W. J a s t r z ę b s k i, *Hitlerowskie wysiedlenia z ziem polskich wcielonych do Rzeszy w latach 1939-1945*. Poznań 1968, p. 132-134; M. B r o s z a t, *Nationalsozialistische Polenpolitik 1939 – 1945*, Stuttgart 1961, p.101; A. K o n i e c z n y, *Wysiedlenia ludności powiatu żywieckiego w 1940 r. (Saybusch-Aktion)*, „Studia Śląskie”. Seria nowa, v. XX. Opole 1971, p. 246, 247; M. R u t o w s k a, *Wysiedlenia ludności polskiej z Kraju Warty do Generalnego Gubernatorstwa 1939-1941*, Poznań 2003, p. 37; S. S t e i n b a c h e r, „Musterstadt”Auschwitz. Germanisierungspolitik und Judenmord in Ostoberschlesien, München (Munich) 2000, p.131-138.

In the case of Danzing-West Prussia, apart from the organized displacements, Germans also carried out the so called “wild” expulsions. For example, from 12 to 26 October 1939, 12 thousand citizens of Gdynia were expelled, and another 28 thousand left the city, before they had been given the police order. In February 1940, the governor of Danzing-West Prussia, Albert Froster, stated that the total number of the expelled from Gdynia amounted to 40 thousand people⁹.

It remains difficult to establish is the number of Poles and Jews who arrived at the General Government to take shelter from the arrest or the inevitable expulsion. According to the data of the Main Welfare Council, in March 1942 the area of the GG was inhabited by 391 thousand people who had previously lived in the territories annexed to the Reich¹⁰. Therefore, the “difference” between the number of people resettled by the occupying forces (365 thousand) and the number of people who actually lived in the GG was about 26 thousand. It might be assumed that the number of people who arrived at the territory of the GG was 400 thousand Poles and Jews

⁹ W. J a s t r z ę b s k i, *Hitlerowskie wysiedlenia..*, p. 51; Cz. M a d a j c z y k, *Polityka III Rzeszy...*, v. I, p.308; G. B e r e n d t, *Ludność Gdyni 1939-1945 – znaki zapytania*, „Dzieje Najnowsze”, (4) 2005. p. 195; M. T o m k i e w i c z, *Wysiedlenia z Gdyni w 1939 roku*, „Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej”, (12-1) 2003-2004, p.33-38.

¹⁰ Cz. M a d a j c z y k, *Polityka III Rzeszy...*, v. I, p. 335.



who fled, evacuated or were forcibly expelled from the areas annexed to the Reich¹¹.

The prepared inclusion of the General Government into the project of Germanization in 1941, led to further mass resettlement and expulsion of indigenous population. The largest relocation was planned in the southeastern Poland (in the area of Zamość). The displacements in the area of Zamość, carried out from late November 1942 to August 1943, embraced over 300 villages that were forcibly abandoned by 110 thousand Poles. The methods of evacuation differed from those employed during the expulsions in the annexed territories. Children were among those who suffered the most. About 4.5 thousand children were sent to the Reich to be Germanized. Other were loaded onto wagons and transported into different parts of the GG. The cold weather and the long "journey" in unheated wagons led to the deaths of several hundred children. Apart from children, many elderly and sick lost their lives in the transit camps, as well¹².

Table 2. The number of Polish people displaced, resettled and expelled from their homelands by German authorities during the German occupation from 1939 to 1944 (in thousands)

Name of the area	Number of the displaced and resettled
Warta Country	626
Upper Silesia	81
Danzing- West Prussia	111
Ciechanów District	25
„Wild” expulsions (mainly in Pomerania)	20
Incorporated areas (total)	863
Bialystok District	28
Zamosc District	110
General Government (troop training grounds)	171
Warsaw (after the Uprising)	500
German-occupied Polish territories (total)	1 672

S o u r c e: I.Z. Dok.I-152, Monatsbericht der UWZ –Litzmannstadt. Oktober 1944; Cz. M a d a j c z y k, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce*, v. I. Warszawa 1970, p. 333-336, table 30; M. B r o s z a t, *Nationalsozialistische Polenpolitik 1939-1945*. Stuttgart 1961, p.101; A. K o n i e c z n y, *Wysiedlenia ludności powiatu żywieckiego w 1940 r. (Saybusch-Aktion)*, „Studia Śląskie”. Seria nowa, v. XX. Opole 1971, p. 246, 247; S. Steinbacher, *„Musterstadt” Auschwitz. Germanisierungspolitik und Judenmord in Ostoberschlesien*, München 2000, p.131-138

¹¹ B. K r o l l, *Rada Główna Opiekuńcza 1939-1945*, Warszawa 1985, p.201-202.

¹² Z. M a ń k o w s k i, *Hitlerowska akcja wysiedleń i osadnictwa na Zamojszczyźnie (model czy improwizacja)*. Zamość 1972.



The last mass displacement was the expulsion of 500 thousand citizens of the left-bank part of Warsaw, carried out in the fall of 1944 after the fall of the Warsaw Uprising. About 67 thousand people were sent to forced labor in the Reich. Like other Polish expellees before, they had been deprived of their possessions, except for small hand baggage.

According to German sources and the assumed estimates, from 1939 to 1944 in the area of German-occupied Poland, Germans displaced and resettled 1 672 000 people, including 365 thousand deported to the GG, over 37 thousand transported to the Reich as candidates for Germanization, 170 thousands sent to the forced labor in the Reich or the annexed territories, and 23.5 thousand taken to work in Nazi occupied France¹³. We must not forget about over 2.7 million Jews, for whom the expulsion and concentration in ghettos were the first step on the way to the Holocaust. The historical literature often overlooks the displacements since they have been considered an initial stage of the mass extermination of Jews.

The territories of German-occupied Poland were a reservoir of cheap and forcibly recruited workers, used for the purpose of German war economy. By the fall of 1944, 700 thousand Poles from the annexed lands, mainly from the Warta Country, were sent to forced labor in the Third Reich. By December 1944, the General Government was left by over 1 297 thousand people, including 67 thousand expelled after the fall of the Uprising. The most difficult seems the estimation of the number of people taken to work in the Reich from the eastern territories of the Second Republic of Poland, excluding the part annexed to the General Government and the region of Białystok (*Reich Ostland* commissariats and the Ukraine). The literature refers to the data prepared in 1945-1946 by the War Compensation Bureau, which mentions 500 thousand people deported from the area to force labor. The total number of the deported to worked in the Reich during the Second World War was 2.5 million inhabitants of prewar Poland.¹⁴

¹³ Cz. M a d a j c z y k, *Polityka III Rzeszy...*, v. I, table 30, p.336; Cz. Ł u c z a k, *Polska i Polacy...*, p.145.

¹⁴ Cz. Ł u c z a k, *Polska i Polacy...*, p. 177 –179; Ibid: *Praca przymusowa Polaków w Trzeciej Rzeszy*, Fundacja „Polsko-Niemieckie Pojednanie”, 1999, p. 61.



Zbigniew Mazur
Germans as perpetrators and victims

A few years ago, Aleida Assmann remarked that the living memory of the German massacre of Jews had influenced and changed the social assessment of the past: the previously dominant division into the winners and the defeated has been replaced by the criminological division into perpetrators and victims. The first pair of opposites have manifested itself in a confrontation and fight, the other, in unilateral and systematic violence towards defenseless civilian people. The winner is not the same as the perpetrator, and the defeated is not the same as the victim. In German, as in Polish, the notion of *Opfer* refers to two different situations: the sacrifice of life for somebody or something (*sacrificium*) or the passive submission to violence (*victima*). In the first case, death is given a particular meaning, in the other, it is utterly senseless. Therefore, the memory of these two kinds of victims must be completely different. A soldier's death on the battlefield has been codified into "heroic national semantics", taken from the religious semantics of martyrdom. The soldier dies for his community and his homeland; his death is revered and glorified. The memory of him undergoes sacralizing heroization. None of these can be applied to the defenseless and passive victimhood of civilian people, subjected to physical extermination. Their fate cannot be rendered by means of a heroic narrative, but requires the narrative of traumatic suffering and pain. According to Assmann, over the last decades of the past century, there has been a distinct shift in collective memory: from sacralizing to victimizing forms of remembrance and commemoration (*victima* as a moral construct present in a public space).

After the war, the Germans had first and foremost problems with internalizing their perpetration. Even after the Nazi crimes had been fully disclosed, there was no sign of a moral shock on their part. It was immediately noticed by three intellectuals who knew German culture well and who, after many years, revisited Germany occupied by the Allies. They were: the outstanding Polish essayist Jerzy Stempowski, the well-known German historian-emigrant Hajo Holborn, and the Jewish thinker Hannah Arendt. They later left Germany with feelings of disappointment, letdown, as anxiety. During the stay, Jerzy Stempowski observed that German society had manifested no will to exonerate themselves. Hajo Holborn was particularly alarmed by the attempts at whitewashing, devious reactions and casuistry in intellectual milieus, and warned against the revival of antidemocratic and nationalist tendencies. Hannah Arendt was surprised by the lack of reaction to the horror of revealed crimes; instead, she saw the inability to regret, the unwillingness to realize what had happened, self-pitying, constant complaints about the Allied reprisal, and evasion of guilt and responsibility. Stempowski tried to justify the situation with chaos, poverty and a lack of actual leadership. Many years later, Christian Meier was trying to prove that tough post-war conditions had not favored deep reflections concerning the past, especially in the country that had been deprived of elites able to an independent crackdown on the Nazi heritage.

It is true that for decades, German society have remained the post-Nazi society, where defense mechanisms have dictated an approach towards the criminal past. In 1983, Hermann Lübke met



with a strong opposition after he had claimed that the silence on the Nazi past was a precondition for successful development of democracy in the Federal Republic. Currently, the claim is not that strongly resisted. Many historians think that the collective silence about the crimes, enabled the integration of old function elites and even the whole nation. It was a well-thought strategy for building democracy in the post-Nazi society. Hermann Lübke inconveniently asked why the silence strategy had actually been necessary. He claimed that it would not have been necessary if Nazism had penetrated a narrow group of people, who could be later charged in lawsuits or removed from public functions. But Nazism had affected the majority of the nation that was later engaged into the common building of the edifice of democracy, and whose feelings had to be respected due to its people's electoral power. Lübke jeered at the thesis of 'denying the dishonorable past'. He argued, it did not explain anything, but let one forget what millions of people had seen every day. He claimed that the moral and political issue was being altered into a therapeutic problem, that the thesis of denying the past by social masses had been invented to authorize claims of intellectual elites to moral and political domination.

The society of the German Federal Republic had ignored the problem of responsibility for the crimes of the Third Reich until the end of the 50s. They unanimously condemned Hitler and his 'clique', mainly for the misfortune they had brought onto the nation, as well as for territorial losses and hardship of everyday life during the post-war years. Hitler was blamed for crimes that had been impossible to hide from the public, but a sharp line was drawn between the handful of evident perpetrators and the innocent German nation, whose patriotism had been reprehensibly used and abused. Nazis disappeared in a miraculous way and anti-Nazis multiplied. A slogan on crimes "in the name of the German nation" was coined to emphasize that they were not committed by the nation, but by those who impersonated it. The evil was not born inside the German nation but came from outside of Germany and remained outside its people. The war criminals were deprived of an ethnic attribute – those who murdered were not Germans but Nazis. In the GDR (German Democratic Republic), the blame was put on the class-defined "fascists", "capitalists" and "imperialists". Linguistic deceptions appeared to be particularly long-lasting - they have existed until the present times. Aleida Assman described them as psychological externalization of the evil, based on the mechanism of escaping the blame and pushing it onto others, as well as on donning the robes of an innocent victim - deceived, betrayed, oppressed, made to obey orders, and unable to resist in the conditions of ubiquitous dictatorship. The true and deep internalization of perpetration had been impossible as long as Germans believed to be a victim of external evil powers.

Christian Meier pointed out that when speaking of the Third Reich, Germans had never used the pronoun of the first person plural ("we"), but the third person plural ("they"). The Third Reich was alienated, pushed out of German identity. Otherwise, the crimes would have been referred to as "ours" and not "theirs". The approach was good in so far as it helped to assimilate the dark sides of the past (whose "ownership" was not recognized). Initially, the trauma of the Jewish massacre was hoped to subside since Germans believed in the



healing effects of the so called historisation. When it had appeared impossible, they turned away from their past - they remained aloof from it, as if it was a history of another nation. Only then, argues Meier, did Germans show readiness to accept the truth about war crimes. They did not, however, agreed to assess the Third Reich through their own identity. Nevertheless, at the end of the 50s and the beginning of the 60s, the collective silence was eventually broken, starting the period of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the public confrontation with Nazism. It begun with the questioning of the claim that the problem of responsibility for the crimes of the Third Reich had not been addressed in order to maintain the stability of West German democracy. In 1960, the prominent SPD politician Carlo Schmid said in the Bundestag that the avoidance of settling the legacy of the Third Reich contributed to the instability of West German democracy. In the early 60s, it was continued with the trial of Eichmann, Auschwitz trials and the public discussion over the statue of limitations for Nazi crimes.

II. Shortly after the war, German collective memory was reigned supreme by the motif of German victim. In communicative memory, there was no room for other victims. Germans dwelled upon individual sufferings: the loss of relatives, the horror of the Allied blanket bombings, the escape from the Soviet Army, rapes, lootings, the enforced displacements, the destruction of goods and chattels. They brood over the fate of those kept in captivity or deported deep into the Soviet Union. Their whole attention revolved around strains of everyday life: housing problems, unemployment and the struggle for daily survival, in a word – the general poverty. The future did not seem bright, as well. Nobody knew what to expect from denazification policy – how far it would extend; people feared it would transform into a mass revenge. The future of families, local communities, the nation and the state was uncertain. All this fell onto a society – brainwashed into thinking that Germans had been created to rule over “sub-humans”. It must have been painful to be shaken out of the Nazi dream; the humiliation of the defeat and the Allied occupation had been experienced twice as intensely; the German sufferings were taken as an affront to civilized standards; many Germans found their fates equal with the fates of people who suffered from the Hitlerian regime; they counted and compared the losses. When Hannah Arendt would admit her Jewish origins, the Germans reportedly flooded her with stories of their hardships; better-educated Germans drew balance between German and non-German sufferings, claiming them equal and mutually canceling out.

There has been a view, occasionally expressed, that for many years the flight and “expulsion” (*Vertreibung*) had been tabooed in West Germany. It is nonsensical and absurd for the simple reason that the memory of the phenomenon played an extremely important role in the relativisation of German perpetration. It is true, however, that in the sixties and the seventies, having embraced the policy of opening to the east (*Ostpolitik*), the openly and undeniably nationalist and revisionist organizations and publications of the “expellees” became inconvenient for the governing coalition of Social Democrats and Liberals, and to some extent, the Christian Democratic opposition, as well. Since then, the only political support the “expellees” could expect, came from the right-wing CDU and the Bavarian CSU. As long as the minimal agreement with Warsaw and



Prague was desired, the anti-Polish and anti-Czech Federation of the Expellees (Bund der Vertriebenen) could not be officially approved. Left-liberal intellectual circles regarded the "expellees" milieu as a bastion of the Right, or a bastion of reactionaries ("ewiggestrigen" – "yesterday's eternal"), whose votes they could not count on for, anyway. The '68 generation did not want to be linked with the xenophobic environments of the Federation. Particularly unfavorable to the memory of the flight and "expulsions" was the internalization of the Holocaust guilt. The "expellees" suddenly slipped down the hierarchy of victims, where they had previously occupied the very top position. No wonder they took it as a great distress. They complained about the lack of compassion. Although they subjectively felt pushed to the sidelines of collective memory, they were in fact not tabooed.

For nearly ten years, the BdV had struggled for the establishment of a special center to commemorate "expulsions". The 'campaign' ended with success in 2008. The project was launched in 1999 as the "Center of the 15 million", which meant it would be dedicated exclusively to German "expellees". The name was politically awkward, thus "Center of the 15 million", was replaced by more universal "Center Against Expulsions". The project was planned to be designed, managed and supervised by the members of the BdV, but financed with money from the federal budget. The project was so big that it could not be started without public money and implemented without the engagement of the institutions responsible for the national historical policy. The idea enjoyed explicit support from the right-wing CSU, slightly restrained support from the CDU, and only partial support - provided with many reservations - from the SPD; the Greens treated it with reserve, and the post-communist PDS stood up against it from the very beginning. In fact, the political parties of the Federal Republic reached a consensus that the suffering of refugees and resettlers should be commemorated in a particular way - even the Greens consented - though under certain conditions. Main reservations were addressed to the project's initiator (Federation of Expellees); some feared the negative reactions from Jews, as well as Czech and Polish societies.

One may wonder what determined the ultimate commemorative success of the Federation. The 1998 events in Kosovo (but not only them) have been considered to contribute to a substantial increase in international interest in the problem of "ethnic cleansing". Although the analogy with German mass exodus and transfer seems more than doubtful, Kosovo could still serve as a catalyst for the political history of German "expellees", who wanted to counterbalance the memory of the Holocaust. In 1999, the Bundestag decided on building the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, which was immediately followed by the idea to set up the "Center of the 15 million". Planned on a grand scale, the commemoration of the massacre of European Jews threatened the commemorative status of German end-of-the-war and postwar victims, whose position was additionally challenged by the competitive victims of the Berlin Wall. The excessive exhibition of Jewish victims goaded the aggrieved refugees and resettlers into struggle for the proper and exceptional commemoration of their suffering in the capital of the new Germany. The erection of the Holocaust Memorial paradoxically appeared an advantageous opportunity. Nobody could accuse the German side of hiding the Jewish massacre and focusing on commemorating only



their own suffering. The Federation's leaders publicly stressed the uniqueness of the Holocaust, but at the same time underlined that Germans also have right to remember and commemorate their own victims.

The Federation of Expellees has proved to be a strong lobby. Nevertheless, they would not have been able to implement their designs, had it not been for general changes in social attitude that took place in the Berlin Republic. It was clear that the unification of Germany would reshape German collective memory and alter the perception and representation of the past. German society has become more self-confident, more willing to open wide for the national past and able to break their Nazi fixation. Moreover, the generation directly involved in the crimes of the Nazi regime has gradually disappeared; those who felt (at least partially) guilty or responsible for the atrocities committed "in the name of the German nation" have been passing away. German political and intellectual lives came to be dominated by a new generation whose experiences remain unrelated to the events of the war. In the case of the West Germany, they have been shaped by the experiences of great economic success, well-functioning democracy, a well-developed system of welfare, and restrictions self-imposed in foreign policy. Zdzisław Krasnodębski, a Polish sociologist and expert on Germany, said: "The historical consciousness of modern Germans is limited to the democratic post-war history of their country. Widespread is the feeling that today's Germany is a country that does good and conducts the policy of reason". If one combines the feeling with the general tendency to anthropologize memory - to approach the past through an individual fate - the career of refugees and resettlers as victims becomes more understandable.

The federal government presents a more moderate stand, especially since the tacit agreement of Polish authorities to musealize the "expulsions" in Berlin (2008) was not easy to obtain. The government officials ensure that the newly established institution will commemorate the "expulsions" in accordance with the actual sequence of events: from the war started by the Third Reich, to the transfer of the German population from East to West. From the German viewpoint, however, the most important seems the general acceptance for the project to include the refugees and resettlers into the vast "community of victims" comprising the Armenians, Albanians, Finns and Poles. It is obvious that, at the same time, the opposite group - the "community of perpetrators" has also expanded, which, in the opinion of Germans, automatically involves the extension by the "expelling" nations, including the Czech and Polish people. What is thus being attempted is the creation of two big communities: of perpetrators and of victims, to give an impression that every nation, in fact, is both a perpetrator and a victim; every nation indeed - the Germans on par with the Poles and the Czechs. Instead of a clear black-and-white image, there is an image full of grays that blurs German responsibility for two major European catastrophes. If the image is accepted, no one will ever be able to point to the actual victims and perpetrators of World War II.



Hubert Orłowski
The memory of institutionalized violence and historical semantics

Modern assessment of violence, in the context of both the perpetrator and the victim, splits into two areas: legitimate and illegitimate violence. While the former, the limited violence is largely internalized and given deeper psychological and moral acceptance, the unlicensed violence is totally morally stigmatized, exciting fear and horror. This allocation of resources, mechanisms and strategies of violence has deep cultural roots and comes close to the mechanisms of tabooed behaviors. Recent studies have substantially advanced our knowledge in this respect, releasing works such as Herfried Münkler's *Gewalt und Ordnung. Das Bild des Krieges im politischen Denken* [*Violence and Order. The Image of War in Political Thought*] (1992), Heinrich von Stietencron and Jörg Rupke's excellent anthology *Töten im Krieg* [*Killing at War*] (1995), and finally, the written reflections of Jan Philipp Reemtsma, Wolfgang Sofsky and Zygmunt Baumann on modernity and the Holocaust.

The violence of World War II as a total war - however great the damage, suffering and deprivation - was given a certificate of cultural civil rights or, in other words, a cultural agreement to sanction the acts of war, whereas the actions conducted "out of control" and after the (symbolic) caesura known as "the war's end", are regarded as culturally stigmatized and morally reprehensible.

Authentic and directly experienced suffering, says Elaine Scarry, escapes verbal expression. The suffering of others, unfortunately, has no spokesmen. "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned"¹.

Deprivation is defined as "a mental condition that occurs when essential - biological, sensory, emotional, cultural and social - human needs are not satisfied. The feeling of relative deprivation might occur when one's living situation does not deteriorate, or even slightly improves, but the changes in the situation of other people are evaluated as more advantageous."² The condition includes the feeling of loss of important emotional biotope (for people and their communities) that is followed by the feeling of sacrifice. It is executed through language and not beyond it, not beyond the existent world of concepts, metaphors and formulas. Therefore, hermeneutical consequences seem of no small importance, particularly when one realizes that the key concepts of deprivation - „Heimat“ (little homeland) and „Vertreibung“ (expulsion) - have not been given by God, but are man-made. Thus, the terminology around the key concept "expulsion" makes itself a factor of hardly imaginable consequences. In the tangled political debates of the immediate postwar period, whoever entered the field, had to support the German reason of state since the key term „Vertreibung“ [expulsion] was legitimized by the Constitution of the Federal Republic (article

¹ E. S c a r r y, *The Body in Pain. The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford New York Toronto, 1985, p. 4.

² *Praktyczny słownik współczesnej polszczyzn*,. H. Z g ó ł k o w a (Ed.), Poznań 1996, vol. 8, p. 27.



116.1)! Today in Poland, there are binding official translations of "uciekinier" [refugee] and "wypędzony" [expellee]³, therefore their connotations and emotional aura, acquire the strength of popular references.

It appears that the stigmatizing power of the term that is central to German (and Polish) social-political language, originates from German law, and as such, the term functions without previous, and mandatory in science, verification and falsification. The term „Vertreibung” – strengthened by the referential power of the state, and firmly anchored in derivative terminology - „Recht auf Heimat („right for homeland”) and „Heimatverlust” (homeland loss), and the heritability of the expellee status (article 116.1) – affects only a certain part of the phenomenon of the flight and forced deportations (in other words: the forced transfer of people) after 1945.

The purpose of historical semantics is not to reason for this or that terminological option, especially since arbitrary terminological decisions have proved to fail in practice. However, some terminology needs to be organized, and the attempts undertaken by historians (such as Krystyna Kersten⁴) or linguists (e.g.: Reinhard Roche) should not be allowed to pass without mention. The organizational area is not the matter of semantics, but, whatever criticism one may apply to it, it allows a comprehensive, typological (i.e. in keeping with set-oriented criteria) presentation of the expulsion complex in terms of diversified (in time) mechanisms, intentions, institutions, and perpetrators. The thing is not to give up "expulsion" as a generic term, but to make it a term used without exceptions or ideological connotations. "Right" and "wrong" uses of the term "expellees" are still being argued, with much reluctance to extend its meaning to strangers, and not only to one-of-ours. Examples seem countless.

However, there are reasonable doubts concerning the spontaneous nature of the emergence and origin of the term "expulsion". Mathias Beer's thorough monograph on the implementation of the first project to document the German expulsions from Central-Eastern Europe (*Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa, 1951-1961*), substantiates that all crucial thematic documents and works by 1950, referred to the expellees with a use of a completely different term - „Ausweisung”.⁵

That judgment has been argued for by the historians, Eve and Hans Henning Hahna. Under the entry "Flight and Expulsion" of the lexicon *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte [German Sites of Memory]*, the authors write about recollection procedures rather than the unverifiable freshness and quality of sentiments. They see the term "expulsion" as culturally articulated.

³ Cf. the Polish translation of the Fundamental Statute of the Federal Republic of Germany: *Ustawa Zasadnicza (Konstytucja) Republiki Federalnej Niemiec*, Poznań 1997, p. 267.

⁴ K. K e r s t e n, *Przymusowe przemieszczenia ludności – próba typologii*, in: H. O r ł o w s k i, A. S a k s o n (Eds.): *Utracona ojczyzna. Przymusowe wysiedlenia, deportacje i przesiedlenia, jako wspólne doświadczenie*. Poznań 1996, p. 13f.

⁵ Cf. M. B e e r, *Im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Zeitgeschichte. Das Großforschungsprojekt „Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa”, „Vierteljahresschrift für Zeitgeschichte”, 46 (1998), p. 345f.*



The difference between “expulsions” and “forced relocations” is that the first term’s connotations have reduced their subject to the role of a victim only. The victims of expulsions are never respected as witnesses to history; pain and suffering are to absolve them even for the duty of bearing witness to the truth.

Hegemonic discourse of statistics, which refers to two categories of data: twelve million refugees and expellees (without clear distinction from the other), and two million dead, murdered or missing, has dominated the public debate on “genocidal ethnic cleansing” after 1945. These estimates do not come out of nowhere but, being official, they have been acknowledged by a number of governmental institutions of the Federal Republic and by certain researchers of unlimited referential confidence.

The voices of other researchers find it particularly difficult to penetrate the scene of the public (media) discourses of expulsions. Probably the most recent introduction to the history of statistics (since once can hardly speak of studies), comes from the German historian Ingo Haar. The title of his excellent work *Die demographische Konstruktion der „Vertreibungsverluste“ - Forschungsstand, Probleme, Perspektiven, Opfer* [The demographic structure of “expulsion losses” – research, problems and perspectives] tells a lot. Haar’s unusually well-documented narrative concludes with the bitter punch line: “In the history of this construction [that excludes the wartime genocide], German expulsion is figured as a key to the universal history, or the history of the Second World War and the immediate postwar period. The interested public is shown the historical panorama that presents German collective victims together with the victims of Jewish genocide of the Second World War, and the Armenian genocide of World War I.”⁶

One can scarcely imagine two more distant categorizations of ‘expulsion discourse’ than the almost ideal-typical narratives and observations of Norman Naimark i Hans Henning Hahn. The German researcher expressed his outrage at the viewpoint, Naimark, an American historian of extremely high media prestige and referential authority, had presented⁷ in his essay *The Killing Fields of the East and Europe’s Divided Memory*. Norman proposed a revision of the current views on the historical processes in (Central-Eastern) Europe: “The starting point for the common history of massacres and deportations should be the European superior narrative of the past, present and future.”⁸ The furious reaction of Eve Hahn and Hans Henning Hahn seems more than justified since, just a few years earlier, Neimark formulated a thesis that ethnic cleansing, which had take place in Central-Eastern Europe, had been triggered by “flaming tribal hatred”. The original title (*Fires of Hatred. Ethnic Cleansing In Twentieth-Century Europe*, 2001) and the title of the German translation

⁶ I. H a a r, *Die demographische Konstruktion der „Vertreibungsverluste“ - Forschungsstand, Probleme, Perspektiven, Opfer*, „Historie. Jahrbuch des Zentrums für Historische Forschung Berlin der Polnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften“, (1) 2007/2008, p. 119.

⁷ Cf. E. i H. He n n i n g H a h n: *Alte Legenden und neue Besuche des „Ostens“*. Über Norman M. Naimarks *Geschichtsbilder*, „Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft“, (7/8) 2006, [Trans. A. M].

⁸ N. M. N a i m a r k: *Die Killing Fields des Ostens und Europas geteilte Erinnerung*, „Transit“ 30 (2005/2006), p. 67, [Trans. A. M.].



(*Flammender Haß. Ethnische Säuberung im 20. Jahrhundert*) clearly point to “fierce”, “wild” or even “deadly hatred” of the ethno-national “tribal” basis, although Neimark refers to Zygmunt Bauman’s presentation of the modernizing aspects of mass extermination. It does not, however, fit the ethnic context of personal “flaming hatred”. Bauman’s theory of extermination assumes the cold rationalism of perpetrators, adopted for the time and purpose of vile acts. Moreover, the abuse of the phrase “millions of casualties” has placed Naimark in the discourse of expulsion, understood as the consequence of ethnic cleansing, especially since he points to “the chaotic time of transition from war to peace”⁹. It again confirms the tension between the narrative culturally ‘pro war’ and the narrative that stigmatizes violence ‘as such’.

Before I return to the large tribal option of the discourse of expulsions and the discourse of ethnic cleansing as an explanatory formula for the processes of “population transfers” in the 20th century Europe, I will briefly discuss the modernization paradigm in the context of Nazism and the Third Reich. This complex issue was described in a separate volume of a book series “Poznań German Library” (*Trzecia Rzesza, nazizm a procesy modernizacji*) [*The Third Reich – Nazism and Modernisation Processes*] (2000). Unlike in the case of the radical nationalism, the investigation into the influence of totalitarian ideologies, based on the ethos of “historical mission”, revolves around the question about the definition of “social engineering”, within which the practical eugenics (that refers to one’s “valueless life” even if ethnically “own”), the Holocaust and genocide, as well as expulsions constitute various forms of exclusion: from “definitive”, which involves the physical extermination, to “partial” - displacements, relocations, expulsions.

That issue was brought to the Polish intellectual discussion by Zygmunt Bauman’s study *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Bauman’s conclusions are disturbing. Bauman advocates for the theory that sees genocide as a result of “the short circuit (one almost wishes to say: a chance encounter) between an ideologically obsessed power elite and the tremendous facilities of rational systemic action developed by modern society (...)”¹⁰. “Modern genocide is genocide with purpose. Getting rid of the adversary is not the end in itself. It is a means to an end. (...) The aim itself is a grand vision of a better, and radically different society. Modern genocide is an element of social engineering (...)”¹¹.

Perhaps, the emergence of the ethnic version of institutionalized violence or – as Zygmunt Bauman would say – civilized violence is “just” another step on the tortuous path to building German group or national identity? After attempts to create the “negative” definition of identity (nation of perpetrators) – I am thinking of Thomas Welskopp’s comments on the “identity *ex negativo*”¹² – and the equally reductive definitional understanding of

⁹ Cf. N. M. N a i m a r k, *Flammender Haß. Ethnische Säuberung im 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt am Main 2008, p. 234.

¹⁰ Z. B a u m a n n, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, in: A. Laban Hinton (Ed.): *Genocide. An Anthropological Reader*. Oxford 2002, p.122.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 120.

¹² Cf. T. W e l s k o p p *Tożsamość ex negativo. „Niemiecka droga odrębna” jako meta-opowieść nauk historycznych w Republice Federalnej lat*



identity as a community of victims (besides Jews) – carried out with the use of ignorant silence (*Beschweigung* mentioned by Hermann Lübke), the ex-territorialization of the Holocaust (by Jörn Rüsen), the awareness of experience and fabrication of a total defeat in the form of a trauma of “collective auto-respect”¹³ towards the collective ‘us’ who are the “avant-garde in defeating the evil past” (Ilja Kowalczyk), – an attempt at hegemonic building their identity with the use of the paradigm of “flaming hatred” is very probable.

If nearly all mass actions against civilian people (including forced relocations, starting with the Armenians to those that took place in the Balkans) – except the Holocaust as an exceptional and unprecedented phenomenon – are treated according to the rules of the paradigm of ethnic cleansing as genocide, the “bumps” in the form of reservations concerning the cases where violence has been inflicted by the state or its institutions, or/and as a result of modernization processes, will be “ironed out”

Under these circumstances, Germans may feel the identity of pride in:

- the life sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of German civilian citizens and the suffering of those who have survived from the wave of violence: rapes, homelessness and persecution – the sacrifice for the other dozens of Germans “in the West”;
- the dowry in the form of the satisfaction of the “autochthonous” Germans, deriving from the ability to integrate in the local communities of “refugees and resettlers”;
- the contribution of refugees and resettlers into the development of postwar Germany and the renunciation of “revenge and reprisal” (whatever they could be like).

The rule by which more prosperous Germans in the west jointly supported the harmed members of their national community, has determined and shaped – since late 40s – the political discourse of the legal status as “the expelled and members of German minorities in the east”¹⁴. The founding myth could be ascribed extra traits of the so-called basic narrative in the sense of Trutze von Trotha: “The basic narrative (*Basiserzählung*) is the structure of the history of a society and culture together with the dominant legitimization of the structure of the past, which makes it an inescapable point of reference in conflicts about the structures of the past. Therefore, changes in the basic narrative herald changes in political culture”¹⁵. The central category of violence can be perceived either from the perspective of a perpetrator or the perspective of a victim. The latter, especially when strengthened with proper “memory

siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych, in: H. O r ł o w s k i (Ed.): *Sonderweg. Spory o 'niemiecką drogę odrębną'*. Poznań 2008.

¹³ J. R ü s e n, *Holocaust, Erinnerung, Identität. Drei Formen generationeller Praktiken des Erinnerns*, in: H. W e l z e r (Ed.): *Das soziale Gedächtnis. Geschichte, Erinnerung, Tradierung*. Hamburg 2001, p. 245, [Trans. A. M.].

¹⁴ R. M ü n z, R. O h l i g e r, *Vergessene Deutsche – Erinnernte Deutsche. Flüchtlinge, Vertriebene, Aussiedler, Transit*. “Europäische Revue”, (15) 1998, p. 144, [Trans. A. M.].

¹⁵ Quote from T. H e r z, *Die „Basiserzählung“ und die NS-Vergangenheit. Zur Veränderung der politischen Kultur in Deutschland*, w: *Gesellschaften im Umbruch. Verhandlungen des 27. Kongresses der deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie 1995*. Frankfurt am Main 1996, s. 93, [Trans. A. M.]



politics”, will no longer require any form of ideological, legal and pragmatic institutionalization.

I believe that this particular situation triggered the debate on the German nation as a community of victims, (the debate, which recalls events from over fifty years ago). The trauma suffered by the victims of violence, understood as illegitimate (or unlicensed), allows them to maintain the continuity of identity as well as to find their place in the founding myth of the European community of victims.



Conclusions

The German historical memory of WW II revolves around three main injustices experienced by the Germans during and after the war: the mass deaths of soldiers on the Eastern front, the Allied bombing of Dresden, and the displacement of German people from Poland and Czechoslovakia. Although the Germans emphasize the injustices, they remain aware of the German perpetration of the Holocaust. They do not, however, admit their blame for *Lebensraum* that involved the expulsion of several million people from the land "gained" in Poland, the extermination of another millions (of non-Jews) in concentration camps, the resettlement of millions of Poles sent to forced labors to the Reich, the germanization of thousands of the Polish children with "racially valuable traits", the pacification of those who remained on the German-occupied territories, including the extermination of the Polish intelligentsia.

The non-Jewish and non-German victims of the Second World War do not exist in German national consciousness. German historical politics finds the victims – and makes them – less important and "marginal"; it belittles painfulness of their war experiences, producing the hierarchy of war suffering with the German people at the top.

The Germans avoid calling their nation the main perpetrator of the martyrdom of nations during the WW II – the aggressor responsible for the policy that asserted the superiority of German race and sought to subordinate other nations. They deny their own blame by bestowing it onto other perpetrators, which blurs the historical truth of the war. When a German soldier, responsible for the extermination of Poles and killed by Polish partisans, fighting with the invader, is called a "victim", historical facts seem to be deformed. Just like when the word "victim" describes a German family displaced from the land they settled after it that had been taken from its Polish owners.

Death, pain, famine or displacement are traumatic experiences impossible to evaluate, regardless of the historical context. But when the consequences of undertaken actions are easy to predict, historical processes must talk about the predominant and determining guilt of states and nations. It is not surprising, then, the German policy of denying the full responsibility for the consequences of the war and blaming other nations for the suffering of German people - which resulted from historical mechanisms started by Germans themselves – raises protests of the unjustly blamed.

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