DISPLACEMENT
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CATALOGUE
OF THE
PERMANENT
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CATALOGUE OF THE PERMANENT EXHIBITION

EDITED BY THE FOUNDATION DISPLACEMENT, EXPULSION, RECONCILIATION

SANDSTEIN VERLAG

A EUROPEAN HISTORY OF FORCED MIGRATION

THE DISPLACEMENT AND EXPULSION OF THE GERMANS

SCAN ME

SCAN ME

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SCAN ME

INTRODUCTORY FILM

WAR AND VIOLENCE

In the 20th century, the violence of war disrupted everyday lives in hitherto unprecedented ways. Not only did the military use modern logistics and weapons technology to target the enemy army, they now also attacked the enemy's entire social structure. Never before had the civilian population suffered more violence. During or shortly after a war, it was easier for those in power to expel undesirable sections of the population. Entire social groups were treated as enemies on the basis of their nationality, their faith or ethnicity. In every corner of the globe, people were forcibly displaced, expelled or deported; they were subjected to sexual violence or systematically murdered. Such violence was the ramification of nationalism or racist ideas of a homogeneous society, while mass media became an effective tool for preparing the ground for and justifying such measures.

< CLOSE UP ON EXHIBITION DISPLAY

The exhibits in this display case were witnesses to war and violence against civilians, akin to material evidence kept in an exhibit room for a future trial.

BELGIAN REFUGEE TREK

Belgium, 1914

Fleeing from War and Violence

War and tyranny are the main reasons why millions of people have to flee and seek safety. For many, what was initially believed to be a short-term escape from danger may turn into long-term or permanent displacement if borders are moved post-war or if a conflict simply drags on or becomes 'frozen'. Displacement has become a universal experience that people have been suffering worldwide.

The First World War (1914–18) triggered one of the 20th century's first major refugee crises. The German invasion of Belgium alone caused 1.4 million to flee to the Netherlands, France or Great Britain. Concurrently, half a million Germans fled East Prussia in 1914 and headed west. The violence armies wrought against enemy civilians in this war took on a whole new dimension, as did the brutal treatment inflicted on the population through the instruments of the state.

During the Second World War (1939–45) terror against civilians escalated once more in unprecedented ways, and after the two world wars and the devastation they wrought, the Cold War's proxy wars also caused massive refugee movements. Fought indirectly between the blocs headed by the US and the Soviet Union, among the largest of these conflicts were the Korean War (1950–53), the Vietnam War (1955–75) and the Soviet-Afghan War (1979–89). The Korean War was directed in large measure

against the civilian population and exacerbated the country's division into North and South which has lasted until the present day.

The Korean War and the country's division forced millions of families apart. Contacting relatives across the border became extremely difficult if not altogether impossible. In 1983, 30 years after the armistice, the overwhelming public response to the South Korean TV programme *Finding Dispersed Families* made it clear that many South Koreans were still looking for their relatives. Initially broadcast as a two-hour programme that highlighted merely a small number of family separations, it then continued to be aired for 138 days. Through this way over 10,000 people managed to trace their relatives. In 2015, UNESCO declared the recordings for the programme and the archive of documents part of the world's documentary heritage.

More often than not refugees do not cross national borders but first look for protection and safety within their own country, in the hope that they will soon be able to return home. This category forms the world's largest group of refugees. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN refugee aid agency, more than 62 million people in 35 countries were *internally displaced persons* (IDPs) at the end of 2022. Ukraine, along with Colombia and Syria, is currently among the countries with the highest number of IDPs.

In 2014 Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula, backing separatist groups in eastern Ukraine who were intent on using military force to split the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk from the rest of Ukraine. These events forced millions of people to flee and become IDPs. On 24th February 2022, about 150,000 Russian soldiers invaded Ukraine from the north, east and south. Anyone in the occupied territories who did not declare loyalty to Russia had to flee or was expelled. By the end of the year, almost six million people had been internally displaced; in addition, over five million people had sought refuge in other European countries, among them Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Austria and Germany.

Russia's military strategy for the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 also included deportations: Russian troops systematically abducted children and adolescents from the occupied Ukrainian territories and transported them to re-education camps in Russia. For these war crimes the International Criminal Court in The Hague issued a warrant, on 17th March 2023, for the arrest of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Expulsion and Deportation as Military Strategies

Expulsions and deportations are common instruments of warfare, offer leverage for subsequent peace negotiations and can even be primary military objectives. Particularly in times of war, ostensibly hostile population groups are often systematically deported or expelled even though this is prohibited by international law. Those in power regularly justify such practices as imperative for military strategy and vital to ensure the security

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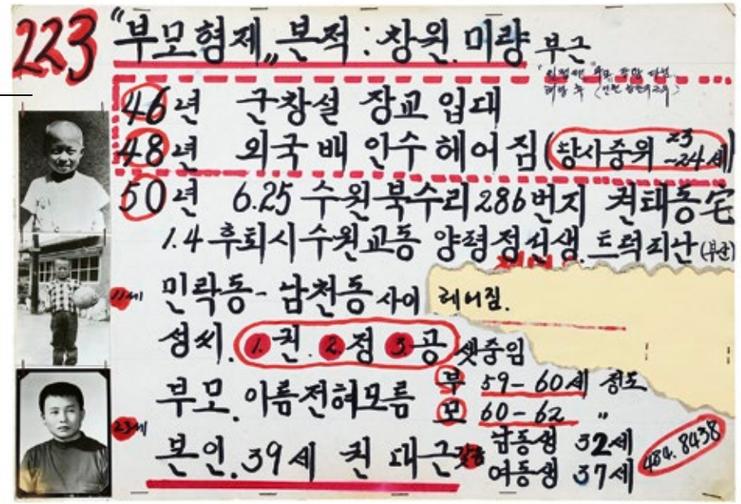
CLIPS FROM THE TV PROGRAMME *FINDING DISPERSED FAMILIES*



INDEX CARD USED TO SEARCH FOR MISSING RELATIVES

Seoul (South Korea), 1983

Participants in the TV programme held up index cards for the camera. The case number was written in the top left corner, with a contact telephone number below.

GLASS GOBLET, MOLTEN BY WARFARE

Ukraine, 2014

In 2014, residents salvaged the molten remains of a glass vessel from the rubble of their house in an eastern Ukrainian village raised by the war.

ROUTES AND CAMPS

INTRODUCTORY FILM

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From the early 20th century onwards, images of refugee convoys and makeshift camps have regularly appeared. When refugees and expellees leave their homeland they have no idea if or when they will be able to return. Often, after years of waiting, they eventually realise their home is lost for good. People may flee alone or together with others; they may have to leave in great haste or be expelled systematically. In the process, families and communities may be torn apart. No matter when or where this occurred or is occurring, the displaced and expelled all share the need for a place of refuge, in search of which they are willing to risk their lives. Once they have reached safety, they often live for months or years in temporary accommodation or in refugee camps.

< CLOSE UP OF EXHIBITION DISPLAY

Milk jug belonging to the Zimmermann family who were displaced from Pomerania (1945), toy aeroplane given to Anton Bender when his ethnic German family emigrated from Kazakhstan (1990), and a shoe left behind on a rescue vessel in the Mediterranean (2016)

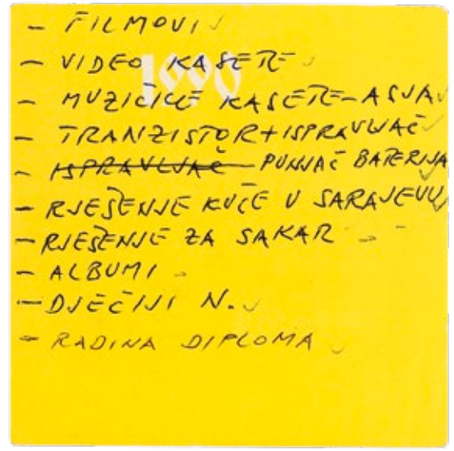
LUDMILA GELWICH

A Journey into the Unknown

Every departure is different. For most it is likely to be a rupture that leaves deep marks on their lives. What can we say about this specific moment in which people are forced to abandon their homes? Usually, there is little evidence or record. There might be an official directive ordering or coordinating forced migration. Some people hastily write down a list of important belongings lest they leave them behind. Other items taken along rather symbolise the hope of returning some day, such as the key to a flat or house. The kind of luggage people carry may reveal something about the conditions of departure: did they have time to pack? Were they able to send anything ahead? Almost always, an entire household has been reduced to just a few items. What was more important: food and clothing or family photographs? Involuntary departure, whether sudden or planned, is always a confrontation with painful decisions about what to take and what to leave behind – most likely forever.

Radmila Erceg had no time to pack. Together with her husband and two daughters she only narrowly escaped Bosnian-Serb soldiers. In 1991, when war broke out in Yugoslavia, her family were living in the town of Zvornik in Bosnia-Herzegovina, near the Serbian border. Her husband came from a Muslim family, she herself had a Serbian-Orthodox background. There had been hardly any ethnically homogenous communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina before the war, and like many interrelated people around them, the Ercegs had married despite ethnic and religious differences. In the spring of 1992, Bosnian-Serb troops occupied Zvornik and expelled, abused or murdered its Muslim residents.

The Erceg family managed to flee to friends in the city of Novi Sad, some 150 kilometres away. Shortly afterwards, Radmila returned home, risking her life to help her mother-and sister-in-law escape from Zvornik. She also wanted to recover a few personal items her husband had jotted down on a yellow notepad.



YELLOW PIECE OF PAPER BELONGING TO RADMILA ERCEG

Zvornik (Bosnia-Herzegovina), 1992

The yellow note lists important documents, such as Radmila's diploma certificate and the title deeds for a Sarajevo property. Among the few items she took were also practical ones such as a battery charger and a radio. Of greatest importance to her though were the personal items reminiscent of her life before she had to flee: video and music cassettes, children's jewellery, photographs and films of the family as well as a tape recording of her youngest daughter's voice.

Not only do objects such as the ones Radmila retrieved serve as reminders of a life lived in peace, they also represent the great loss caused by displacement or expulsion. In fact, it is not just personal possessions that are gone but relatives, friends, social status and the sense of belonging to a community – not to mention an entire country that once was home. On their perilous way to safety, the displaced are often reduced to mere survival.

Perilous Routes

Which is the best path to safety? This is a momentous decision, for the chosen route may be fraught with risk and peril. On their journey the displaced often experience anxiety and are entirely at the mercy of others. While the causes of displacement and expulsion may vary, the problems people face far from home show similarities, irrespective of time or place. Many are at risk and experience violence. Frequently, female refugees are sexually assaulted. Children are particularly vulnerable as they suffer greatly when they are torn away from their familiar environment and daily routines.

The harrowing experiences which seven-year-old Eitel Koschorreck made while fleeing the Red Army in the Second World War imprinted themselves deeply in his memory. His family came from Masuchowken (from 1936: Rodental, since 1945: Mazuchówka) in East Prussia. In January 1945, the Soviet advance cut off East Prussia from the German *Reich*. The only escape route left was via the Baltic ports. To reach them, Eitel's mother found a place for him and his two older sisters on sleighs that were part of a trek of horse-drawn carts while she herself went on foot. To protect Eitel from the freezing cold, she wrapped her youngest child in an adult fur coat, much too large for him. Their route led via Heiligenbeil across the frozen Vistula Lagoon towards Danzig (today: Gdansk). They arrived safely in Mecklenburg on 13th March 1945 only for their mother to die shortly afterwards. The three siblings were placed in a children's home in Neukloster. In 1946 their father returned from Soviet captivity and brought the children to Straussberg in Thuringia. Eitel never returned to the Baltic coast: he had no wish to relive his memories of misery and death.

National borders are one of the many obstacles refugees have to overcome. There, others decide if and how their journey will continue. In February 2015, for example, refugees from Syria and Afghanistan discovered it was possible to enter the Schengen area by crossing the border from Russia into Norway, far north. Putting up with ice and snow was in any case preferable to risking their lives crossing the Mediterranean. However, Russia prohibited pedestrian border crossing, which is why the refugees bought bicycles in Russia and discarded them immediately after cycling across the border into Norway.

FUR COAT BELONGING TO EITEL KOSCHORRECK
Masuchowken/1936 – 45 Rodental (German *Reich*), before 1945

BICYCLES COLLECTED BY BORDER POLICE AT THE RUSSIAN-NORWEGIAN BORDER
Storskog (Norway), 2015

PHOTO SERIES OPENING THE BORDER AS A MEANS OF EXERTING PRESSURE ON FOREIGN POLICY

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In response, Norway swiftly erected a fence along its short border with Russia. Such border closures are neither unusual nor infrequent. By late 2022, the external border of the EU/Schengen area had 19 border installations spanning a length of over 2,000 kilometres. Many of the fences and walls – some of them several metres high – were equipped with cameras, motion sensors and barbed wire.

By contrast, opening a border can exert pressure on other countries. In 2016, Turkey signed an agreement with the European Union, pledging to take in refugees in exchange for financial assistance. In February 2020, however, the Turkish government suspended the agreement and opened the border to refugees heading for the EU. This was aimed at increasing pressure on the EU: Turkey demanded more help with taking in millions of people fleeing the civil war in Syria.

After Turkey had opened its borders, thousands of refugees made their way to the border with Greece. Greece refused to accept them, and security forces there deployed water cannons and tear gas to prevent them from crossing the border, with at times considerable force. Those who had been forced back had to spend the winter near the Greek border without any food or sanitary facilities. Such illegal interventions (so-called push-backs) which force back refugees before they have the chance to apply for asylum contravene international law which guarantees the right to apply for asylum.

The course of war can also have a significant impact on refugee routes as those seeking safety naturally try to avoid areas of active combat. Natural obstacles such as mountains or bodies of water can pose additional risks. Crossing the sea in order to escape has always been particularly dangerous. The 2015 photograph of Alan Kurdi, the young boy lying dead on a beach on the Turkish coast, came to symbolise the plight of refugees on their route across the Mediterranean. Alan's family had sought to escape the Syrian civil war by making their way from Turkey to Greece in an overcrowded rubber dinghy. The photograph put a face and a name to an individual, appearing as it did among the vast number of the drowned. It served as a wake-up call for the international community.

More often than not, the boats available to refugees are barely seaworthy, and one of the greatest dangers is the sheer difficulty of navigating on the open sea, for which refugees are often not sufficiently equipped. Between 2016 and 2018 the *MS Aquarius* of the aid organisation SOS Méditerranée carried out rescue operations for vessels in distress. In the summer of 2016, it took aboard several passengers from a wooden boat drifting about 25 miles off the Libyan coast. The analogue compass the refugees had taken with them was retained by the *Aquarius*' captain, Alexander Moroz.

It is a simple, mass-produced compass of Chinese manufacture with a power socket for back lighting, but it cannot be used to determine a course. To navigate, one would need to know the boat's actual position at sea and consult a map for orientation – an item rarely available aboard a refugee vessel. This is why these boats fail to be on, or stick to, any course and often drift for days on the open sea. Rescue by an aid organisation is therefore practically the refugees' only chance of survival.

ANALOGUE COMPASS
China, c. 2015

ZAATARI CAMP

Zaatari (Jordan), 2013

In 1943 German troops began retreating from the Eastern front. This retreat set in motion the forced migration of millions of Germans, summarised in German cultural memory with the phrase 'displacement and expulsion'. In this context, the term 'Germans' comprises German nationals on *Reich* territory and German-speaking minorities in East-Central and Southeastern Europe.

By May 1945 the course of the war had triggered a range of population movements, from official evacuations to individuals' own attempts to flee approaching troops. This was undoubtedly the most dramatic phase of displacement and expulsion, during which violence, adverse weather, exhaustion and a lack of basic food and shelter claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands.

< LARGE DISPLAY

Cart and trunk used by the Ferger family in their evacuation from Erdevik (Yugoslavia) in October 1944. The Fergers belonged to the Danube Swabian community of ethnic Germans.

However, Nazi resettlement policies had already caused extensive population movements from 1939 onwards. The first step was the *Heim ins Reich* campaign ('Back Home to the *Reich*'), whose implementation fell somewhere between voluntary relocation and forced resettlement. Resettlements under this initiative prefigured the demise of many German minorities in East Central and Southeastern Europe.

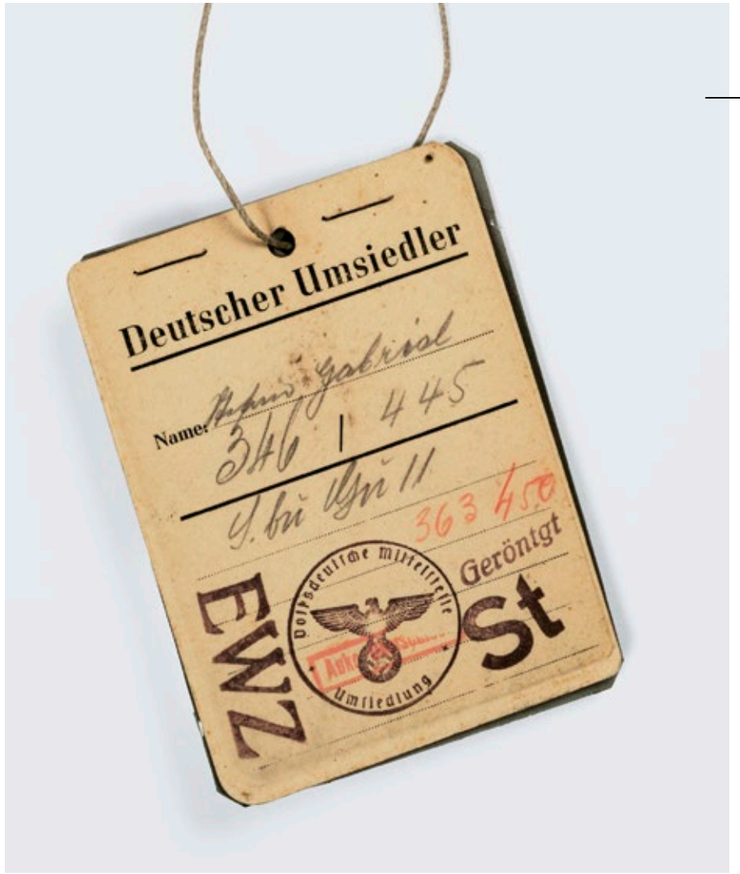
PROPAGANDA FOR CHILDREN: *TIPP UND TAPP*

Berlin (German *Reich*), 1941

The *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* (Coordination Centre for Ethnic Germans), the authority responsible for the resettlement operation, also wanted to appeal to children and therefore commissioned one of the earliest German comics. It tells the story of a boy from Volhynia who sets out with his dachshund to 'come home to the *Reich*'.

Heim ins Reich: the Nazi Resettlement Campaign

The Nazis' resettlement campaign *Heim ins Reich* had the main purpose of *Germanising* the annexed western Polish territories. In a secret protocol appended to the *German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty* of 28th September 1939 (the sequel to the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact of 23rd August, both of which comprise the political framework of the Hitler-Stalin Pact), Germany and the Soviet Union agreed to relocate German minorities from the Soviet to the German spheres of influence. The resettlement and accommodation were organised and conducted by the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* or *VoMi* (Coordination Centre for Ethnic Germans) and the *Einwandererzentralstelle* or *EWZ* (Central Office for Ethnic German Immigrants). Most resettlers were given housing in the *Warthegau, Danzig-Western Prussia* and Upper Silesia. The campaign started in 1939 with the resettlement of Baltic Germans from Estonia and, in 1940, from Latvia. The same year brought an influx of Germans from Soviet-occupied Eastern Poland (Galicia, the Narev region and Volhynia) and from Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia. Both these regions were also under Soviet occupation. An agreement between the German *Reich* and Romania resulted in the transfer of Germans from Southern Bukovina and Dobruja. Finally, Germans from Lithuania and *Nachumsiedler* (later resettlers) from Estonia and Latvia followed in early March 1941. By June 1941, about half a million Germans had been resettled in the territories of the *Reich* and the annexed territories on the basis of bilateral treaties. Most of those eligible for resettling were keen to do so since they feared political repression in, and expropriation by, the Soviet Union. Many simply believed they had little choice and were further swayed by a rather idealised notion of Germany. Nazi propaganda



IDENTITY CARD FOR GERMAN *UMSIEDLER* (RESETTLERS)
Gura Humora/Gura Humorului (Romania), 1940

While in transit, resettlers carried an identity card with a personal number. Stefan Gabriel, who was issued this *Kennkarte*, numbered 346/445, was relocated from southern Bukovina to Upper Silesia. His card was stamped in the centre by the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* and the *Einwandererzentralstelle EWZ*. We can also identify stamps certifying medical examinations, such as '*Geröntgt*', meaning X-rayed.

SCAN ME

'REGISTERED AND DIVIDED INTO CATEGORIES'
Alfons Adam
Curator

'LOSING CONTROL OF YOUR OWN LIFE'
Horst Köhler
Former President of the Federal Republic of Germany. Köhler's parents were from Bessarabia.

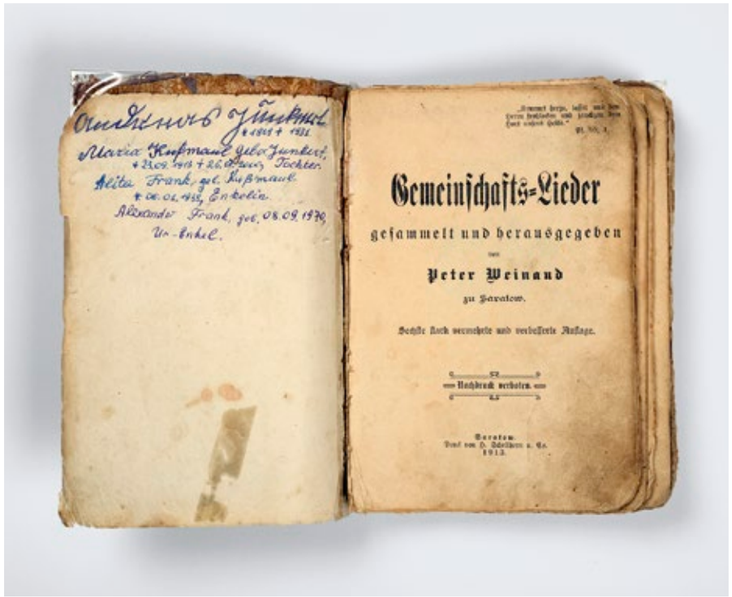
'THREE ASPECTS OF RESETTLEMENT'
Isabel Heinemann
Historian

packaged the *Heim ins Reich* campaign as an era-defining operation and a logistical feat, although the process subjected resettlers to intolerable delays and hardships.

After relocation most resettlers had to submit themselves to 'racial', medical and political examinations in camps run by the EWZ. These examinations determined whether they were assigned to the newly annexed territories, where they were promised land and property, or whether they were relegated to the *Altreich* ('the old *Reich*', i. e. Germany within the borders of 1937). Being moved to the *Altreich* typically involved a loss of social standing, since the settlers were mostly used as a cheap labour force. In the *Altreich* they were also more likely to be drafted into the military. Those categorised as *fremdvölkisch* (alien) or *rassisch unerwünscht* ('racially undesirable') ran the risk of being returned to their places of origin or deported to the *Generalgouvernement*. Those with ostensibly hereditary diseases and the mentally ill or physically impaired could quickly find themselves caught up in *erbgesundheitspolitische Maßnahmen*, so-called ethnoeugenic measures ranging from hospitalisation to euthanasia.

Finding a new home usually meant long periods of waiting in camps for the incoming population, with inadequate support from the Nazi authorities while familiar social bonds and structures disintegrated. On top of this, many realised that the promised farmsteads did not materialise and that they would have to sit and wait in camps for years. Only about half of the resettled were given homes and farmsteads, having benefitted from the prior expropriation and expulsion of their Polish and Jewish owners.

Although the experiences of the resettled varied according to place of origin and the time and circumstances of their relocation, at the end of the war they all faced displacement and expulsion – and being housed in camps once again. For many of them, the resettlement initiated by the Nazi authorities turned into an odyssey. The Schillers from Lithuania, for instance, were relocated by special train in the summer of 1941. The train also served as a rolling office, processing en route the paperwork required for naturalisation. The German officials had some doubts about the Schillers' ethnicity: Were they German or Lithuanian? Neither granted German citizenship nor sent to the annexed Polish territories, the Schillers ended up in Bütow, a small town in Pomerania, where Georg Schiller took a job with the German *Reichsbahn*, the national rail. In February 1945, the family fled from the approaching Red Army to the Baltic port of Gotenhafen (pre-1939: Gdingen, post-1945: Gdynia). There, they were separated. While Georg's wife Anna and their youngest son Hans reached Denmark by boat, Georg and Eduard, their oldest, ended up in Swinemünde/Świnoujście. It was only in October 1948 that the family was finally reunited.



RUSSO-GERMAN HYMNBOOK
Saratov (Russian Empire), 1913

For Maria Kußmaul, an ethnic German from the Odessa region, this hymnbook was an important keepsake, reminding her of her father Andreas Kußmaul. His name is written in Kurrent script on the reverse side of the flyleaf. A kulak, he was deported by the Soviet secret police in 1929 and sent to Archangelsk, where he died. Maria managed to keep hold of the hymnbook despite her own multiple displacements. She took it with her when she was permitted to emigrate from the Soviet Union to Germany in 1976.

Deportation, Displacement and Evacuations during the Retreat on the Eastern Front

The *Wehrmacht's* retreat from the Eastern front after its defeat at Stalingrad in early 1943 was accompanied by forced recruitment, deportations and the evacuation of the civilian population. From the autumn of that year the Nazi authorities began evacuating hundreds of thousands of Germans, primarily from Ukraine and the Black Sea region and relocating them to the *Altreich* and the *Warthegau*. There, Soviet troops caught up with them in early 1945. Those ethnic

Germans from Russia who did not succeed in fleeing further west and ended up behind Soviet lines were deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan. In March 1944, Maria Kußmaul, her two daughters Ella and Alita, and her mother-in-law Elisabeth fled from the Odessa region to the *Warthegau* where the Soviet authorities then seized them and deported them to the Komi Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. As 'special settlers' they were placed under police surveillance and were put to hard labour in the timber industry.

In addition to evacuating the ethnic German population, the *Wehrmacht* and the Coordination Centres also recruited Soviet citizens for forced labour and took them westwards. Those unfit for work because of old age or illness and women with infants, however, were simply left to fend for themselves. In March 1944, the *Wehrmacht* set up three makeshift camps near the village of Ozarichi in Byelorussia. Over 40,000 people were crowded into these camps without shelter. At least 9,000 of them died within a week.

ANNA KOCUR AND HER HUSBAND THEODOR

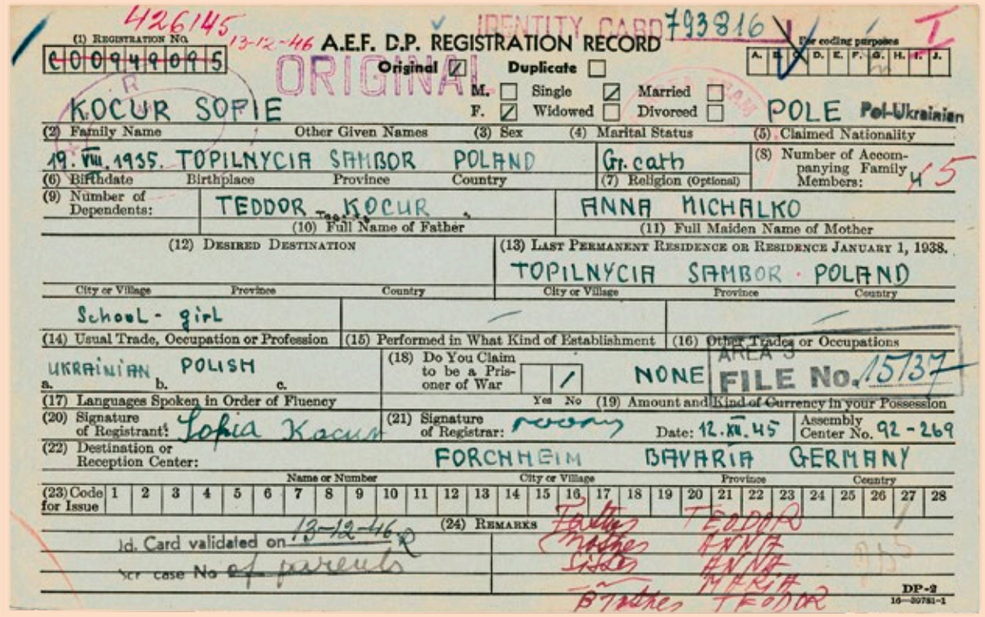
Yonkers, NY (USA), 1963

Displaced Persons after losing their Home

THE KOCUR FAMILY

Anna and Theodor Kocur lived in a village near Lemberg (Polish: Lwów; Ukrainian: Lviv) in eastern Poland, where they belonged to the Ukrainian minority. Since 1920 they had owned a large farmstead which was confiscated when Soviet troops occupied the region in 1939. When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in summer 1941, the region fell under German rule and the Kocurs could return to their farm. When the Soviets recaptured the area in late 1944, the Kocurs, afraid of Soviet repressions and the renewed confiscation of their farm, took their four children and fled westwards. On the way they were seized by German authorities and deported to Linz in Austria as forced labourers. In early 1945 they were moved to the forced labour camp in Berlin-Schöneweide. While the parents and their oldest son were made to work in the Pertrix factory, the younger children were left to fend for themselves in the camp. During an air raid on 22 February 1945, the family managed to escape and fled to Bavaria, where they were liberated in April 1945 by American troops. For the Kocurs, returning to their homeland, now part of the Soviet Union, was out of the question. They saw their future in the United States. They were indeed officially recognised as *Displaced Persons* (DPs), that is, as people who had been deported during the war and were stranded in Germany at war's end. After four years in various DP camps the Kocurs were permitted to emigrate to the United States in 1949.[1]

1 www.dz-ns-zwangsarbeit.de/zeitzeugenarchiv/interviews/video/kocur-maria-und-theodor/, accessed 19.06.2023.



(1) Registration No. C009490975 — 426145 — 13-12-46 — A.E.F. D.P. REGISTRATION RECORD — IDENTITY CARD 793816 — For coding purposes

Original ☑ Duplicate ☐

(2) Family Name: KOCUR — Other Given Names: SOFIE — (3) Sex: M. ☐ F. ☑ — (4) Marital Status: ☐ Single ☑ Married ☐ Widowed ☐ Divorced — (5) Claimed Nationality: POLE Pol-Ukrainian

(6) Birthdate: 19. VIII. 1935. — Birthplace: TOPILNYCIA — Province: SAMBOR — Country: POLAND — (7) Religion (Optional): Gr. cath — (8) Number of Accompanying Family Members: 4 5

(9) Number of Dependents: — (10) Full Name of Father: TEODOR KOCUR — (11) Full Maiden Name of Mother: ANNA NICHALKO

(12) Desired Destination — (13) Last Permanent Residence or Residence January 1, 1938: TOPILNYCIA SAMBOR POLAND (City or Village / Province / Country)

(14) Usual Trade, Occupation or Profession: School-girl — (15) Performed in What Kind of Establishment — (16) Other Trades or Occupations

a. UKRAINIAN b. POLISH c. — (17) Languages Spoken in Order of Fluency

(18) Do You Claim to be a Prisoner of War: Yes ☐ No ☑ — (19) Amount and Kind of Currency in your Possession: NONE — AREA 3 FILE No. 15137

(20) Signature of Registrant: Sofia Kocur — (21) Signature of Registrar: — Date: 12. XII. 45 — Assembly Center No. 92 - 269

(22) Destination or Reception Center: FORCHHEIM BAVARIA GERMANY (Name or Number / City or Village / Province / Country)

(23) Code for Issue: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28

Id. Card validated on: 13-12-46 R — (24) Remarks: Father TEODOR; Mother ANNA; Sister ANNA MARIA; Brother FEODOR

DP-2 16—20781-1

***DISPLACED PERSON* REGISTRATION RECORD FOR SOFIE KOCUR**

Forchheim, Bavaria (American occupation zone of Germany), 12.12.1945

In order to emigrate to the US after the war, the Kocur family had to be recognised as *Displaced Persons* (DPs)

Northern East Prussia Under Soviet Rule

According to the Potsdam Agreement, East Prussia was divided between the Soviet Union and Poland. The northern part was incorporated, in 1946, into the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR) as the Kaliningrad Oblast; the Memel region was ceded to the Lithuanian Soviet Republic. The larger southern part fell under Polish administration. While the Agreement made provisions for the German population in Poland, Germans now on Soviet territory fell outside its remit.

The Soviet Union did not wish to take over a deserted area, therefore its military ordered those refugees whom the Red Army had overrun in the winter of 1944/45 and the following spring to return to their hometowns. Many also returned of their own volition after the fighting had stopped. Already in February 1945 the Red Army began to deport able-bodied adults from East Prussia to the interior of the Soviet Union on the basis of a decision taken at Yalta to use German labour for reparations.

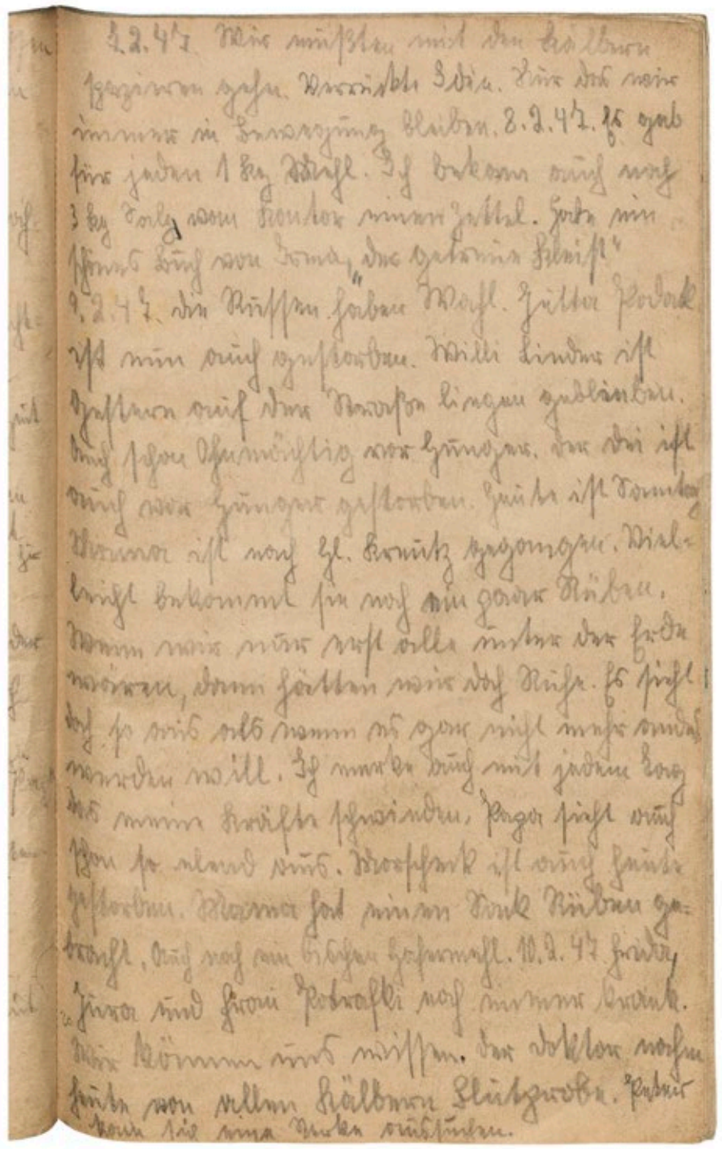
An estimated 44,000 people were taken to Siberia, the Ural mountains or the far north of the Soviet Union, where they were forced to work in mines or in railway construction. From 1946 onwards, many were released into the Soviet occupation zone in Germany on grounds of poor health. The last ones only returned in the early 1950s.

In the autumn of 1945, there were still about 140,000 Germans in the northern part of East Prussia. Their lives were now defined by the strict obligation to work, by eviction and rehousing, by limited freedom of movement and also, frequently, by violence. Hunger was ubiquitous. In the winter of 1946/47 in particular, a disproportionately large number of the local German population died of exhaustion and from epidemics such as typhoid and malaria. Among the memorable and harrowing items documenting this time is the diary of Charlotte Schmolei. This young woman from Samland recorded her life, from April 1945 to November 1947, on the reverse pages of a simple invoice book. The main topics are constant hunger, hard physical labour on a military *sovkhoz* (a state-owned farm), disease and death. She also writes about looting, rape, her fears and her longing for safety. Many of her thoughts revolve around mere survival:

‘9th February 1947 – Now Jutta Podack has died as well. Yesterday Willi Linda collapsed in the street. He, too, fainted from hunger. Dei also died of hunger. […] Mama has gone to Heiligenkreutz. Maybe she can get a few turnips there. If only we were all six feet under, we’d have peace at last. It looks as though nothing’s ever going to change. Every day I can feel my strength waning. Papa is also looking wretched. 3rd March 1947 – Frau Stange has died, and Holz’s child, Zander’s child, Mazewski, Karell’s boy. All died of hunger and cold. 8th March 1947 – Hard snowfall once again. I’m losing all hope. They say we’re leaving. I wish our time had come. 16th March 1947 – Sunday. We’ve eaten the last of our soup. I think it’s all over now. […] Frau Kuschinski has just died of hunger as well. Now it’s frosty again. Spring just doesn’t want to come. […] Dewinske also died three days ago. Frau Wittke killed her dog and ate it. […] Papa is still sick. 29th March 1947 – Mama is fetching linden buds to make soup. […] I felt so sick in the morning, if only we had something to eat.’

The appalling living conditions and the lack of prospects reinforced the desires of the German population to leave the area for good. Charlotte Schmolei’s hardship in East Prussia ended with her expulsion to the Soviet occupation zone in November 1947. Initially she was taken to a camp in Brandenburg before she came to Berlin. Only once did she return to her native Samland, almost fifty years later, together with her husband Emil.

Not before spring 1947 were the Germans in Kaliningrad/Königsberg allowed to leave for the Soviet occupation zone of Germany. In October and November that year several more transports left. In early 1948, the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union decided to ‘resettle’ all remaining Germans that same year. In total, around 100,000 people arrived in the Soviet occupation zone in 1947 and 1948 combined. However, many who had fled hunger by escaping to Lithuania were unaware of the transports to Germany. Among them were several hundred orphaned children and adolescents (so-called *Wolfskinder*, or ‘wolf children’) who, if they had not been fostered or adopted by Lithuanians, were left to fend for themselves. Later official emigration campaigns enabled some to leave for Germany; some, however, preferred to remain in the Soviet Union and applied for Soviet citizenship.



CHARLOTTE SCHMOLEI’S DIARY
Kaliningrad Oblast (Soviet Union), 1945–47

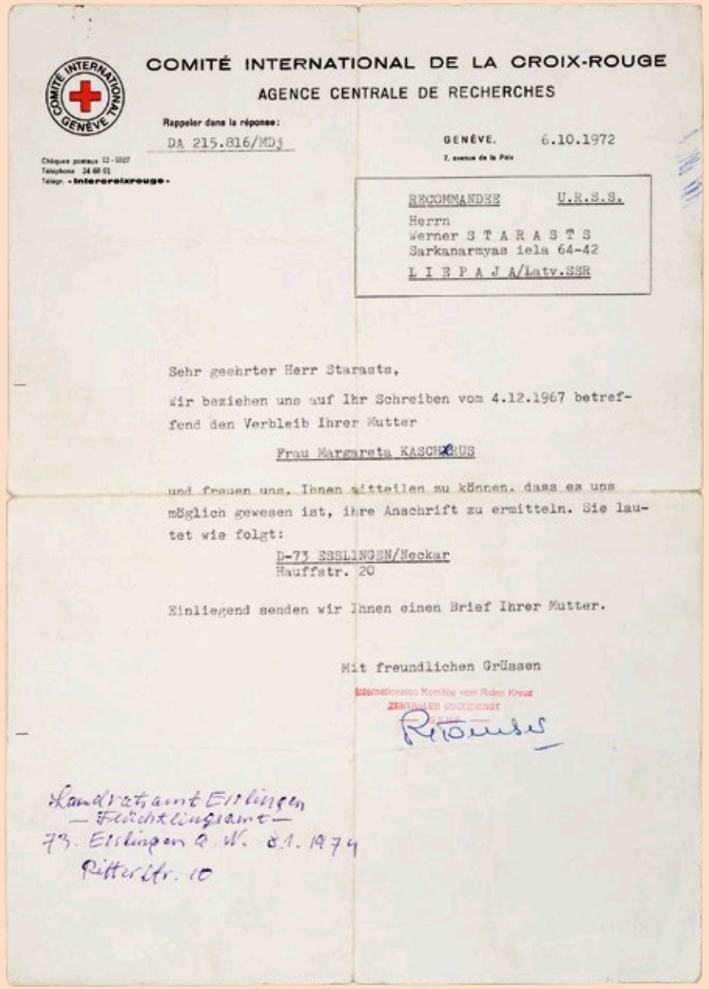
A *Wolfskind* in Latvia

VERNERS STARASTS

Verners Starasts was born Werner Kascherus in Insterburg, East Prussia, in 1935. His father died in uniform during the war. His mother worked as a nurse in a military hospital; staff and patients were evacuated westwards at the end of the war. Werner stayed behind with his grandmother and her two sisters. The four of them also fled west from the advancing frontline but returned to Insterburg in May 1945. By then the town had come under Soviet military authority.

Ten-year-old Werner and the three women had to move house frequently and never found another permanent home again. In such a state of insecurity, they were without protection against trespassing Soviet soldiers. The worst part of it all was hunger: his grandmother and his two great-aunts starved to death, one after another. Werner had to bury the last of them himself, in the garden.

From then on, he was entirely on his own. Banding together with other children, he managed to scrape by somehow or other for two years, always scavenging for food. The children were severely malnourished, weak and sick; some did not survive.



COMITÉ INTERNATIONAL DE LA CROIX-ROUGE
AGENCE CENTRALE DE RECHERCHES

Rappeler dans la réponse:
DA 215.816/MDj

GENÈVE. 6.10.1972

RECOMMANDÉE U.R.S.S.
Herrn
Werner S T A R A S T S
Sarkanarmyas iela 64-42
L I E P A J A/Latv.SSR

Sehr geehrter Herr Starasts,

Wir beziehen uns auf Ihr Schreiben vom 4.12.1967 betreffend den Verbleib Ihrer Mutter

Frau Margareta KASCHERUS

und freuen uns, Ihnen mitteilen zu können, dass es uns möglich gewesen ist, ihre Anschrift zu ermitteln. Sie lautet wie folgt:

D-73 ESSLINGEN/Neckar
Hauffstr. 20

Einliegend senden wir Ihnen einen Brief Ihrer Mutter.

Mit freundlichen Grüssen

Landratsamt Esslingen
— Flüchtlingsamt —
73 Esslingen a. N. 8.1.1974
Ritterstr. 10

LETTER FROM THE CENTRAL TRACING SERVICE OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS TO VERNERS STARASTS
Geneva (Switzerland), 06.10.1972

‚We are delighted to inform you that […] we were able to trace your mother's, Ms Margareta Kascherus', whereabouts. Her address is as follows […]. We enclose a letter from your mother.'

VERNERS STARASTS AND HIS DOG TOBI
Medze, Lithuanian SSR (Soviet Union), 1949

In 1948, Werner and other boys were rounded up in Chernyakhovsk/Insterburg and put on a freight train headed for Latvia, presumably just to be rid of these orphans. Werner found shelter with a farmwoman and helped her on the farm. As it was illegal in Latvia to shelter Germans, she saw to it that the boy got a new, Latvian identity, and so Werner Kascherus became Verners Starasts.

In the 1970s, the Red Cross helped Verners Starasts trace his mother, who was living in West Germany. They met in Moscow in 1974, thirty years after they had been separated. He made several attempts to emigrate and join his family in West Germany but found it hard to prove his German descent to the German authorities. Therefore he remained in Liepāja/Libau in Latvia.

The Schäfer family from the small town of Skrodeln (Lithuanian Skrodliai) in the Memel region were deported to Siberia in March 1949, when son Gerd-Helmut was barely a year old. About 90,000 individuals from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania suffered this fate. They were arrested as 'enemies of the Soviet Union' and taken by train to remote regions. Among the deported were Germans like the Schäfers.

The family was barely given time to pack a few essentials. After a fortnight-long rail journey, they arrived in Irkutsk oblast and were housed in a so-called Special Settlement. The family was assigned to a *kolkhoz* (a collective-owned farm) in which the parents had to work in the timber mill. Their banishment was open-ended, and so for almost a decade they lived in a state of complete uncertainty as to whether they would ever be allowed to leave Siberia. In common with all other deportees, the Schäfers were subject to the orders of the garrison headquarters, had a prescribed abode, and had to report to the police at regular intervals. Life in Siberia was full of hardship and privations. Nevertheless, Gerd-Helmut Schäfer later remembered that his parents managed to give him a relatively carefree childhood. Starting school at the age of six, he soon had better Russian than his parents and could assist them with writing

letters in Russian, for instance. In the late 1950s, a Russian family with whom the Schäfers were friendly helped them submit an application for an exit visa. In 1958, they were finally permitted to leave for West Germany.

The German Minority in Czechoslovakia

Creating an ethnically homogeneous state for the Czech and Slovak population was built on the premise of expelling both the German and the Hungarian minorities, a process for which the Czechoslovak government-in-exile had already prepared the legal basis during the war. Between 1940 and 1945 and based on a constitutional decree about the organisation of the interim government, President Edvard Beneš issued a total of 142 presidential decrees which were to regulate public life once Czechoslovakian statehood was restored. These so-called Beneš Decrees were retroactively ratified by the Interim National Assembly of Czechoslovakia in March 1946. Some of the decrees specifically referred to the German and Hungarian minorities, revoking their citizenship and confiscating their property, and applied to anyone unable to prove that they had actively fought against Nazism during the war and the occupation period. Thus accusations of disloyal behaviour became the justification for repressive policies against both minorities.

Immediately after the war, the Czechoslovak government implemented a number of measures against the German minority. The mood among the Czech population was fundamentally hostile to the Germans who were held collectively responsible for the dismantling of Czechoslovakia in 1938 as well as the terror and oppression during the occupation. In many places, the sense of fear and impotence that had built up during that time turned into hatred for everything German. Speeches by leading politicians like President Beneš further whipped up these emotions, as did the revelation of Nazi crimes in the mass media.

One visible sign of disenfranchisement was the obligation to wear an armband or badge featuring a capital N for *Němec*

THE SCHÄFERS IN FRONT OF THE LOG CABIN THEY HAD BUILT THEMSELVES
Irkutsk Oblast (Soviet Union), 1954

PRESIDENT EDVARD BENEŠ SIGNING DECREES
Prague (Czechoslovakia), 02.08.1945

(German) in public. The N made many Germans targets of humiliation, abuse and even murder.

Already in 1942 and 1943 the Allies had consented in principle to the plans of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile to forcibly expel the Germans. Now the country's political apparatus was set in motion to swiftly deport a large number of Germans. That way the western Allies would be presented with a fait accompli before the Potsdam conference; the Soviet Union supported these plans anyway. From spring to autumn 1945, the Czechoslovak army and various paramilitary units managed to expel an estimated 700,000 Germans across the border to the Soviet occupation zone and to Austria. Any German property had been confiscated beforehand.

'Wild expulsions' (as opposed to organised expatriations according to the Potsdam Agreement) often involved brutal violence; exhaustion, malnutrition, lack of medical care and disease were frequent causes of death. The German-Czech Historical Committee concluded, in 1996, that the number of casualties caused by the expulsions was in the range of 16,000 to 30,000. Instances of extreme violence such as the notorious 'Brno March' caused a high number of casualties (therefore it is also called *Brünner Todesmarsch* in some German sources and publications). Approximately 20,000 Germans – predominantly women, children, those unfit for work, and men over sixty – were driven from Brünn/Brno and its environs and marched towards Austria in late May 1945. A small number actually crossed the Austrian border, the majority remained in southern Moravia, where they were put into a holding camp in Pohrlitz/Pohořelice or found shelter in the surrounding villages. By mid-July, about 700 people had died on the Czechoslovak side – most of them in a dysentery epidemic. On the Austrian side of the border, about 1,000 succumbed to exhaustion and disease. The total number of victims remains unknown.

'OFTEN RETAINED BY THE FAMILY'

Andrea Kamp
Curatorin

'BUT I DIDN'T WEAR THAT N.'

Christine Rösch,
who had to wear the N badge
at the age of 16

'A MEASURE AND A SYMBOL'

Volker Zimmermann
Historian

SCAN ME

ARMBAND BELONGING TO HERMINE SPRINZ
Senftenberg/Žamberk (Czechoslovakia), 1945

Hermine Sprinz had to wear this armband until her expulsion in summer 1946.

ALOISIA PARSCH (CENTRE) WITH HER CHILDREN ERNST AND CHRISTINE
Neutitschein/Nový Jičín (Czechoslovakia), April 1945

Separated from her children for a whole year

In 1945, Aloisia Parsch (1903–1988) and her children Ernst and Christine lived in Neutitschein/Nový Jičín in Moravia. Her husband Benno had died in uniform a year earlier. On 4th July, Czech men seized Aloisia on her way home and took her to a camp. She had no idea what would happen to her and was extremely worried about her children. During the night, she and thousands of other Germans were marched to the town of Zauchtel, almost ten kilometres away, where they were put on a freight train headed for Germany. At the border, they had to continue on foot towards Saxony. In this way she ended up in the Sonnenstein camp in Pirna, then already severely overcrowded. Her nights were spent slumped on a chair. In autumn she continued on to Thuringia without having received any news of her children. Ernst and Christine were still in Neutitschein. Not until February 1946 did they receive a letter from their mother asking them to join her in Germany. The siblings arrived in Bavaria on an expellee transport the following month, but were not reunited with their mother until July, a whole year after their separation.

ALOISIA PARSCH

ANDREA MOLL

Commemorating displacement and expulsion after the Second World War is an integral part of Germany's cultural memory.

These events are remembered through monuments and street names, in exhibitions, literary texts, films and photographs. For a long time, the very idea of establishing a commemorative site for displacement and expulsion was politically highly controversial. The opening of the Documentation Centre Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation in the capital in 2021 put an end to this debate. One section of the Permanent Exhibition deals with the memory of displacement and expulsion and shows how official remembrance is practised, how it operates within groups and how personal stories and experiences are passed on in families from one generation to the next.

< CLOSE UP INTO A DISPLAY CASE

Household items from the *Altvater Heimatstube* in Gärtringen, Baden-Würtemberg (Germany), one of several such privately-run local museums now closed. The Altvater mountains/Hrubý Jeseník are part of the Sudeten range in Czechia.

In German, the set phrase *Flucht und Vertreibung* – displacement and expulsion – refers specifically to the forced migration of some 14 million Germans: displacement mostly relates to the period shortly before the end of the Second World War; expulsions were mainly part of its aftermath, whether through immediate removal or compulsory expatriation many years later. Remarkably, 'displacement and expulsion' has become a specific commemorative composite, an umbrella term for the entirety of official and private forms of remembrance. Yet, as the historical events continue to recede, repeating the same commemorative tropes also runs the risk of offering little more than a rather staid historical narrative. Aleida Assmann, a renowned expert on cultural memory, has voiced her concern that stagnating commemoration runs counter to empirical knowledge which is based on constant change.

The memory of displacement and expulsion has always received a fair amount of criticism, not least because it has been so closely intertwined with politics. In fact, the expulsion of the Germans has loomed very large in the generational battles over the memory of the Nazi era, the Second World War and German culpability. The reunification of East and West Germany in 1990 abolished one of the most significant ramifications of the Second World War – the division of Germany. Together with the fall of the Soviet Union this political change has impacted on the remembrance of displacement and expulsion in a range of important, and at times unexpected, ways.

Ersatz-Heimat – substitutes for lost homelands

There can be no doubt that the experience of losing house, home and *Heimat* – often under violent circumstances – has left a permanent mark on many families in Germany. The memory of displacement and expulsion now extends over three generations each of whom have developed their own points of view, which may lead to disagreements and quarrels within families. The generation who experienced displacement and expulsion first-hand tended to collectively think of themselves as victims, while the generation of their children adopted a more critical stance, particularly in the context of Germany's responsibility for a war of extermination. This assessment applies primarily to West Germany since the 1970s; East Germany's anti-fascist stance summarily absolved its citizens of shared moral responsibility for Nazi tyranny. Since the 1990s, the generation of the grandchildren in a now reunified Germany have rediscovered the fate that befell their grandparents. This has led to growing interest both in the cultural heritage of the former Eastern territories and in their grandparents' lives and traumatic experiences.

In the 1950s, the successive governments of the fledgling Federal Republic were anxious to convince the sizable number of eight million refugees and expellees that their economic integration could be accomplished; they also wanted to commemorate where they came from. Right from the start, recognition of the specific origins and heritage of the German refugees and expellees was an important element of West German integration policy. Its aim was to encourage cohesion for a regionally re-constituted post-war population and to foster a common culture of remembrance. The *Federal Expellees Act* of 1953 attempted just that with its so-called *Kulturparagraf* (Article 96). Legislators intended to keep alive the expellees' regional cultural heritage not only among the expellees themselves but among all Germans and even abroad. It still continues to fulfil this purpose.

The fostering of a culture of remembrance was established very soon after the foundation of the Federal Republic. In many public places in former West Germany we still find references to displacement and expulsion: almost every town and city had streets named after the ceded territories in the East; more than 500 monuments commemorate the loss of *Heimat*, in public squares, cemeteries and in the countryside. Most of these were unveiled in the 1950s as part of West Germany's early policy of remembrance. Another wave of memorialisation followed in the 1980s. The range of different shapes and designs included cruciforms, sculptures and large stones, some hewn, some left as found. One such early monument is the Eternal Flame on Berlin's Theodor-Heuss-Platz, first lit in 1955. Since then, the square has been an important site for the annual commemorative gatherings of expellee associations, a practice that has continued beyond German reunification in 1990.

Ostdeutsche Heimatstuben, small private museums run by volunteers from expellee organisations, have been indicative of West German remembrance. Within sixty years, about 600 of them sprung up, notably in the 1950s and 1980s. *Ostdeutsch* (east German) was used as an umbrella term here, to include all those regions where (ethnic) Germans had lived before 1945, even if some of these areas had never been in Germany. The most recent *Heimatstuben* were established after 1990 in the new *Länder*, that is the former East Germany. These museums were furnished by expellees with everyday items that reminded them of their former homes: furniture, household utensils or crockery, tools used in regionally prevalent trades or professions, objects related to old customs and traditions or indeed religious practices. Such keepsakes helped them come to terms with the loss of their *Heimat*. Expellees and visitors alike used these objects to cherish their visions of a quotidian life lived in

ANTI-WAR MONUMENT AND MEMORIAL FOR THE VICTIMS OF EXPULSION IN ST. MARY'S CHURCH

Lübeck (Germany), 2021

On the floor of the chapel of remembrance lie the shattered and charred bells of St Mary's Church, destroyed in 1942. The chapel's large window in the south tower was designed in 1951/52 and shows the coats of arms and names of towns, cities, regions and provinces from where Germans were expelled.

SCAN ME

PHOTO SERIES: MONUMENTS IN GERMANY COMMEMORATING THE EXPULSIONS

HANDMADE BONNET, PART OF A TRADITIONAL COSTUME FROM THE LINGUISTIC ENCLAVE OF WISCHAU

Southern Moravia (Czechoslovakia), before 1945

This bonnet was part of the luggage of a family expelled to Bavaria in 1945. It is still used today for displays of traditional costume and in performances of traditional dance.

MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF THE LINGUISTIC ENCLAVE OF WISCHAU

Munich (Germany), 2016

The association campaigns for the dissemination of the cultural heritage of those formerly resident in the Wischau linguistic enclave in Moravia. This photograph was taken shortly before the group joined the parade at Munich's Oktoberfest.

tant places for expellees where they could preserve their traditions and their identities.

Over many decades, expellees in West Germany also found a sense of belonging within other types of communities and clubs founded to this end. Those interested in traditional regional costume or dance could join *Heimatkreisvereine* (larger regional *Heimat* associations) which also kept alive regionally specific crafts like embroidery and lacemaking. Whether the long-established West German population was at all aware of the cultural heritage of the expellees and their conservation practices, is perhaps hard to say. In any case, for many expellees places like the *Heimatstube*, the *Heimatverein* or private get-togethers with those from the same region were important spaces in their adaptation to life in a new place: whether institution or private initiative, they served as *Ersatz-Heimat,* as it were, a substitute homeland.

In some families, the parents' desire to maintain a bygone, now historical identity caused serious rifts when teenage children challenged their parents over their lack of adaptation to the present. In other families, parents pursued the opposite strategy and kept stubbornly silent about the past; they might have thought denial was the most expedient way forward for getting on with their lives. Those who had experienced the end of the war, displacement or expulsion as children also often found it difficult, in the years after, to lend words to their emotions. Many among the generation who had lived through these events remained profoundly disturbed and deracinated, and never really felt at home again anywhere.

Tokens of Remembrance

Margarete Löhning's story illustrates very well the importance of a personal memory of losing one's *Heimat*. Alongside numerous photo albums and personal memoirs she also kept a small collection of stones and broken pieces of crockery, earthenware and tiles. These she had brought back from her travels to her former home in Northern Bohemia in the 1990s. Ebersdorf, the place where she worked as a teacher until 1945, peace and prosperity, in a stable and familiar environment from which they had been torn. Those who had fled or been expelled from the same region would meet up there regularly, curating small exhibitions with these commemorative objects or compiling so-called *Heimatkarteien,* indices with information about the places they had had to leave behind and their former residents. However, the realities of life under the Nazi regime and the discrimination and persecution of Jews or dissidents, were rather glossed over. Today these museums may seem rather old-fashioned, yet for many decades they were impor-

ALTAR CRUCIFIX BELONGING TO SILESIAN EXPELLEES. THE INSCRIPTION READS 'LORD, RETURN OUR *HEIMAT* TO US'.

Place and year unknown

A BAG CONTAINING A COLLECTION OF STONES AND FRAGMENTS FROM NORTHERN BOHEMIA BELONGING TO MARGARETE LÖHNING

Habartice u Krupky (Czechia), 1992

ZAATARI REFUGEE CAMP
Jordan, 2019

New Challenges and Global Crises

The history of the Foundation Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation illustrates that the memory of historical events is subject to constant change. Recent global crises have once again transformed our view of displacement and expulsion and have impacted on the design of the Documentation Centre and its Permanent Exhibition.

In early 2011, a wave of protests swept across the Middle East, now known as the Arab Spring. Spontaneous demonstrations erupted in almost every country in the region. Its citizens and subjects demanded greater social justice, access to education, the rule of law and political participation, measures to counter corruption and an end to despotism. The European view of these developments was ambivalent. On the one hand, Europe had politically propped up many of the regimes now under pressure. On the other hand, the Arab Spring raised rather high hopes in its evocation of the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and the changes that had taken place in Eastern Europe in its wake.

What happened after the protests in the Middle East was quite different from what had ensued in Europe; most countries implemented reforms, albeit often rather superficially. In Syria, Libya, Yemen and Iraq, however, violent state repression led to civil war. Interventions by regional and international actors exacerbated these conflicts, and this violence continues to this day. Jihadists from al-Qaeda and Islamic State have used the power vacuum in the wake of collapsing governments to expand their rule and organise terrorist attacks across the globe. Millions of people have been displaced. To this day, there are huge refugee camps in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon.

The number of refugees significantly increased once more in 2015 as a result of the war in Syria. The journey across the Mediterranean in overcrowded boats repeatedly ended in shipwreck and produced high numbers of casualties. That same year, the support for refugees travelling along the Balkan route sank to catastrophically low levels because Hungary had largely sealed off its borders. In September 2015, the humanitarian situation for refugees at Budapest's Keleti railway station became so critical that hundreds embarked on foot along the motorway towards Austria in an effort to reach Germany. On the night of 4th September 2015, after consulting with her Austrian counterpart Werner Faymann, German Chancellor Angela Merkel decided not to use force to stop people crossing the border into Germany but instead to grant them entry. Merkel had already explained her stance at a national press conference on 31st August 2015: 'I'll put it quite simply: Germany is a strong country. The intent with which

A SYRIAN REFUGEE TAKING A SELFIE WITH GERMAN CHANCELLOR ANGELA MERKEL.
Berlin (Germany), 10.09.2015

The phrase 'We can do it!' produced both acclaim and criticism. 2015 saw a historical record of 476,649 claims for asylum (both first-time applications and follow-ups). At the time, large sections of German society were prepared to support refugees. Whether the country could indeed successfully take in so many people – and if so, how – was a question that ruled many a public debate.

REFUGEES WAITING AT THE CLOSED TURKISH-GREEK BORDER.
Edirne (Turkey), 20.02.2020

to approach these matters must be, We have achieved so much already; we can do this, too. We can do it! and wherever something stands in our way, we have to overcome it; we will work towards achieving this. The federal government will do everything in its power – together with the federal states, together with the local authorities – to achieve exactly that'.[4]

4 'Deutschland ist ein starkes Land. Das Motiv, mit dem wir an diese Dinge herangehen, muss sein: Wir haben so vieles geschafft – wir schaffen das. Wir schaffen das, und dort, wo uns etwas im Wege steht, muss es überwunden werden, muss daran gearbeitet werden. Der Bund wird alles in seiner Macht Stehende tun – zusammen mit den Ländern, zusammen mit den Kommunen –, um genau das durchzusetzen.' See the Chancellor Merkel's press conference, 31.08.2015, www.bundesregierung.de/-848300; see also www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eXc5Sc_rnY#t=13m02s, accessed 22.09.2023.

The high number of asylum seekers in Germany led to a temporary crisis in asylum-related processing and infrastructure and sparked political controversies about the protection of Europe's external borders, a common European refugee policy and caps on the number of asylum seekers. These debates reverberated through a number of creative and artistic approaches to the topic. The subject permeated the 2017 *documenta* in Kassel, one of the most important exhibitions of contemporary art. Nigerian-born artist Olu Oguibe erected an obelisk in the centre of Kassel's Königsplatz with which he hoped to encourage people to take in refugees. Carved on the sides of the obelisk in English, Arabic, Turkish and German respectively, was a verse from the gospel according to Matthew: 'I was a stranger and you took me in'.[5]

5 Matthew 25:35.

After *documenta*, Kassel erupted into heated arguments about the artwork's fate. Many residents wanted the obelisk to remain in the city's central square while others rejected its message and demanded its removal. After lengthy discussions in the city council, mayor Christian Geselle decided to relocate the obelisk to Treppenstrasse, a far less central location in the city.

Oguibe's obelisk is just one example illustrating the strong polarisation within German society when it comes to displacement and expulsion. The situation is similar in many other European countries. While it is true that the 27 EU countries make joint decisions about migration and refugee policy, the issue continues to be dealt with on a national level and through domestic policies. Meanwhile there is no sign of the global crises abating. Far-reaching political, social and religious conflicts in the Middle East continue to divide and fracture societies. Localised civil wars are not the only cause of refugee movements from these regions. Rather, they have highlighted how support or rejection of a regime is based on international military and security policy considerations. Russia's military support for Assad's rule in Syria, for instance, revealed the role of geopolitical issues and the search for new alliances which will continue to challenge European security policy. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022, European security and stability have clearly been shaken up for the foreseeable future. Millions of Ukrainians have been forced to flee as a result of this war, and to date Germany has taken in just over a million people from Ukraine.

The challenges presented by taking in refugees will remain with us for quite some time; and so will the question of how to master these challenges. A further task will be to provide a space for different and perhaps conflicting memories and stories of displacement by those who take refuge in Germany and for empathetic encounters with these narratives. This is the reason why the Documentation Centre's Permanent Exhibition offers many links between the historical narratives of the Germans and the experiences of others affected by forced migration. As the generation of those Germans who experienced displacement and expulsion first-hand is passing, the second and third generations shape this memory with different approaches and attitudes and in the context of contemporary debates. They, too, will need to face the changing global political situation and develop their own ideas of a culture of remembrance.

The Documentation Centre Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation in Berlin is a unique place that commemorates and provides information about forced migration – its causes, manifestations and ramifications in Europe from the early 20th century onwards. Its main focus is the displacement and expulsion of about 14 million Germans in the context of both Nazi policies and the Second World War. This richly illustrated catalogue takes the reader on an empathetic, virtual tour through the Permanent Exhibition, and also includes QR-codes to access digitised films, audio material, maps and photographs.