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Susannah Eckersley

Walking the tightrope between memory and diplomacy? Addressing the post-World War II Expulsions of Germans in German Museums.

Introduction

“When people use museums, they bring their life experiences with them. Often, their encounter with objects in the museum brings back vivid recollections, half-remembered places and emotions which would otherwise have remained forgotten. It is commonplace for such memories to be discussed amongst the social or family group taking part in the visit. From the exhibits encountered, and the memories evoked and shared, new meanings are made.” (Black 2011:418)

The post-World War II expulsions (*Vertreibungen*) of the German populations from East of the Oder-Neisse line is a difficult and at times controversial topic, marred by both political and emotional issues. This chapter examines museums in Germany which (to a greater or lesser extent) address the histories, places and memories of the expulsions, including the Silesian Museum in Görlitz, the Military History Museum Dresden and the German Historical Museum in Berlin. It identifies the differing ways in which museums in Germany present the history and memory of the expulsions, looking at the reasons for their curatorial choices and the impact of them. The chapter identifies three categories of museum presentation, exploring the potential dichotomy between history and memory in exhibitions and the significance of ‘validation’ to the working through (*Aufarbeitung*) of traumatic memories. These categories are mapped against varying perspectives on the events surrounding *Vertreibung*, as documented by the personal written memories of individuals from different generations who were expelled from the mountainous area of lower Silesia. These memories are as yet unpublished accounts accessed by the author and include descriptions of everyday life in the ‘Heimat’ under Polish and Russian administration prior to the expulsions, expulsion itself and the aftermath of as ‘refugees’ within Germany. These are accounts which have been written at a temporal distance to the events, and so include self-reflexivity of a sort which is not found in some collections of personal accounts, published relatively soon after the events, such as Kaps 1962 and Storm 1961. The chapter places the

ways in which the expulsions have been and continue to be presented museologically in parallel with the changing nature of expellee memory narratives and personal testimonies. It argues that the demand for new interpretations of this past is related to the highly sensitive, yet perhaps frequently misunderstood, desire of expellees for public recognition, beyond that which has been provided by existing museum representations.

Background

During the final stages of World War II and in the aftermath of the war, significant numbers of people were moving around Europe, many attempting to escape from advancing troops or forced to move from areas whose sovereignty had been transferred to another power. The reasons for such movements and justifications or condemnations of them are complex and interwoven with the politics and history of all the nations involved in World War II. As such, this chapter is not seeking to address any specific political, collective or individual 'rights and wrongs', nor to assign blame for, or conversely to whitewash over, any of the difficult events which occurred during and after the war. Instead, it focuses on how museums have presented some of these events in the period since then. Nevertheless, in attempting to analyse the ways in which museums in Germany are addressing this difficult and controversial topic, this chapter is stepping into a veritable political, historical and academic 'minefield' within which there is little that is considered universally to be 'neutral' or factual. As Hansen aptly describes:

The question is to avoid both extremes. Given the dreadful company one might fear to keep, the temptation for mainstream liberal historians may be to push the issue of German suffering to one side, to leave it at best to the respectable but conservative historians. This, too, would be a mistake. Though well-intentioned, it would amount to a partial reading of history, to say nothing of the fact that it may be, as in the past, the disreputable far-Right that opts to control public consciousness of these topics. The goal is to cleave to the centre: to recognize German suffering as real and based on events that indisputably occurred but to analyse it in a way that attends to the issues of context, accent and intention [...] (Hansen 2011:379)

These movements of people have been described in different places and at different times using a range of terminology, some of which is heavily loaded with political and emotional

subtext, and which can provoke strong reactions (see Salzborn in Schmitz 2007:87-104 for a more detailed discussion and historical analysis of the terminology used). For example, terms which are sometimes employed to describe the events include: population transfer; repatriation; resettlement; displacement; expulsion; ethnic cleansing.

In describing the specific example of the movements of German people from the territories transferred to non-German sovereignty following WWII the chapter will use the term *Vertreibung*, plural *Vertreibungen* (expulsion). This is the most commonly used terminology within German and English language discussions of these events. However, elsewhere in the literature, the following terms are also employed to describe more specific aspects of these population movements:

1. **flight** is used to describe the voluntary movement of Germans away from their homes and towards western Germany, anticipating the advance of Red Army troops, during the latter stages of WWII.
2. **'wild expulsions'** describes the unsanctioned (by the Allies) forced movement of Germans from their homes towards western Germany, carried out from the end of the war by the Polish Communist military authorities and those of other countries with German minorities.
3. **'organized expulsions'** is the term used to describe the enforced movement of Germans from all areas east of the Oder-Neisse Line as sanctioned by the 'Big Three' (Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill) from 1945, subsequent to the Yalta, Potsdam agreements which set out the new borders for central European countries.

The topic of the flight and expulsion of Germans from east of the Oder-Neisse Line continues to be of great international political sensitivity. This is not only because of the past from which it arises, but due to contemporary political and diplomatic concerns, including the international recognition of borders within Europe (Niven in Schmitz 2007: 108-9 summarises the late 20th century history of German-Polish and German-Czech border politics); the free movement of people within the EU; the question of compensation for the loss of property (either collective or individual); and ownership rights to property (varied discussions of these issues can be found in Bafoil 1999, Lutomski 2004, Ther 1996, Kraft 2004, Niven 2007, Urban 2006 for example).

In addition to all of this, there is the key concern and controversy over who (either collectively or individually) may be considered (or be permitted to consider themselves) as a perpetrator or as a victim within this dark period of European history. As Niven 2012:220; Schmitz 2007; Douglas 2012 and Assmann 2006 among others discuss, the idea that Germans could be seen as victims in a situation that had come about due to the extreme horrors of Nazi Germany is an anathema to many and understandably so. And yet, the continuing and repeated public discussion of this question (see Berger 2006 for example), connected to the experiences and traumas of so many individuals indicates that it is an unresolved part of the past for Germany and its neighbours – a ‘wound’ that could fester if not treated appropriately. Schmitz welcomes the possibility of a “potential lifting of a rigid binary perpetrator/victim discourse in favour of a more inclusive picture” (Schmitz 2007:17), something which Assmann addresses in her analysis of memory praxis and the frameworks within which this occurs in Germany, stating that “one memory does not have to challenge and eliminate the other, as long as they are not in competition for the master-narrative” (2006:197-8). However, despite the significant passage of time since the *Vertreibungen* occurred, the question of guilt/victimhood remains a hotly contested topic politically, socially and for institutions such as museums which attempt to address the issue.

Museum Approaches to *Vertreibung*

“through its cultural heritage a society becomes visible to itself and to others. Which past becomes evident in that heritage and which values emerge in this identificatory appropriation tells us much about the constitution and tendencies of a society.”

Assmann and Czaplicka 1995:125-133

Paragraph 96 of the *Bundesvertriebenengesetz* (Federal Expellees Law) of 1953, (Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz, undated) requires both the German national government and federal states to preserve, research and support the culture of former eastern regions and expelled people and it specifically mentions museums, archives and libraries. Since this legislation was enacted the history of *Vertreibung* has been addressed through the cultural heritage of the people and places affected. This has

happened with varying focuses at different times, firstly concentrating on the preservation of (in some cases the last) examples of specific cultural and ethnographic material objects from the German populations in these regions, generally within *Heimat* museums. *Heimat* museums are small, locally focused museums whose collections often contain objects with a specific ethnographically distinctive character for that region, or are connected to individuals from that region. They have been described as pedagogical workshops, which reflect global developments on a regional scale (Köstlin 2000). Macdonald succinctly sums up the history and evolution of *Heimat* museums, pointing out that during the period of their greatest expansion in the late 19th and early 20th century, they “sought to make belonging tangible and root it in a material past, [and] were part of the means through which the new way of thinking about national identity was also brought home” (2002:122). In the early 1950s individual *Heimat* museums around western Germany were given so-called ‘guardianships’ (*Patenschaften*) over the culture and traditions of specific locations beyond the Oder-Neisse Line (an extensive record of such collections can be found in the publication *Schlesische Heimatstuben in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Schlesisches Museum zu Görlitz, undated, while Kittel 2007:97-100 analyses the ways in which such guardianships were set up). Secondly, with the redevelopment of national museums in Germany and their displays following reunification in 1990, the topic of flight and expulsion was presented alongside the other major upheavals and traumas of 20th century German history, often occupying a small part of large museum displays, such as in Berlin’s German Historical Museum and the Military History Museum in Dresden. Finally, there are also museums which focus more strongly on the topic of *Vertreibung*, with collections relating to the ethnography, cultural and political history, and art and design of specific former German areas. These include the museums associated with the *Landsmannschaften*¹ of these regions, for example the Oberschlesisches Landesmuseum in Ratingen, or place-specific museums, such as the Silesian Museum Görlitz, which is situated in the only portion of Silesia which remained part of Germany.

¹ *Landsmannschaften* are non-profit organisations sometimes translated as ‘Homeland Associations’, which represent people from the expelled areas. There are *Landsmannschaften* for East Prussia, West Prussia, Silesia, Upper Silesia, Sudeten Germans, Germans from Hungary, from Lithuania etc.

These various types of museums present *Vertreibung* differently to one another, as might be expected from representations of the past developed in varying times and places, for as Urry suggests: “the past is endlessly constructed in and through the present... all representations of the past involve remaking in and through the present” (Urry in Macdonald and Fyfe 2005:48-9). In analysing this situation, three distinct styles of presenting *Vertreibung* and the reasons behind them have been identified:

1. ‘Neutrality’ or detachment

Firstly, the ‘neutral’ display where historical fact and contextualization is dominant, with *Vertreibung* embedded within the wider history of the time period and of Germany. This can be considered to be both political and historical in its approach to the topic. It is seen most often in the larger, ‘national’ museums, which cover a huge range of historical time periods and diverse collections, such as the German Historical Museum Berlin and the Military History Museum Dresden. In these examples *Vertreibung* is presented as a minor aspect of German history, within the wider context of the more significant histories of World War II and the Holocaust. In both of these museums very little exhibition space has been given to the topic of *Vertreibung*, and there is no further discussion of any issues arising from these expulsions (either politically, social or for individuals) later in the chronological exhibitions. Given the huge historical scope of, and international audiences for these two museums, it is perhaps not surprising that *Vertreibung* does not figure in any depth, in particular when taking into account the ongoing political and historical controversies over this part of German history. As might be expected of nationally focused, more politically minded museums, the way in which *Vertreibung* has been presented is also relatively ‘neutral’, presenting the facts of the situation and occurrences. There is minimal personal or emotive content, if there is any at all, creating a rather detached presentation of historical events.

Such a detached presentation of the history of *Vertreibung* matches quite neatly the way in which adult expellees (in personal accounts accessed by the author) recorded their memories of their experiences. Although writing some considerable time after the events, the adult expellees focused their ‘testimonies’ on factual descriptions of events, places and people, concentrating on the major overall issues affecting them during and after the *Vertreibung* took place. For example, concerns such as housing, work and schooling for their

children focus prominently, but are described with little emotion, instead there is a sense of detachment as the individuals recall what needed to be done to get by and survive. The written memories of adult expellees often focus on a sense of pride at having built up new lives through hard work and determination, again echoing the German story of 'national' renewal in the late 20th century which can be read into the German Historical Museum and Military History Museum's displays and interpretation of post-war history.

One attempt is made within the Military History Museum to engage with the visitor's emotions and empathy on the subject of *Vertreibung* via a 'no-tech' interactive, which asks visitors "What would you pack in your suitcase?" and to choose a maximum of eight items from a total of 24 to pack to take with them on their last journey away from home. The items offered are: Money and valuables; bread; doll; keys; pet; bedding and pillow; food; personal keepsakes; clothing; certificates and identity papers; books; photos; cooking equipment; silverware; typewriter and manuscript; religion; Sunday best clothes; cigarettes and alcohol; old and infirm people; sewing machine; honey and jam; cutlery; horse feed; tools (Fig. 1). Again, this fits with the content of adult expellee accounts, which feature lists of what they were permitted to take with them and how they managed to do this. However, despite the museum having recently undergone a whole-scale redisplay and 'reorientation' of its collections along interwoven chronological and thematic lines, the subject of *Vertreibung* does not make it into the exhibition guide at all (Piecken and Rogg 2011).

The kind of 'neutral', detached historical presentation described in these two museums, (which is of course anything but neutral in reality, but instead is a political and social diplomacy of sorts) negates the emotional impact of an often violent and traumatic past. It mirrors the way in which the emotions attached to traumatic experiences are often repressed or detached from the recounting of such experiences by individuals suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Bisson 2007). The national museums may therefore be exhibiting a type of 'institutional PTSD' through the way in which they present the history of the *Vertreibungen*, echoing that which the adult expellees are likely to have experienced. While this is an interesting observation in itself, such museum presentations however do not provide the 'validation' of trauma which is often desired by PTSD sufferers and which is significant for many expellees. These museum presentations therefore run the

risk of alienating expellee audiences, at the same time as potentially underplaying the issue of *Vertreibung* to members of the public with no specialist knowledge of it, which is what most visitors to such museums would be. In this way, such museums become one of Sharon Macdonald's 'contested terrains' (Macdonald and Fyfe 2005:9) due to the manner in which *Vertreibung* is presented within them.

2. Place symbolism

Secondly, many museum displays and interpretation associated with *Vertreibung* are tied to the idea of 'place' – an idea which Kockel (2012:551-571) explores both thoroughly and thoughtfully within the contexts of displacement, belonging, memory and replacement, to highlight the enduring significance of place to people, especially those dislocated from it by space and time. In the museum examples presented here, their utilization of the idea of 'place' is illustrated by them using the symbolism of specific places and landscapes, in connection with the history, literature, art and craft, language, ethnography and music of the people who lived there. This is a much more cultural and less political approach to the subject matter of *Vertreibung*, focusing on the tangible and intangible heritage of the place, including within it the difficult aspects of that place's history.

This is the approach taken by individual *Heimat* museums and museums such as the Museum of European Cultures in Berlin and the Silesian Museum Görlitz. In both of these museums the displays are both object-centred and also respectively people-centred or place-centred. For example, the Museum of European Cultures does not explicitly address the issue of *Vertreibung* or even German history from the chronological or political perspectives, but rather takes as its starting point the idea of "the study and presentation of lifeworlds and cultural contacts within Europe from the 18th century to the present day" (Staatliche Museen Berlin, undated). The museum's website states that it is "addressing contemporary issues such as social movements and national boundaries" (ibid). Within this remit, the objects chosen for display are varied according to both their place of origin and historical or contemporary significance, and include an example of traditional dress from a German 'language island' in Wishau, in the Czech Republic (Fig.2 & Fig. 3). The interpretive label for this item succinctly and factually explains the historical, social and cultural significance of the dress in relation to the lost culture of that area, the *Vertreibungen*, and

for the donor of the dress today. In this example, the issue of *Vertreibung* is only a minor part of the wider ethnographic significance of the object, but at the same time, it is also the pivot within the interpretative text which allows the object to speak symbolically for the events, people and places affected by *Vertreibung*.

The Silesian Museum in Görlitz has a remit and mission which is much more explicitly connected to the history of *Vertreibung*, partly due to it being located in the only corner of Silesia to have remained in Germany following the redrawing of national borders along the Oder-Neisse line. As such it not only represents the sole German museological presentation of German Silesian history, culture and traditions which is still physically located in part of the place of their origins, but also has a responsibility to address its own status as a museum within a border region. This is significant in that it therefore has a heightened need to work within the reality of contemporary German-Polish-Czech relations on both the local and national level, but also to address future challenges in an open and inclusive manner. For example, the museum website states (in the German version at least) that:

“The traditions of Silesia are a communal heritage of Germans, Poles and Czechs. The museum searches for new routes into this old/historic cultural landscape and invites discussion on the past and future of Silesia”² (own translation, Schlesisches Museum zu Görlitz, undated).

This differentiates it from the other museums housing Silesian collections or collections from other *Vertriebenen* communities, such as the *Heimat* museums or the *Landmannschaften* museums. Although these institutions often state that they aim to work towards “good German-Polish-Czech neighbourliness” (Oberschlesisches Landesmuseum, undated) they are physically dislocated from the places which they represent, and away from the border territories, where such issues are more acute. It is interesting to note at this point, that due to its location on the German-Polish border and as a key entry point to post-war Germany for many expellees, Görlitz/Zgorzelec was the Copernicus Group’s (a collection of experts and academics on Poland and Germany) first choice location for a Centre against Expulsions (Lutomski 2004:463). It also carries the symbolism as a place of Polish-German

² “Die Traditionen Schlesiens sind ein gemeinsames Erbe von Deutschen, Polen und Tschechen. Das Museum sucht nach neuen Wegen zu dieser alten Kulturlandschaft und lädt ein zum Gespräch über Vergangenheit und Zukunft Schlesiens.”

‘friendship’ and peace going back to the signing of the *Görlitzer Vertrag* (Görlitz Treaty) between the GDR and People’s Republic of Poland in 1950 (Urban 2006:165-166),

The majority of the permanent exhibition at the Silesian Museum in Görlitz is given over to thematic displays on the social and cultural history of the region since the 13th century onwards, yet these are framed within an overall structure of the significance of place. The first exhibition space presents the theme of ‘landscape and cities’, introducing the visitor to the changing demographics associated with Silesia as a place of both continuity and difference. It introduces a number of objects acting as, or including place-based symbols, symbols which can subsequently be found throughout the museum. For example the mythological figure of *Rübezahl*, the mountain spirit said to inhabit the Giant Mountains (*Riesengebirge*, or *Karkonosze*), or depictions of the *Schneekoppe* mountain (*Śnieżka*). These symbols are then found intermittently throughout the permanent displays and again with a greater emphasis on their significance in terms of the loss of connection to place in the final exhibition space, ‘Downfall and New Beginnings’ which addresses the *Vertreibung* directly. For example, there are a number of *Rübezahl* figures carved from wood as part of the display in the ‘Landscapes and cities’ space, and then there is a small *Rübezahl* figurine (Fig. 4) which was one of the few items, and the only toy, taken by a 14 year old girl on her journey of expulsion in 1945, exhibited in ‘Downfall and New Beginnings’. The image of the *Schneekoppe* (Fig. 5) also reappears numerous times within the museum, in paintings from all the time periods on display, 19th century ceramics, and in maps and illustrations.

Such object-centred, cultural presentations of the *Vertreibungen*, whether emerging from place-based or people-based associations are a more holistic way to examine this history than the apparently ‘neutral’ presentations. Within this approach it becomes possible to bring out the breadth, depth and complexity of the history presented as well as the emotional ties to place. This is often achieved from multiple perspectives simultaneously, but again without making *Vertreibung* an overpowering theme within the long history of the places.

3. Memory, trauma and personal experience

Finally, there are exhibitions and displays which focus much more deeply on personal memories and experiences, and which address the subjective (and therefore potentially controversial) issues of emotions and trauma. Often (but not always) these museums embed the specific experience of people who were expelled from east of the Oder-Neisse line within the context of other forced migrations and displacements. This final type of approach can be seen as much more 'human', as personal, emotional and subjective, with significantly less weight given to the overarching historical events or political context in which these personal experiences were formed. Assmann describes memory as either a rival or a partner to history, depending on the way in which it is used, but also the way in which it is perceived: "over the last two decades, history has received a potent rival or partner in its claim to access, reconstruct, and represent the past, namely memory." (Assmann 2006: 262). Examples of this approach range from specific temporary exhibitions, including some from the Silesian Museum Görlitz, to the hotly contested Centre Against Expulsions, which is currently under construction in Berlin.

Two temporary exhibitions in the Silesian Museum Görlitz from 2012, *'Lebenswege ins Ungewisse'* (Life routes into uncertainty) and *'Schlesien nach 1945: Wege und Wandlungen eine europäischen Region'* (Silesia after 1945: Routes and transformations of a European Region) link in to the place-based interpretive strategy of the Silesian Museum's permanent exhibition, but also introduce a new layer of personal and subjective interpretation. The first exhibition was a joint operation with the Muzeum Łużyckie in Zgorzelec (the Polish part of the divided/double city Görlitz-Zgorzelec which straddles the River Neisse) as part of the third *Sächsischen Landesausstellung* (Saxon regional exhibition) (Pietsch 2011). It presented a number of different individual stories of migration into and through Görlitz by means of personal accounts, together with loaned objects from those individuals, a set of digital media 'talking heads' and a film backdrop of people and places with the memories and stories associated with them (Fig 6). This exhibition was bilingual German-Polish (as is the permanent exhibition of the Silesian Museum), and brought together a broad range of nationalities and intersecting personal-national-European histories within the individual stories. For example, it included testimonies from Germans fleeing to Görlitz from east of the Neisse following the end of World War II, but also those of Poles, Macedonians and Greeks who moved to Zgorzelec in the same time period, as well as the contemporary

movements of people from both cities in many different directions due to economic and social factors. The juxtaposition of these personal stories, together with the individually significant yet outwardly ordinary objects which embody the challenges and achievements of their owners, make for a highly emotive, but also balanced exhibition. The contemporary and historical are also balanced through the use of the talking heads and the visual backdrop of archive images with personal memories and changing experiences of the same places across time.

This exhibition echoes the way in which those expellees who were children at the time of the *Vertreibungen* have recorded their memories of this past, much as the 'neutral', detached presentations of the GHM and MHM echo the more detached testimonies of the adult expellees. The child expellees' testimonies are full of emotion and experiential descriptions of the changes to their daily lives and circumstances, such as hunger and privation. They also focus heavily on their individual losses, whether of a parent, their home or a toy or pet, full of detail and emotion (in much the same way as described in Kossert 2009 and Douglas 2012 who both also highlight the need of such individuals to receive validation and recognition of their traumatic pasts). At the same time the written testimonies (completed by the individuals as adults looking back on their childhoods) are full of a sense of disbelief that such things happened to them, while expressing the importance of recording and recognising this past, tempered by an adult awareness of the context to the events. In contrast to the fears generated by the League of Expellees and its proposals for a Centre against Expulsions,

The vast majority of refugees and expellees, and especially their children and grandchildren, are not concerned with blame and restitution, but with grieving for the places they lost and recovering the roots of their belonging (Hirsch, 2004:251)

The second exhibition 'Silesia after 1945', while being a more low-tech installation of text and image panels, was also an effective means of presenting the subjective and personal alongside the wider historical and contemporary political, social context of Polish Silesia. Here, individuals described how they felt 'Silesian' and what it was that bound them to a place, which many of them (or their parents or grandparents) had been brought to by historical 'chance'. The ways in which the individuals' different experiences of social change

and economic and political upheavals within Silesia affected each person's sense of identity and belonging to place were presented in a manner which allowed the visitor to explore the varied responses without following a fixed path – thereby echoing the experiences presented. The exhibition is described on the Museum's website as having the purpose of attempting to introduce to Germans a "familiar place which has become alien" (Schlesisches Museum zu Görlitz, undated, own translation), in order for them to understand it better. Both of these exhibitions demonstrated constructive uses of personal memory and testimony within museum presentations of *Vertreibung*. The overall positive atmosphere of the exhibition narratives, despite containing stories of hardship and trauma, can be attributed to the museum's careful balancing of emotions combined with a sensitivity to and awareness of the different perspectives on the topic.

The 'tightrope'

Susan Crane describes the key problem which is at the heart of the current analysis of museum presentations of *Vertreibungen* in Germany, which is that:

"when members of publics find that their memories of the past or their expectations for museum experiences are not being met, a kind of 'distortion' occurs... a distortion from the lack of congruity between personal experience and expectation, on the one hand and the institutional representation on the other"

(Susan Crane 1997:44)

When it comes to representing the history and personal experiences of *Vertreibung*, the question remains as to whether it is actually possible to address all the issues, but at the same time keep away from bias or the over-representation of any one particular issue or viewpoint. The different approaches described above each have their own advantages and disadvantages, but none yet seems to meet the need to preserve, record and interpret the history and memory of the past without 'distorting' it for different publics.

The supposedly 'neutral' historical presentation seen at the German Historical Museum negates the emotional impact of the past, thereby running the risk of alienating expellee audiences. At the same time, it also underplays the issue to non-specialist audiences, who may leave with little or no understanding of the wider significance of the facts described so

succinctly. The 'cultural' presentation, such as in the permanent exhibition in the Silesian Museum Görlitz, can be considered to be more holistic, enabling it to bring out the breadth, depth and complexity of history, as well as highlighting the significance of emotional ties to place, doing so from multiple perspectives simultaneously. However, such a museum may well have limited obvious appeal to a non-specialist audience or to those with no personal connections to the places and histories being presented. The Silesian Museum therefore, may well be talking to an audience of visitors who are looking specifically for the history and stories they find there, rather than learning about them as part of a more general interest.

The more emotional presentation, such as described in the two temporary exhibitions in Görlitz, using memories, personal objects and stories can allow visitors in on an emotional level, but without providing a historical context, something that may alienate those with specialist historical knowledge. In some cases (although not in the two exhibitions from Görlitz), the need for balance through the use of multiple perspectives may be lacking, with the result that a particular (and potentially controversial) perspective is presented. Indeed early plans for the Centre against Expulsions were criticised for being too one-sided in this respect, which led to accusations of bias, revisionism, propaganda and so on.

The use of personal testimony and memory in museums is an increasing contemporary trend internationally, following Assmann's conclusions that: "History and memory, then, are no longer considered to be rivals and more and more are accepted as complementary modes of reconstructing and relating to the past." (Assmann 2006: 262-263). However, this is something which needs to be done with great care in museums, which are often seen in the public as repositories of 'truth' (a concept which is discussed within the introductory chapter to this volume), or conveyors of national identity.

The Centre against Expulsions appears to meet a demand by expellees for wider public recognition of their experiences within Germany, but at the same time its existence stokes anti-German phobias and fears of compensation, and ownership claims from both the Polish government and individuals within Poland. It arose out of a long held proposal by the *Bund der Vertriebenen* (League of Expellees), led by its President Erika Steinbach, a CDU (Christian Democrat) politician. Both the plans for the Centre and the League of Expellees itself have been highly contentious in Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic and further afield, for a

number of reasons. Pawel Lutomski's article (2004:449-468) analysing the controversy surrounding the Centre sets out some key points of debate: firstly, the site of any Centre against Expulsions, and the symbolism which the various mooted locations (Berlin, Wroclaw/Breslau, Sarajevo or Strasbourg) carry; secondly the extent to which the focus and content of the centre would be balanced or contextualised; thirdly the involvement of expellees themselves (both through the League and other expellee organisations); and finally, the possible connections of high profile expellees and expellee organisations to right wing groups, or to a Nazi background. This final point came to the fore recently with the revelation from a study by the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* (Institute for Contemporary History) that more than 50% of the League's executive committee members in the early years of its existence had once been members of the National Socialist Party (Carstens, 2012). Such links obviously make the League's involvement with the proposals for the Centre against Expulsions even more controversial. International debate has focussed on the motivations of individuals driving the project, such as Steinbach, who has proved controversial in her own right and become a figure of ridicule as well as of suspicion and vilification. Lutomski describes a 2003 Polish magazine cover satire image of her in SS uniform astride the back of Germany's former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, with the caption 'German Trojan Horse', summing up the mood in Poland towards the plans for the centre at the time. Such media depictions do not necessarily reflect the true diplomatic situation, but they do give an indication as to the public and political atmosphere surrounding the impact of the Centre on Polish-German relations.

Following many years in which both the League and its plans for the Centre were used as a political football and caused diplomatic problems (Niven in Schmitz 2007:105-123 analyses the development of the League's proposals for the Centre), the German federal government took the unusual step of taking on responsibility for the project. The government set up a Foundation for Flight, Expulsion and Reconciliation and thereby removed the Centre from the control of the League. This signalled the end of the involvement of the League of Expellees, which also declined to take up a place on the Foundation's committee (Kürschner, 2013). Wolfgang Thierse (an SPD politician) made the point that:

“This Foundation is an establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany, decided by the German Federal Parliament and with this the Federal Republic of Germany has taken on the commemoration of this chapter of our and of European history. It is no longer the property of the League of Expellees. That is very important.”³ (ibid)

At the end of 2011 the building contract for the new Documentation Centre on Expulsions in the 20th Century was awarded to the architectural firm Marte Marte, which is currently constructing it within the *Deutschlandhaus* building in Berlin. The Documentation Centre aims to focus on German expulsions, but not in isolation, rather placing them alongside other displacements across Europe, including the forced resettlement of Poles from eastern Poland to former German regions such as Silesia, and ethnic cleansing during the Yugoslavian conflicts. Chancellor Angela Merkel made the point that *‘Erinnerung Raum braucht’* (memory needs space), in a speech that has been described as the ‘starting signal’ for the new project (Die Bundesregierung, undated).

Interestingly this rather sidesteps the question of whether the German victims of the expulsions will be presented within the context of Germans as perpetrators. Stefan Berger makes the point that “the private family memory of victimhood needs to be brought into line with the official historical consciousness of the FRG. But this can only be achieved by bringing discussions of German victimhood together with debates on German perpetrators” (in Niven 2006:223). The new Centre is intended to have spaces for temporary exhibitions alongside the permanent exhibition, which will include examples of individual fates (ibid). This suggests that the interpretive strategy of the Centre will be much more along the lines of the temporary exhibitions in the Silesian Museum, and rather than the way in which *Vertreibung* has been included within the permanent exhibition of the German Historical Museum. This is despite the fact that the German Historical Museum now has the academic and museological responsibility for the Centre (ibid).

³ “Diese Stiftung ist eine Einrichtung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, beschlossen vom Deutschen Bundestag und damit hat sich die Bundesrepublik Deutschland des Gedenkens dieses Kapitels unserer deutschen und europäischen Geschichte angenommen. Das ist nicht mehr Eigentum des Bundes der Vertriebenen. Das ist ganz wichtig.”

Although the history of *Vertreibung* has been addressed in different ways in different museums and at different times, there has been a surge in the public interest in the topic more recently, bringing the controversial Centre against Expulsions to the fore. The fact that the people who were themselves expellees as children are now an aging generation, facing not only the new realities of a relatively 'borderless' Europe, but also the potential loss of 'their' history and their stories has made the desire to preserve and record the history of *Vertreibung* more pressing. Contemporary museological practice is such that memory and history no longer act as rivals, but rather as two sides of the same coin, each able to enrich the other for the benefit of a visitor potentially lacking in a general historical awareness of this aspect of European history. As Black suggests:

As first hand memory disappears, the objects made and used even in the recent past shape our views. Thus museums become places where culture, history and memory meet. (Black 2011:417).

This ties in with Hirsch and Spitzer's articulation of 'testimonial objects' which facilitate the transmission of memories to subsequent generations, creating a 'postmemory' which can be carried by individuals who did not experience the remembered past themselves, but for whom it has great resonance (Hirsch and Spitzer 2006). At the same time, the reliability of memory as a historical document in itself, which appears to have been questioned by many of the larger museums in Germany in the past, is almost considered to be part of the richness of memory as a source for museums by Benedien when describing her reminiscence work with older people:

Remembering processes at a later age demonstrate that there are no right or wrong memories, but there is something that older people could call the honour of remembering. They honour their own lives, in all its heroic or mundane manifestations. They also honour the memory of those who are no longer with us, and in many cases they modestly feel themselves to be the carriers of a certain historical experience they want to preserve for the future" (2012, 458).

The approaches which are being taken in smaller museums and temporary exhibitions, which include both 'objective' factual, and subjective personal accounts of the past, are no longer necessarily seen as problematic within 'national' history curatorship in Germany, as the example of the newly re-interpreted Military History Museum in Dresden shows.

Beyond Germany there is also a developing understanding of the significance of this past within the places where it happened, and new initiatives are being developed to address and acknowledge the history of *Vertreibung* where it happened. An interesting example of this is the new Museum of German History and Culture in the Czech Lands, in Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic which specifically addresses the history and culture of the German population – a population which is no longer there (Willoughby, 2009). As this demonstrates, the significance of *Vertreibung* and its presentation within museums has moved on from being a difficult historical event that has only been dealt with in passing.

By recognising the personal and emotional aspects of *Vertreibung*, without neglecting the historical context, museums may be able to act as repositories both of the material culture of the places and people affected by the *Vertreibungen* and also of the memory culture of individual expellees. In this way museums can provide a sense of recognition of the hardships and traumas suffered by individuals, within the over-arching historical narrative of war and extreme politics. For many of those personally affected by *Vertreibung* this balance may enable them to set their personal memories and trauma ‘to rest’, come to terms with their pasts and impact positively on the future, for as Sharon Macdonald points out “memory is never only about the past” (Macdonald 2012:216). The topic of *Vertreibung* has ‘been through the wringer’, having been, in turn, the focus of political controversy, a diplomatic hot potato, a topic for media spotlighting, and now appears to be coming out on the other side with some integrity and the potential for reconciliation and understanding.

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