

## Aufsatz

### **"When you come back, the mountains will surely still be there!"**

How Silesian expellees processed the loss of their homeland in the early postwar years, 1945-1949<sup>1</sup>

by

Andrew Demshuk

#### Introduction

"Wenn Ihr wiederkommt, die Berge sind dann bestimmt noch da!" With this promise, a priest from Hirschberg (Jelenia Góra) sought to console his parishioners in the aftermath of the Second World War as they waited for a cattle car that would expel them from their Silesian homeland to West Germany. "'Laßt nur,' meinte er, 'die Berge müssen sie uns doch stehen lassen.'" But Gertrud Rauch was skeptical and thought: "Ja, würden wir denn wiederkommen?!"<sup>2</sup> Over the past year she had been plundered to the point of impoverishment, forced to serve as a housemaid to the Poles who had taken over her home, ejected into ever-smaller living quarters, and finally found herself in a camp. She had watched the invaders erase everything recalling Hirschberg's German history and grew depressed aboard the train that carried her westward on May 28, 1946, because they traveled "durch verwüstetes, zerstörtes schlesisches Land, durch verbrannte Städte" ("through a devastated, destroyed Silesian land, through burned out cities").<sup>3</sup> Virtually nothing was the same any longer; virtually nothing remained of her *Heimat*<sup>4</sup> in this ruined, foreign land of suffering. Could mountains be enough to call her back?

Mountains were at least an unsullied landmark she could use to remember her *Heimat* in better times. In the coming days, when she sought relief from

<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to thank Prof. Dr. Peter Haslinger, Dr. Winfried Irgang, Dr. Christian Lotz, and the participants at a January 2008 workshop presentation held at the Herder Institute in Marburg for their insightful comments and recommendations on drafts of this article.

<sup>2</sup> "When you come back, the mountains will surely still be there! [...] 'Just hold on,' he said, 'certainly they will have to leave the mountains standing there for us.' [...] Yes, so would we really come back?!" GERTRUD RAUCH: *Mein Schlesierland, mein Heimatland...* Und das war das Ende!, Report in the Archive at Haus Schlesien [henceforth: HS] in Königswinter, BER00014, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>4</sup> *Heimat* is roughly translated as one's "native homeland," tied to soil, intimate spaces, and acquaintances.

the everyday misery in a West where refugees only further narrowed housing and work possibilities, she did not hope for a return to Silesia, but rather expressed: "ewig [geht] die Sehnsucht nach dem verlorenen Paradies im Herzen."<sup>5</sup> The experience of everyday foreignness and suffering in Silesia had transformed *Heimat* into an idyllic dreamland that lived on in cherished memory to give her strength in her new existence in the West. Returning to live in the physical Silesia could only elicit pessimism, for she knew intimately well that it had become a land of nightmares.

Hundreds of thousands of Silesians experienced a similar ordeal under the first years of Polish administration; the individuals formed memories, and, as Maurice Halbwachs famously observed, common experiences lead to the social construction and sharing of collective memories, maintained and adapted to suit the present need.<sup>6</sup> Though many Silesians managed to leave the homeland before or during winter of 1945, and never saw their familiar landscapes overturned by war and resettlement, word of the changes got around in the West German expellee community – through oral accounts, written reports, and above all Protestant and Catholic circular letters and periodicals, the chief means by which expellees retained ties in an immediate postwar environment in which the western occupying powers forbade other forms of organization.

From these everyday sources, written by individuals from a broad spectrum of political, professional, and social backgrounds, a strong trend coalesces. As this article means to demonstrate, for an increasing number of Silesians the yearning to return to Silesia after the war was not a desire to actually move back to the physical *Heimat*, but rather an expression of the need to reside in an idealized memory that helped them to cope with their loss and adapt to a new life in the West. Indeed, as the first four years after the war progressed, shared awareness of the widespread destruction and foreignness in contemporary Silesia prompted an early decline in hope, and even desire for physical return. Such findings help to explain why no grassroots program for a return to Silesia ever gained the support of a majority of expellees, and why, after so much bloodshed and suffering, the new, historically unprecedented German-Polish border on the Oder-Neisse line was to become one of Europe's most peaceful.

#### The postwar context, contemporary research, and structure for analysis

The idea that expellees might reconcile to their loss was unthinkable to most contemporary observers (and certainly the occupying authorities) – they looked at the dismal postwar context in Germany and expected massive radi-

<sup>5</sup> "My yearning constantly goes to the lost paradise in my heart." RAUCH (cf. footnote 2), p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> MAURICE HALBWACHS: *The Collective Memory*, New York 1980.

calization. After all, most expellees lived in miserable poverty and felt little hope of recovering their earlier social standing; they received citizenship but seldom felt welcome; and they had every reason to think that the border might be pushed back.<sup>7</sup> Uprootedness was prevalent: in 1948, as she toured camps in which one-third of expellees still lived, Silesian psychologist Elisabeth Pfeil often heard a song: "Wir fahren hin, wir fahren her. Wir haben keine Heimat mehr."<sup>8</sup> Expellees reflected back on the spaces of *Heimat* and despaired that they were becoming overgrown and foreign; they saw the ignorance of Silesia in the western Germans around them and feared that their homeland would be forgotten. A priest still in Silesia wrote to the *Katholische Kirchliche Hilfsstelle* in Munich that vicious Polonization and the elimination of all means of survival for Germans would lead to moral decay and proletarianization unless something was done.<sup>9</sup> When discussing the feared political radicalization at a November 1945 *Hilfsstelle* meeting, a Caritas leader went so far as to recommend shipping expellees out of the country.<sup>10</sup> His idea was not an uncommon one.

Why did not a revolution break out to release a radicalized stampede back over the border? Previous explanations offer a valuable, but only partial view, because they grant primary agency to political elites and impersonal political and economic forces. After the formation of the Federal Republic of Germany in May 1949, expellee land associations, research organizations, and political movements claimed to represent expellees as a whole and exerted pressure on the government. Most studies extrapolate that expellees shared the territorial revisionist agendas prevalent among their "advocates." Such a view overlooks that the expellee political party (*Bund der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten*, BHE) survived a mere eleven years (it lost support precipitously after the early 1950s, leaving expellee leaders to ally with the SPD and CDU to pursue their demands). It also overlooks that the sizeable minority that attended rallies often did so as a means to find old friends and discuss their shared past in a distant land, rather than to mindlessly adhere to the political agenda in the speeches they heard.

In their in-depth analyses of the impact of expellee organizations in West German politics and foreign policy, Pertti Ahonen and Matthias Stickler

<sup>7</sup> ANDREW DEMSHUK: Citizens in Name Only. The National Status of the German Expellees (1945-1953), in: *Ethnopolitics* 5 (2006), 4, pp. 383-397.

<sup>8</sup> "We travel here, we travel there, we have no homeland anymore." ELISABETH PFEIL: *Der Flüchtling. Gestalt einer Zeitenwende*, Hamburg 1948, pp. 47, 75. Pfeil had adopted Nazi theories of connectedness between race and space – that populations forged the character of their space – and this evolved into her postwar theories about uprootedness among expellees; IDEM: *Bevölkerung und Raum*, Berlin 1939.

<sup>9</sup> PFARRER AUS SCHLESILIEN: *Hilfeschrei aus Schlesien*. Ein Lagebericht von Ende November 1945, Archival record from the Catholic *kirchliche Hilfsstelle* at the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz [henceforth: BAK] Z 18/131, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Besuch bei Herrn Direktor Baumgärtner in Stuttgart, Aktennotiz November 10, 1945, BAK Z 18/19.

presume that widespread support only declined by the 1960s due to increasing economic integration and the shift in generations.<sup>11</sup> Christian Lotz's excellent study of the "politics of memory" within government and religious leadership in the BRD and DDR systematically compares the evolution of political argumentation and appeal, and demonstrates how larger expellee organizations did not represent commemoration objectives of smaller groups; but it adds that "a large proportion of the population" agreed with the demands of expellee organizations because they wanted Silesia returned to Germany.<sup>12</sup> Though Brenda Melendy promises to differentiate between Sudeten German official commemorations of the *Heimat* and those conducted in private, she avers that all expellees wanted to return to the East, and tends to conflate the demands of the expellee population with those of Sudeten leaders.<sup>13</sup> Eduard Mühle's examination of continuities in postwar *Ostforschung* largely infers, rather than determines the extent to which this influenced mainstream perception of the former eastern territories.<sup>14</sup> Frank Buscher proves that church organizations misunderstood the postwar situation, since no massive radicalization ever occurred, but he attributes expellee political stability to economic integration, the skill of political elites, eagerness to return to normalcy, and reaction against the political radicalism, which the expellees held responsible for their plight.<sup>15</sup> Mark Mazower similarly argues that yearning for normalcy in the wake of catastrophe led Europeans away from radicalism, but deduced from this that "looking backward" to the world they had lost, by nature, must have meant indulging in reactionary dreams of empire.<sup>16</sup>

This scholar's forthcoming dissertation seeks to enter into and contribute to this discussion by showing that, while elite political discussions and econo-

<sup>11</sup> PERTTI AHONEN: *After the Expulsion. West Germany and Eastern Europe 1945-1990*, Oxford 2003; MATTHIAS STICKLER: "Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch." *Organisation, Selbstverständnis und heimatpolitische Zielsetzungen der deutschen Vertriebenenverbände 1949-1972*, Düsseldorf 2004.

<sup>12</sup> CHRISTIAN LOTZ: *Die Deutung des Verlusts. Erinnerungspolitische Kontroversen im geteilten Deutschland um Flucht, Vertreibung und die Ostgebiete (1948-1972)*, Köln 2007; IDEM: *The Interpretation of Loss. Political Controversies in Divided Germany about the Memory of Escape, Expulsion and the Eastern Territories (1948-1972)* (Paper presented at Polish-German Post/Memory Conference, Bloomington, Indiana, April 21, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> BRENDA MELENDY: *In Search of Heimat. Crafting Expellee Identity in the West German Context (1949-1960)* (PhD Diss. University of California Santa Cruz 1998), p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> EDUARD MÜHLE: *Für Volk und deutschen Osten. Der Historiker Hermann Aubin und die deutsche Ostforschung*, Düsseldorf 2005.

<sup>15</sup> FRANK BUSCHER: *The Great Fear. The Catholic Church and the Anticipated Radicalization of Expellees and Refugees in Postwar Germany*, in: *German History* 21 (2003), 2, pp. 204-224.

<sup>16</sup> MARK MAZOWER: *Dark Continent. Europe's Twentieth Century*, New York 1999, p. 400.

mic integration played decisive roles, one must separate the everyday dreams and desires of ordinary expellees from the political message put forth in their name, in order to fully determine why they became part of a stabilized postwar order. Just as the "spokespeople" appropriated and contorted expellee sentiments for their own uses, expellees adapted the political memory as it emerged after 1949 for use in their own, deeply personal memory, and for coping with loss. This increasingly tended to work against the expellee leadership's political aims, such as restoring Germany to its 1937 borders, because "remembering" the purely German and idealized *Heimat* which the elites always demanded back ironically widened the gap between memory and reality – at the same time that expellees mourned that so idyllic a place (which never in fact existed) could now only be preserved in memory, they knew that the physical reality of Silesia was foreign.

This article proposes a first step in the analysis. It looks to the period before the formation of a West German state, when political movements were still banned, to show how expellees began a process of dealing with loss. It proposes that it was actually out of clinging to memories of *Heimat*, amid miserable immediate postwar conditions, that expellees began to cope with loss. Each expellee "may be endeavouring to turn into something," Pfeil concluded, "yet he will never be able to forget the past to which he clings."<sup>17</sup> Expellees retreated from the bleak everyday to cherish and reflect upon the *Heimat* they remembered; they found continuity by preserving their unique, often idealized knowledge about these lost spaces. In this manner, as this article means to demonstrate, many found that preserving Silesia in themselves ultimately meant integrating into West German society without losing a fundamental part of who they were.

Time passed. Most expellees tried to make the western environment their own. And preserving Silesia in themselves and dreaming of these lost spaces steadily separated more and more from any concrete intent to live in the physical reality of a Polish Silesia which did not conform to their idealized memories. This process of dealing with loss proceeded through the 1950s and 1960s, when the political narrative of the expellee spokespeople established itself as the most visible expression of the expellee worldview, and it then outlived the political narrative as it lost all real relevance for West German society by the 1970s.

To show how Silesian expellees took the first steps in the process of reconciling with the loss of *Heimat* from 1945-1949, this essay first surveys contemporary reflections of those like Gertrud Rauch, who were expelled "late" from Silesia after the wild flights of January 1945. They inhabited a *Heimat* that was physically destroyed and collapsing around them; even more important, they experienced the transformation of *Heimat* into a foreign

<sup>17</sup> ELISABETH PFEIL: Soziologische und psychologische Aspekte von Flucht und Vertreibung, in: Europe and the German Refugee, ed. by Institut zur Förderung Öffentlicher Angelegenheiten, Frankfurt/M. 1952, pp. 40-71, here p. 48.

space, responded to Polish neighbors they saw furthering this process every day, and internalized that what *Heimat* had been could only be accessed now in memory and fantasy. The essay's second half will investigate how personal exchange, often mediated by the church, spread word of a transformed Silesia and also prompted many to yearn for an idealized world in their memory that they knew no longer existed. Increasing dissemination of the realization stimulated a decoupling of space and time, a steady process through which the imagined *Heimat* of memory, now temporally frozen, became the "real" Silesia, to be preserved for the consciousness of future generations, even as news of advancing foreignness and transformation in the physical *Heimat* made the Silesia under Polish administration more and more lost with each passing year. Most saw the loss as an injustice, to be sure, and many continued to voice an abstract "right" to their *Heimat*. But, in a process filled with hesitation and contradiction, expellees started to realize that there was no going back to a place that now only existed in memory.

### The physical destruction of the *Heimat*

To varying degrees, Germans everywhere experienced the physical destruction of familiar spaces during the 1940s. Expulsion added a major difference for Silesians, since, in addition to returning to burned villages, most of the people they had once known were dead or scattered too far afield to ever come back. Moreover, while, as in the West, physical destruction was not seen as insurmountable, living amid this destruction deprived of resources to rebuild, and ultimately being forced to leave it behind in a ruined state contributed to pessimism that the beloved *Heimat* was physically lost, graspable only in memory. In this manner, while expellees were part of the postwar German "community of victims," as articulated by Robert Moeller,<sup>18</sup> the "victimhood" of their physical *Heimat* was greater than that in the West, where Germans could rebuild. Hence, destruction was an important backdrop, though, as the next section will show, it became drastically worse when combined with foreignness brought on by Soviets and Poles in a Nazi-induced climate of heightened nationalism and the first stages of communism.

While some remained in the *Heimat* during its destruction, many hundreds of thousands fled to the mountains in January 1945 and then returned home, shocked to find ruins where they remembered an ordered *Heimat*. In his reflections over Christmas 1948, farmer Herbert Koffmane looked back on his return, in May 1945, to his farmstead in the village of Neudorf bei Bernstadt [Bierutów]. Before 1945, he could recall a proud history of hard work: planting fruit trees, increasing the livestock, and establishing electricity and plumbing. That "beide Wohnhäuser und die alte Scheune mit angebautem

<sup>18</sup> ROBERT G. MOELLER: War Stories. The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany, Berkeley 2001.

Schuppen [...] abgebrannt [sind]”<sup>19</sup> (“both houses and the old barn with attached shed were burned down”) did not hold Koffmane back from starting a new existence. Previous efficiency (having added a new oven to the worker’s house), combined with resourcefulness (planting potatoes and acquiring beds and tables from a nearby relic of the recent Nazi past casually referred to as the “Franzosenlager”), ensured that they did not go hungry, even if their horses were stolen a short time later. As will be shown, it was only the arrival of the Poles that ended what Koffmane fondly recalled as a promising start in overcoming the physical destruction of *Heimat*.

Elsewhere, physical destruction and the expulsion of the inhabitants at once convinced witnesses that the *Heimat* was permanently lost. In no place was destruction more total than in Glogau (Głogów), where the Silesian actor Servas Lantin reported in 1945 that, apart from a few buildings where only 800 to 900 Germans still lived, everything else was destroyed:

“Ich habe mit dem sogen. poln. Polizeipräsidenten gesprochen, und es ist gut, wenn sich jeder Glogauer mit dem Gedanken vertraut macht, daß er Glogau als seine Heimatstadt abschreibt. Es ist für uns alle, die wir heute mehr denn je an dem Stückchen Erde hängen, das wir unsere Heimat nannten, und mit dem wir verwurzelt waren, ein wenig tröstlicher Gedanke, aber leider bittere Wahrheit.”<sup>20</sup>

Roughly two thousand more German Glogauer had returned by late 1945 to witness this destruction.<sup>21</sup>

Expulsion from the ruined *Heimat* was an heritage for Silesians who settled in both the western and Soviet zones of Germany after the war; while the process of dealing with loss for *Umsiedler* (“resettlers”: the Eastern regime’s less-charged term for those known in the West as *Vertriebene*, “expellees”) was steadily impacted by a very different political context in the GDR, their initial coping was very similar to that experienced in the West, and everyday dealing with the loss of *Heimat* after 1949 was more comparable across the German-German border than has often been assumed. In her daybook of experiences in the ruins of Breslau (Wrocław) through April 1947, the future GDR citizen Elisabeth Waage found herself overwhelmed by the sheer extent of the destruction in what had once been her home. But as in the case of Koffmane, this was just her first step toward alienation from her

<sup>19</sup> Niederschrift des Bauern Herbert Koffmane aus Neudorf bei Bernstadt Kreis Oels/Schlesien (Christmas 1948), HS BER0036, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> “I spoke with the so-called Polish police president, and it is good if every *Glogauer* gets used to the idea that he has written off Glogau as his *Heimatstadt*. This sentiment is little comfort for all of us today. More than ever, we cling to our little piece of soil we called *Heimat*, from which we were uprooted. But it is unfortunately the bitter truth.” Eindrücke des Schauspielers Servas Lantin aus den letzten Tagen der Festung Glogau (1945), HS BER0004.

<sup>21</sup> DOMKAPITULAR T., Report 10, in: *Berichte aus Schlesien*, ed. by ALFRED SCHULZ, November 30, 1945, BAK Z 18/131, p. 23.

former *Heimat*.<sup>22</sup> Though Erika Herbach settled in July 1945 with relatives in Görlitz, a town suddenly on the new Polish border and just a stone's throw from her home village, destruction already made her feel less prospect for return. In a letter to former classmates from Breslau on December 5, 1946, she wrote: "Rauscha, nur 40 km entfernt, ist für uns unerreichbar, unser Haus soll jetzt im Oktober abgebrannt sein. Was wird uns das kommende Jahr bringen, ob wir uns mal wiedersehen?" Most importantly, she entreated her classmates to get a firm footing "in the new *Heimat*," while making sure that they will not forget "our beautiful Silesia."<sup>23</sup>

### Experiencing the *Heimat* as a foreign country

The imposition of Polish and communist foreignness on the ordered, German *Heimat* of idealized memory proved decisive in the process of alienation for those who remained in Silesia. Though at times the remaining Germans humanized, even pitied their Polish neighbors, more often their presence stimulated resentment and racist hatred, as well as a loathing for the lawlessness and brutality perceived in communism. In either case, this created the sentiment that Silesia was now dominated and given its shape by Poles, rather than Germans; by communism, rather than the peace and order they remembered and yearned for. And so, though many spoke of the right to the *Heimat* in principle, the trauma of suffering in a land more foreign with every month makes questionable the extent to which they would have actually desired to physically return, especially with the passage of a few more years.

In Lower Silesia, aggressive, state-led efforts to Polonize the land left few original inhabitants, so that the period of immersion in a transforming, foreign *Heimat* was short and intense.<sup>24</sup> For Gertrud Rauch, Poles became an invasive element, steadily ruining each of the most cherished parts of the former *Heimat* and stimulating a firm desire to escape the nightmare. By Christmas 1945, the Poles who had taken over her home forced her mother to bedeck the Polish Christmas tree in her former living room with her family's traditional Christmas ornaments, to which Rauch reflected: "Gut, daß ich es nicht zu sehen brauchte, ich glaube, ich hätte geschrien."<sup>25</sup> Shivering without a winter coat, she found it hard to watch a Polish woman strut about "in meinem hü-

<sup>22</sup> URSULA WAAGE: Bleib übrig. Aus den Tagebuchaufzeichnungen in der Festung Breslau und der Nachkriegszeit von Januar 1945 bis April 1947, Halle 2004.

<sup>23</sup> "Rauscha, only forty kilometers away, has become unreachable for us. Our house was said to have been burned down in October. What will the coming year bring? Will we see each other again?" ERIKA HERBACH, December 5, 1946, in: Ein Teil Heimat seid Ihr für mich. Rundbriefe einer Mädchenklase, 1944-2000, ed. by JULIANE BRAUN, Berlin 2002, p. 52.

<sup>24</sup> BEATA OCIEPKA: Niemcy na Dolnym Śląsku w latach 1945-1970 [Germans in Lower Silesia in the years 1945-1970], Wrocław 1992.

<sup>25</sup> "It's good I didn't need to see it, since I think I would have screamed." RAUCH (cf. footnote 2), p. 45.

schen Mantel mit dem Fellkragen" ("in my pretty coat with the fur collar") and "meinen Morgenrock aus königsblauem Samt" ("my morning skirt of royal blue velvet"), which looked "wie ein Mistbrett" ("like a dung board") after four weeks. In the end, her family wore rags and lacked good shoes. Small wonder that Rauch no longer cared about eviction from her lifelong house in February: "Wir haben uns nicht mehr umgesehen u. wir haben auch nicht geweint. Es ging ja allen so. Und das war der beste Trost in jener Zeit."<sup>26</sup>

For Koffmane, Poles were an obstruction to the reconstruction of his farmstead. After the first Polish families entered his village in June 1945, the progress he had made faltered amid ceaseless plundering and attacks by Polish militias. The Polish woman who came to occupy the neighboring room was eager for the Germans to leave what was now hers: "Erst schüchtern und bescheiden, entwickelte sich die Frau zu einer gehässigen, üblen Person, die uns nur schikanierte, denn in ihren Augen waren wir nur Banditen."<sup>27</sup> The expulsion order in September ended hopes that the Poles might leave: "Die [sic] Abschied fiel uns nicht sehr schwer von der Stätte, die unsere Heimat war, wo wir [...] noch so vieles erdulden mußten."<sup>28</sup> His journey west, seeing only "Unkraut und Disteln" ("weeds and thistles") in once-managed fields, furthered his relief to cross the Neisse and ultimately reach what he called the "new *Heimat*," in which "die Freude des Wiedersehens und Wiederfindens" ("the joy of reunions and finding people") was great.<sup>29</sup>

For Curt Exner, who made his escape from Hirschberg at the end of August 1945, the foreignness was spreading over the land in a great wave, which steadily corrupted each space: "Auf dem Lande sah es traurig aus. Alle Bauernhöfe waren in polnischer Hand, ebenso wie die Betriebe in der Stadt. Die Bauern waren auf ihren Höfen nur noch die Knechte."<sup>30</sup> Only as he passed through Löwenberg (Lwówek) county did he find villages that were "noch von Polen frei" ("still Polish-free"), and therefore, at least temporarily, remained intact. But any thought that this last glimmer of the old German Silesia might remain was overshadowed when he received two letters from Hirschberg at the end of October, which "nicht nur meine Schilderungen bestätigen, sondern auch zeigen, daß die Verhältnisse inzwischen noch

<sup>26</sup> "We didn't look around anymore and we also didn't cry. It's just how it was. And that was the best comfort at the time." Ibidem, p. 47.

<sup>27</sup> "At first shy and humble, the woman developed into a spiteful, slanderous person who only harassed us, because in her eyes we were only bandits." Niederschrift des Bauern Herbert Koffmane (cf. footnote 19), p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> "It wasn't so hard to say goodbye to places that had been our *Heimat* and where we still had to endure so much." Ibidem, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>30</sup> "The land looked sorrowful. All the farms were in Polish hands, just like the businesses in the city. The farmers were reduced to laborers on their own farms." CURT EXNER: Hirschberg im Riesengebirge in der Zeit vom 7.5. bis 25.8.1945, November 1945, HS BER0026, p. 15.

schlimmer geworden sind." Thus, he argued, "wenn man die Neißebrücke hinter sich gelassen und russisch besetztes Gebiet erreicht hat, atmet man auf,"<sup>31</sup> because here people live with "einer gewissen Sicherheit" ("some security") and are not seized "Tag und Nacht" ("day and night") by "irgendwelche[n] Gewalttaten" ("some sort of violence").

Like a number of expellees, Exner felt that Silesians had the "right" to one day rebuild their *Heimat* when the Poles left, but the outcome of just these first months of sustained occupation depressed him terribly:

"Hoffen wir, daß die Leidenszeit für Schlesien nicht mehr zu lange dauert. Jeder Tag unter Polenherrschaft kostet vielen Deutschen Gesundheit und Leben und vernichtet unersetzliche Werte. Wir müssen uns darüber klar sein, daß wir, wenn wir eines Tages zurückkehren, ein völlig ausgeplündertes, leeres Land vorfinden."<sup>32</sup>

One wonders if, as months turned into years of Polish administration, Exner despaired of whether Germans could ever recover the Silesia they had lost.

A Silesian correspondent for *Die Zeit*, who remained in the East until 1949, was shocked to find Polonization already so far advanced that only three private homes still had "das normale Aussehen einer deutschen Bürgerwohnung" ("the normal appearance of a German residence"). In his own, deteriorating village, the number of residents had fallen by half, and the "autochthons" who remained struggled to learn the difficult Polish language. If this had not already challenged his claimed desire for a change in the border, it was troubled in an encounter he had with an Englishman in Spring 1946. Strolling the Polonized towns, this neutral outsider was led to believe that Silesia had simply always been Polish. The reporter could only try to convince him otherwise by referring to trace relics, most destroyed or concealed: German signs that had preceded the freshly painted Polish ones, church registers, and the old telephone book.<sup>33</sup>

Upper Silesia was less physically damaged than Lower Silesia, and possessed a longer history of German-Polish exchange; nonetheless, the so-called autochthonous population of onetime German citizens that remained to work the region's industries developed a sense of foreignness, along with a strong

<sup>31</sup> They "not only confirm my impressions but also show that, in the meantime, circumstances have become even worse. [...] When one has the bridge over the Neiße behind him and enters the Russian-occupied region, he breathes easily [...]" Ibidem, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> "We hope that the time of suffering for Silesia doesn't last much longer. Each day under Polish rule costs many Germans health and life and destroys irreplaceable worth. We must be clear that, if we return one day, we will find an empty, completely plundered land before us." Ibidem, p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> ANONYMOUS: Im Jenseits von Oder und Neiße. Wie es in den alten deutschen Gebieten im Osten wirklich aussieht, in: *Die Zeit*, 17 Nov 1949, p. 9.

desire to escape to "Germany."<sup>34</sup> In some continuity with Nazi racial practices,<sup>35</sup> a form of national verification of the population occurred to retain industrial workers and reinforce Warsaw's claim that the region had always been home to an oppressed Polish population.<sup>36</sup> The integration process built resentment and alienation. Though many Germans adopted Polish citizenship, they opposed Polonization and the loss of everyday German culture. Thus, as one German reporter observed, remaining Germans adopted a spirit of "waiting" for any sort of change, and idealized lost German values of "Ordnung, Wohlstand, Kultur," which they have "always" come to know in connection with Germans.<sup>37</sup>

As in many cases, an anonymous Upper Silesian writer called for the return of Silesia to Germany in the name of justice. But the sheer extent of foreignness and personal suffering led him to despair that the lands were too far gone to ever be recovered, to yearn for escape, and then to feel great relief once finally away.<sup>38</sup> When he returned to his *Heimat* in August 1945, he was shocked by a thoroughly Polonized landscape, appearing lifeless to him:

"Das Leben in den Städten schien erloschen zu sein. Überall nur polnische Laute, polnische Hoheitszeichen, polnische Aufschriften, welche Rückkehrer und Siedler begrüßen, alles so hingestellt, als wenn es sich in Schlesien um urpolnisches Land handelte, das Deutsche den Polen entrissen hätten, so, als wenn jetzt ein altes Unrecht wieder gut gemacht wäre."<sup>39</sup>

With a thudding heart, he walked the empty streets and was intimidated by the prevalence of thuggish militiamen and lack of a civil police force. When by accident he met his wife, she wept of the rape, suffering, and suicide by women of all ages. The rest of Silesia he found to be a land "der absoluten Gesetzlosigkeit" ("of absolute lawlessness"), in which thousands starved because the fruitful earth was "unbebaut" ("untended"), and which those that could left.<sup>40</sup>

To what extent were Silesians deploying Nazi language and even mourning the loss of a Nazi past as they sought to engage with the destruction and

<sup>34</sup> INGO ESER: Einleitung, in: "Unsere Heimat ist uns ein fremdes Land geworden..." Die Deutschen östlich von Oder und Neiße 1945-1950. Dokumente aus polnischen Archiven, ed. by WŁODZIMIERZ BORODZIEJ and HANS LEMBERG, vol. II, Zentralpolen, Wojewodschaft Schlesien (Oberschlesien), Marburg 2003, pp. 377-378.

<sup>35</sup> MICHAEL G. ESCH: Gesunde Verhältnisse. Deutsche und polnische Bevölkerungspolitik in Ostmitteleuropa (1939-1950), Marburg 1998, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in ESER (cf. footnote 34), p. 390.

<sup>37</sup> ANONYMOUS (cf. footnote 33), p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Ein Christ erlebt Schlesien, March 1946, BAK Z 18/131.

<sup>39</sup> "Life in the cities appears to be extinguished. Everywhere, there are only Polish voices, Polish national emblems, Polish inscriptions greeting returnees and settlers. Everything is so arranged as if Silesia was an ancient Polish land that Germans took away from the Poles, and thus as if now an old injustice was being made right." Ibidem, pp. 3-4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, pp. 3-4, 14.

foreignness around them? This essay's findings indicate that Silesians often applied Naziesque rhetoric as they sought to understand the incursion of foreignness, but one must be extremely cautious in accusing them of a nostalgia for Nazism specifically. Comparison is useful: in Katja Naumann's assessment of four Leipzig journals written immediately after the war, former Nazi sympathizers and activists despaired that the Germandom they identified with Nazism should be destroyed, and they loathed the thought that Germany should now be misruled by inferior Slavs. Anna Regner, a convinced Nazi, saw the entry of Russians into Leipzig in 1945 entirely through a racist Nazi worldview – it was the incursion of Asian hordes from the steppes and suspected an Allied plot for “die Demütigung und Ausrottung des starken deutschen Volkes” (“to debase and exterminate the strong German people”).<sup>41</sup> Because expellees represented a broad sampling of Germans from every political mindset, it is to be expected that many of them retained Nazi sympathies, or at least remembered Nazi rhetoric as they perceived eastern peoples flooding into their homeland and behaving in ways which they imagined fit with the barbarity Nazi leaders had predicted. The rarity of willingness to see their own suffering in light of prior German crimes, and the onset of an obvious, drastic decline in lifestyle naturally led many to idealize an immediate past that overlapped with the Nazi period. One need look no further than Elisabeth Pfeil's postwar analyses to see continuities in Nazi-era writing about races and spaces. It is nevertheless essential to take note of a distinct difference between Silesians and former Nazis, who mourned the loss of the *Reich* from the deplorable but comparably comfortable conditions in a *Heimat* further west in the four partition zones. Silesians lost more than just a Nazi *Heimat* – they lost the physical German *Heimat* altogether. Even in the Soviet zone Germans entered positions of power, and there was no doubt that Saxony or Thuringia remained a German homeland. In light of this, though Silesians trapped in a *Heimat*-turned-foreign often applied language that dehumanized the Soviets or Poles, Hitler himself and National Socialism tended not to apply to their idealized *Heimat* of memory so much as supposedly “German” traits of order, cleanliness, and a sophisticated culture.

Certainly not all experiences with and depictions of Poles were fully negative. Occasionally, as German Silesians got to know them, there was even some empathy, albeit accompanied by the conviction that the Poles would be happier if they all simply went away. But in the end, living among even the friendliest Poles became unbearable. Rauch humanized the Poles she lived with for the last months as “fast Deutsch” (“almost German”) because they had lived ten years in the *Ruhrgebiet*, restarted their Ruhr printing

<sup>41</sup> KATJA NAUMANN: Alltägliche Feindbilder. Eine mikrohistorische Studie zu Tagebüchern aus der Leipziger Nachkriegszeit, in: Der Feind im Kopf. Künstlerische Zugänge und wissenschaftliche Analysen zu Feindbildern, ed. by THOMAS KLEMM et al., Leipzig 2005, pp. 134-135.

business, spoke fluent German, and led a "vorbildliches Familienleben. Die Hausfrau, Mutter von 8 Kindern, war wie eine deutsche Hausfrau."<sup>42</sup> She reflected on the day she received notice of her expulsion:

"Der älteste Sohn kam und meinte, er hätte evtl. eine engere Verbindung ins Auge gefasst. Ach, Du lieber Gott! Es war ein netter Mann, eine tadellose, kultivierte Familie, ich hätte es gut gehabt. Aber mein Innerstes kehrte sich um: nie hätte ich einen Polen geheiratet. Ich hätte in ihm doch immer sein Volk gesehen."<sup>43</sup>

With word of the expulsion order, "mir ein Stein vom Herzen fiel, ich wollte nur noch fort."<sup>44</sup>

The Polish family Elisabeth Waage worked for also treated her well, and her sister's employment by Jews brought about a very moving and rare recognition of the horrible crimes Germans had inflicted on others. As she recorded in her daybook:

"Durch sie erfährt Margot zum ersten Mal richtig, was Deutsche den polnischen Menschen, besonders den Juden angetan haben. Sie lassen es Margot nicht entgelten, behandeln sie höflich korrekt und geben ihr den Rat, im Falle ihrer Umsiedlung nicht nach Ostdeutschland, sondern in den westlichen Teil Deutschlands zu gehen. Ein Professor, der das Konzentrationslager überlebt hat, gibt ihr sogar Adressen von Freunden in Westdeutschland, die ihr weiterhelfen werden."<sup>45</sup>

Experience showed them that there was indeed nothing left for them in the former *Heimat*. They had to move into even smaller quarters, and the Poles in the house kept asking when the last Germans would leave so that they could have their space. Thus, "in Anbetracht der Tatsache, dass unsere Heimat für uns sowieso verloren und jeder Monat Weiterleben dort Zeitverschwendung ist,"<sup>46</sup> they put themselves on the resettlement list. When, on May 9, 1947, they stepped off the train in Radeberg by Dresden, she realized that this place is "nun unsere neue Heimat" ("now our new *Heimat*"), and she reflected on a poem she had written in Breslau, which concluded that both the natural world

<sup>42</sup> They led a "model family life. The housewife, mother of eight children, was like a German housewife." RAUCH (cf. footnote 2), pp. 50-51.

<sup>43</sup> "The oldest son came and indicated he would have eventually envisioned a closer relationship. My God! He was a nice man, from a faultless, cultivated family. I would have had it good. But my guts turned inside me: never would I have ever married a Pole. I would have always seen his people in him." Ibidem.

<sup>44</sup> With word of the expulsion order, "a stone fell from my heart. I only wanted to leave." Ibidem.

<sup>45</sup> "Through them, Margot learned for the first time what the Germans really did to the Polish people, especially the Jews. They didn't want Margot to recompense them for this; they handled her in a civil and correct manner and gave her the advice to go to the western parts of Germany rather than East Germany in the event that she was resettled. A professor who had survived the concentration camp even gave her the addresses of friends in West Germany who could help her further." WAAGE (cf. footnote 22), pp. 69-70.

<sup>46</sup> "In light of the fact that our *Heimat* was lost for us in any case and each month living here is a waste of time [...]" Ibidem, p. 75.

and the ruins of *Heimat* sing “uns zum Abschied für immer” (“to us of farewell forever”).<sup>47</sup>

At times, Germans who remained behind worked so actively with Russian and Polish administrators that their “loyalty” was called into question; among these were building specialists retained for a longer duration, who also attained long-term exposure to the advancing foreignness in the *Heimat*. Walter Tscheschner, the Weimar-era *Baumeister* in Brieg who lost his position due to Nazi persecution, reported his two years of reconstruction efforts in “Brzeg” so eagerly to the Brieg newsletter distributed in the occupation zones that the editor had to intervene, saying that, “selbst in dem Falle, daß unsere Heimatstadt für immer verloren sein sollte” (“even in the event that our city should be lost for ever”), workers such as Tscheschner were not to be reproved for their collaboration, “da sie mit ihrer Arbeit nicht den Polen, sondern ihrer Heimatstadt nützen wollten” (“because through their work they wanted to be of service to their *Heimatstadt* rather than to the Poles”).<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, Tscheschner was disenchanted by the immense suffering of other Germans. He was forced to wear a white armband, just like other former *Brieger*. His family was carefully watched. And so, he proved ready to emigrate. Though he returned periodically into the 1950s to work with Polish reconstruction efforts to restore Silesia’s infrastructure and historic buildings, he firmly made his new home in the GDR.<sup>49</sup>

### Discussing the transience of the earthly *Heimat*

The realization that the *Heimat* was ruined, foreign, and could only be possessed in memory – so essential for stability after the expulsion – was disseminated well beyond those who experienced its transformation. In the first place, those expelled after January 1945 spread word themselves that physical return was not so desirable as imagined return to a dreamland retrievable only in memory. In an October 22 letter from Hirschberg, Curt Exner was told: “Seien Sie froh, nicht mehr hier zu sein, denn die Zustände hier sind furchtbar. Tag und Nacht keine Ruhe. Wann soll es bloß mal anders werden? Vielleicht sehen wir uns eher im Westen wieder als in Hirschberg.”<sup>50</sup> After settling with relatives in Hesse, Klaus Werner’s family learned that friends who tried to return to Silesia from 1945–1946 were looted, abused, and returned to the West demoralized; this prompted realization that there was no going back, even though in coming years they often shared warm memories

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, pp. 91–92.

<sup>48</sup> W.S.: Wiederaufbau in ‘Brzeg’, in: Briegische Briefe 5 (1951), 9, p. 236.

<sup>49</sup> DOROTHEA TSCHESCHNER: Brieg. Bauten erzählen. Eine schlesische Perle, Berlin 2004, pp. 197–198; Interview with Dorothea Tscheschner, 15 Mar 2008.

<sup>50</sup> “Be glad that you are not here anymore, because the conditions here are terrible. No rest day or night. When will the whole situation change? Perhaps we will see each other sooner in the West than here in Hirschberg.” EXNER (cf. footnote 30), p. 16.

of *Heimat*, bought books with Silesian poems and tales, and cooked Silesian food at Christmas.<sup>51</sup> Lore Buschendorff's father cycled through the ruined *Heimat* after the war, and his painful stories kept her from visiting Silesia until the late 1990s.<sup>52</sup> In March 1945, Erwin Rosner learned of the utter destruction of Neisse (Nysa) from eyewitnesses, and after he was wounded in Italy, "in fiebereerfüllten und in wachen Nächten sah ich oft eine brennende Stadt, ein Bild des Grauens" ("in feverish and sleepless nights, I often saw a burning city, an image of horror"). So terribly did it disturb him that he sought out people from Neisse on a refugee transport in late May and took copious notes about how each intimate space had been destroyed. With the old *Heimat* lost, he urged expellees to seek the best life possible where they were and to find strength in God.<sup>53</sup>

Broader circulation of the *Heimat*'s fate came about through publications such as the *Westfälische Zeitung*, which reported that, by May 1948, Breslau had become a city of black markets and thievery, in which "die Ruinen stehen noch wie ehemals, es stürzt immer mehr in sich zusammen, und auf den Schutthaufen wächst das Unkraut" ("the ruins still stand as before, they collapse more and more, and weeds grow on the piles of rubble").<sup>54</sup> In his influential and controversial 1949 compilation of newspaper and survival accounts from Breslau, Franz Jerrig graphically illustrated the devastation and foreignness from which he concluded:

"Aus Breslau wurde Wrocław. [...] Das 'damals' beginnt heute Erinnerung zu werden. Und was dann kam, beherrscht die Gegenwart. Dieses 'danach' ist den Menschen aus der großen Oderstadt zu einem bösen Traum geworden. Man hat das Verlangen, aus ihm zu erwachen. Aber dieses 'danach' ist die heutige Wirklichkeit."<sup>55</sup>

By far the most important medium for fostering discussion of loss in the early years were circular letters (*Rundbriefe*) and small periodicals penned by Protestant and Catholic pastors to their expelled communities, in effect a genre between newspapers and private letters.<sup>56</sup> At a time when other forms

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Klaus Werner (October 3, 2007).

<sup>52</sup> LORE BUSCHENDORFF, June 10, 1990, in: *Ein Teil Heimat seid Ihr für mich* (cf. footnote 23), p. 213; *ibidem*, October 20, 1996, pp. 230-231.

<sup>53</sup> ERWIN ROSNER: Die zerstörte Stadt. Bericht vom Untergang des schlesischen Rom, in: *Heimat und Glaube* 2 (1950), 5, pp. 10-11.

<sup>54</sup> Ein Bericht aus Breslau, in: *Westfälische Zeitung*, May 31, 1948.

<sup>55</sup> "Wrocław emerges out of Breslau [...] What was 'back then' begins to become memory today. And what came next dominates the here and now. This 'time after' has become a bad dream for people from the great city on the Oder. One desires to wake up from it. But today, this 'time after' is reality." FRANZ OTTO JERRIG: *Aus Breslau wurde Wrocław*, Hannover 1949, p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> The Catholic *kirchliche Hilfsstelle* collected 109 *Rundbriefe* from eastern parishes, a great many Silesian; these are stored at the Bundesarchiv Koblenz, BAK Z 18/212-224; Protestant *Rundbriefe* which survived are stored at the Protestant Central Archive in

of organization were largely blockaded by the occupying powers, *Rundbriefe*, established on the initiative of individual pastors for a vast number of communities from the lost territories, reached out to a widely scattered but intimate circle of expellees, in both the western and eastern partition zones, with firsthand accounts about the *Heimat*'s transformation and active discussion of how they should respond. Practically no one writing in letters from Silesia through the later 1940s had any wish to remain. Over and over, pastors and laypeople alike spoke of the foreignness they found in the old *Heimat*, expressed ardent yearning to leave for "Germany" in the West, and warned their expelled countrymen that any desire to return was misplaced. Many even envied those that had left earlier and been spared seeing the *Heimat* transformed, because for them it was easier to escape reality and imagine it in a pristine glory that lived in the past. By early 1948, some *Rundbriefe* were reaching between 1,000 to 1,500 addresses, from which they were often further distributed to others in the community.<sup>57</sup> Many were also distributed to the Soviet zone in these early years; indeed, of the two thousand addresses to which the Catholic Liegnitz (Legnica) *Rundbrief* was mailed, 60 percent were in the Russian sector.<sup>58</sup> That passages dealing with the loss of *Heimat*, or reporting the ruined, foreign character it now possessed, dominated the limited pages available to pastors at a time of chronic paper shortage testifies to the extreme importance *Heimatverlust* had for virtually every pastor, and, as proven by the discussion in letters they received, also by the members of their former congregations.

The overarching response by both denominations was the same, though a few natural differences arose in presentation. At times, Protestant clergy mourned that intrinsic qualities of their denomination would be lost as Silesia turned Catholic. Paul Karzel, pastor of the former Bielitz (Bielsko) community, lamented that they could not celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther's death together in a land now Polish and Catholic: "Wie öde muss es jetzt um das Lutherdenkmal auf dem Bielitzer Kirchplatz aussehen. Fremd sind die Menschen, fremd nach Art, Sprache und Glauben, die dort jetzt vorbeigehen."<sup>59</sup> With this in mind, he encouraged his community to lift their hearts up to the image of the monument they held in their hearts, since, "jetzt, da wir es nicht mehr sehen können, soll unser Reformator Martin Luther in unseren Herzen ein unverlierbares Denkmal haben" ("because now, that we can't see it anymore, our reformer Martin Luther should be a permanent

---

Berlin [Evangelisches Zentralarchiv, EZA]. Most widespread before 1950, some continued in later decades.

<sup>57</sup> Rundbrief der Gemeinschaft Heimatvertriebener Schlesier, March 12, 1948, p. 6.

<sup>58</sup> JOHANNES SMACZYŃSKI: An den Freundeskreis von Liegnitz (circa 1948), BAK Z 18/222.

<sup>59</sup> "How desolate it must now appear around the Luther monument at the Bielitz church square. People that now pass it by are foreign in manner, speech, and denomination." PAUL KARZEL, Bielitzer evangelischer Rundbrief 1, October 1946, EZA Z 1.142, p. 1.

monument in our hearts").<sup>60</sup> Protestant clergy were also more likely to cite scripture verses. Catholic clergy tended to highlight the suffering of Christ's mother, or, as in a Frankenstein (Ząbkowicki Śląski) *Rundbrief*, to call on members to spend rosary month in October saying decades for the *Heimat*.<sup>61</sup> But in the end, it is the similarity of Catholic and Protestant writing about the *Heimat* that is most striking.

When responding to the omnipresent sense of loss, the starting point for pastors in both denominations was the scriptural passage Hebrews 13:14: "Wir haben hier keine bleibende Stadt; sondern die zukünftige suchen wir." ("We have no lasting city here, but seek the city that is to come.") In the face of Silesia's drastic transformation, the verse suddenly became deeply meaningful. They knew, from experience and circulating information, that the earthly *Heimat* was a transient, fading space. As such, the physical *Heimat* retained profound importance, but primarily as a past space to be cherished in memory and preserved as an identity and legacy. The true purpose in life, many pastors insisted, was to detach from physical expectations and strive toward an unfading, eternal *Heimat* – a rather open-ended proposal which, as will be shown, expellees interpreted as suited their own needs. Resolve for return migration could be strong in some pastoral writing during the first months after expulsion, but by the end of the 1940s, repeated proof of the physical *Heimat*'s transience tended to make the idea of return become abstract and indefinite, resting in God's hands.

The first half of this verse, that the earthly *Heimat* was a transient space, became a leading means for dealing with the loss of *Heimat* very early on. In a final sermon to his long-suffering Breslau congregation on June 30, 1946, Joachim Konrad cited Hebrews 13:14 to affirm that, as they took leave (*Abschied*) from the transient space of their beloved church, they anchored themselves in God's will, even if this meant losing the "kostbare[] Gut unserer Heimat" ("The precious treasure of our *Heimat*")<sup>62</sup> Richard Hoppe's heavily distributed (2,500-copy) *Rundbrief* offered an excellent encapsulation:

"Der Blick auf die irdische Heimat und das Warten und Hoffen auf ihre Erneuerung bringt uns immer wieder schwerste und bitterste Enttäuschung. Und wenn uns die irdische Heimat wiedergeschenkt werden sollte, so wird das Leben dort schwer genug sein. Ein Paradies wird uns nicht mehr erstehen in dem Lande des Todes und des Grauens. [...] Herr Jesus Christus ist uns durch seine Auferstehung

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>61</sup> RUDOLF KURNOTH: Hedwigsgruß an alle Gläubigen der katholischen Kirchengemeinden Frankenstein und Zadel, Schlesien, no. 2, September 1946, BAK Z 18/216, p. 41.

<sup>62</sup> JOACHIM KONRAD: 2. Sonntag nach Trinitatis, den 30. Juni 1946. Letzte evangelische und deutsche Predigt in der St. Elisabethkirche, in: Flüchtlinge von Gottes Gnaden: Schlesische Predigt 1945-1952, ed. by DIETMAR NESS, Würzburg 1990, pp. 90-91.

vorangegangen, um uns die Stätte zu bereiten in dieser ewigen Heimat, aus der uns niemand mehr vertreiben und die uns niemand mehr zerstören kann."<sup>63</sup>

Hebrews 13:14 always dominated the front page of a Protestant paper devoted to reinforcing that *Heimat* should be found in God, not just the ancestral village, so as "nicht um wehmütige Erinnerung zu wecken, nicht um falsche Hoffnungen wachzurufen, sondern um in uns wach zu halten, was Gott zu uns insonderheit geredet hat, und um uns auf dem Wege zu halten, auf den Gott mitten in seinem Gericht uns in seiner Gnade stellte."<sup>64</sup>

Did this mean that the physical *Heimat* was simply to be forgotten? Just six pages later, an advertisement tasked readers to gather any surviving materials about their lost *Heimat* churches, including memories; physical detachment was to be paralleled by cherishing and preserving the *Heimat* they had known.<sup>65</sup>

Catholic priests similarly urged their flocks to see the earthly *Heimat* as transient, and to find continuity in God and each other. Johannes Smaczny observed in November 1948: "Vergänglich ist alles Irdische, ewig allein ist Gott. Vergänglich irdische Heimat, ewig Gott. Vergänglich irdische Heimat, ewig allein die Geborgenheit in der Liebe Gottes. Das Leben zeigt sich als Pilgerfahrt; wir sind nur Zeltbauer – auf Abbruch."<sup>66</sup>

Pastor Piekorz entreated his Lauban (Lubań) community during their first Advent away from the *Heimat*, "dass wir in unserer Bedrängnis immer mehr inne werden, wie jetzt die Verbundenheit von Mensch zu Mensch und – von Mensch zu Gott unendlich wertvoller ist als alles, was wir an Irdischem verloren und uns an Irdischem fehlt."<sup>67</sup> Prayer for return to the *Heimat* should

<sup>63</sup> "The view to the earthly *Heimat* and waiting and hoping for its renewal brings us the greatest and bitterest disappointment time and again. And if the earthly *Heimat* were to be given back to us, life there would be hard enough. A paradise will not come into existence there for us again in a dead land of horrors. [...] Through his resurrection, Jesus Christ has gone before us in order to prepare a place in his eternal *Heimat*, from which no one will be able to be expelled and which no one will be able to destroy." RICHARD HOPPE: Sonderrundbrief zum Totensonntag 1947 mit Totenliste, November 1947, EZA Z 1004, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> "[...] not to awaken mournful memories and not to enliven false hopes, but rather to keep alive what God has called forth inside each of us and to support us on the way which, in the midst of his judgment, God has given us in his mercy." JOHANNES KLEIN: Wir haben hier keine bleibende Stadt; sondern die zukünftige suchen wir, in: Kirchenblatt für Evangelische aus Schlesien 1/2, February 1949, p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Helft mit, in: Kirchenblatt für Evangelische aus Schlesien 1/2, February 1949, p. 6.

<sup>66</sup> "Everything earthly is impermanent, God alone is eternal. Impermanent earthly *Heimat*, eternal God. Impermanent earthly *Heimat*, eternal alone the security in the love of God. Life shows itself to be a pilgrimage; we are only the tent builders, until they collapse." JOHANNES SMACZNY: Das katholische Liegnitz, November 1948, BAK Z 18/222, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> "[...] that in our affliction we increasingly internalize how now the unity from person to person and between people and God is of infinitely greater value than everything we have lost in earthly existence and which is lacking on Earth." PIEKORZ: Laubaner Rundbrief, December 6, 1945, BAK Z 18/219, p. 3.

not only mean prayer for the lost earthly *Heimat* but for the eternal *Heimat* as well.<sup>68</sup> Josef Ryba supported a similar view by citing a parishioner's letter, emphasizing that the hard lot of the expellee was meant to instill the realization, "dass alles Irdisches vergänglich ist, und dass wir dann geläutert und zufrieden unser Leben doch noch recht beschliessen können" ("that everything Earthly is impermanent, and that then, purified and satisfied, we can decide our lives rightly") and so be prepared for entry into heaven.<sup>69</sup>

A palpable evolution transpired in many *Rundbriefe*; pastors with broadly different personalities and backgrounds, from both denominations, tended to progress from yearning for physical return, to a resignation that the past lived in idealized memory, while the present, even future, lived in the West. Not all reached this sentiment at once, and there were cases where they never reached it at all, but it was the prevailing motif. While in his first letter (1947) Josef Engelbert urged his flock to pray and have patience, that they might one day see St. Michael's in Breslau again, later that year he urged them "[sich] mit beiden Füßen auf den Boden der Wirklichkeit [zu] stellen" ("to stand with both feet on the ground of reality") where they settled. "Wir wollen beruflich zu schaffen und zu wirken suchen, als ob wir immer hier bleiben müßten."<sup>70</sup> By the time of his last letter, two years later, he had moved to cherishing *Heimat* in memory and focusing on new duties in Hannover.<sup>71</sup> Pastor Pelz started out insisting that, by every law of the church, he was still legally pastor of his parish, even if it was now administrated by a Polish counterpart. But having personally witnessed Breslau's utter ruin, and painfully aware that his community was irrevocably dispersed, he ultimately decided: "Doch nützt es nichts, rückwärts zu schauen, so lieb und so notwendig eine solche Rückschau für unsere wunde und müde Seele auch ist. Wir schauen vorwärts!"<sup>72</sup> Alfred Schulz processed loss much more quickly; already in 1945 he was convinced that return to Schweidnitz (Świdnica) was unthinkable because, having lived there through November 1945, he knew of the immense suffering of those left behind. Some of his flock found this too depressing, and

<sup>68</sup> IDEM: Laubaner Rundbrief, October 6, 1946, BAK Z 18/219, p. 6.

<sup>69</sup> JOSEF RYBA: Rundbrief, March 30, 1947, BAK Z 18/222.

<sup>70</sup> "We want to produce according to our calling and to seek to be effective as if we would always have to stay here." JOSEF ENGELBERT, St. Michaels-Brief 1, St. Joseftag 1947, BAK Z 18/212, p. 118:1; IDEM: Pastoral Letter St. Michaels-Brief 3, Zum Christfest 1947, BAK Z 18/212, p. 126:1; see similar in JOSEF RYBA: Rundbrief, November 1947, BAK Z 18/222.

<sup>71</sup> JOSEF ENGELBERT: Breslauer Heimatbrief St. Michael 6 (1949), BAK Z 18/212, p. 139:4.

<sup>72</sup> "It doesn't help us to look backwards, dear and necessary as such a glimpse is for our wounds and weary souls. We look forward!" JOHANNES PELZ: Rundbrief, November 9, 1947, BAK Z 18/218, pp. 2-3.

he responded by promising to never stop praying for the *Heimat*'s return, but that it would take a "Wunder" for Silesia to become German again.<sup>73</sup>

Former congregation members living in all four zones responded to these reports and sermons with gratitude for sustained ties with the old *Heimat* and agreement that the physical *Heimat* should be cherished in memory. Some still clung to the notion of return, but at the same time focused energies on building a new *Heimat* in continuity with what they had known. As Helmut Werner wrote from Leipzig: "Ich gebe die gelesenen Briefe immer an meine Heimatfreunde weiter, die sich auch sehr freuen, durch diese schöne Einrichtung indirekt mit der Heimat Kontakt zu haben."<sup>74</sup> Maria Leuschner of Halle celebrated whenever the *Rundbrief* arrived, and formed new spaces of *Heimat* among Franciscans from Breslau, who celebrate the Christmas Eve Mass "ganz nach unserer Art"<sup>75</sup> ("in the way we always did"). Rudolf Junge shared it with others in the Soviet zone, native and settler alike, who showed great interest; and when he regularly mounted a hill on the Saxon border with Poland, from which he could get a good view to imagine the spaces he had lost, he mourned that "all das Wehklagen bringt nichts vorwärts" ("all the lamentation doesn't bring anything forward"). The pastoral letters give "eine kräftige Hilfe in solche[n] Stunden" ("powerful help in such hours").<sup>76</sup> In general, the Lauban *Rundbrief* featured letters from parishioners giving thanks for what they saw as a lesson of the expulsion: breaking attachment to the earthly and seeking the eternal.<sup>77</sup>

### Building *Heimat* in the present

How were expellees to go about fulfilling the second half of the scripture verse, to seek the eternal, unperishing (*unvergängliche*) *Heimat*? After reading reports from the East or reflecting on their own suffering there, many pastors shifted to focus on regenerating a new Germany in the West through preserving their Silesian traditions and memories. Protestant pastor Hanske reflected that his community had experienced the earthly city's impermanence together, and he had distributed a pamphlet about God's guidance to 4,200 people, "nicht, um die Sehnsucht zu schüren, oder auf Illusionen zu bauen, sondern zu helfen, daß man sich hier und jetzt [im Westen] einlebe und eingliedere, wahrhaftig, 'Salz der Erde' werde und zur Verlebendigung

<sup>73</sup> ALFRED SCHULZ: *Rundbrief*, December 19, 1945, BAK Z 18/222; IDEM, February 11, 1946, BAK Z 18/222.

<sup>74</sup> "I always pass on the letters I've read to my *Heimat* friends, who also delight to have indirect contact with the *Heimat* through these lovely materials." HELMUT WERNER, letter, in: *Das katholische Liegnitz*, April 1949, BAK Z 18/222, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> MARIA LEUSCHNER, letter, *ibidem*, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> RUDOLF JUNGE, letter, *ibidem*, p. 12.

<sup>77</sup> PIEKORZ: *Laubaner Rundbrief*, October 6, 1946, BAK Z 18/219, p. 6.

bisher toter Gemeinden beitrage.”<sup>78</sup> A 1949 ritual book for the Catholic church calendar also noted that, while not all traditions from the old *Heimat* may be viable in the new Western environment: “Vielleicht dürfen wir aber auch begründete Hoffnung hegen, daß von unserem eigenen Volksgute eine Bereicherung oder eine Wiederbelebung des kirchlich-religiösen Brauchtums der neuen Heimat ausstrahlen könnte.”<sup>79</sup> Some laypeople also took on this goal. In 1948, Regina Walta wrote her pastor from Leipzig that she found worship in the Soviet zone richer than in the *Heimat* she had left in May 1947, and wanted to contribute to it.<sup>80</sup> For Richard Buschke, after he returned to a Polish-speaking space that “bot ja kein Heim mehr” (“was not home anymore”), it was simply the case that “nur die Kirche war noch Heimat geblieben” (“only the church still remained *Heimat*”).<sup>81</sup>

The best place to look for how ordinary Silesians responded to pastoral entreaties about the transient physical *Heimat* and the need for a Christian *Heimat* with intransient values emerges in the countless religious meetings (*Treffen*) assembled in early years, when other forms of organization were largely forbidden. Often organized through *Rundbriefe*, *Treffen* fostered finding *Heimat* in each other, to feel continuity with past traditions, to mourn what was lost, and to commit to preserving *Heimat* in memory. Hundreds of Protestant Silesians at a 1949 *Treffen* in Hannover, Hildesheim, and Detmold, elicited “eine gegenseitige, große Freude, sich wiedersehen und sprechen zu können und auch im Erinnern an gemeinsame Zeiten Gedankenaustausch halten zu können” (“a great, shared joy to see each other and speak again, and also to be able to exchange reflections on memories of shared times together”).<sup>82</sup> After a Catholic *Treffen*, a woman from Liegnitz wrote her pastor:

“Wir fanden uns noch einmal alle zur Segensandacht in der Kirche zusammen, um dem Herrgott zu danken, daß er uns diesen Einkehrttag geschenkt hat. Zwar mit ein bißel Wehmut im Herzen, aber doch erfüllt von tiefer Freude und Dankbarkeit nahmen wir voneinander Abschied.”<sup>83</sup>

<sup>78</sup> “[...] not to fuel yearning or build illusions, but rather, as one resides and integrates here and now [in the West], to truly become ‘salt for the Earth’ and to contribute to the resuscitating communities which had become dead.” KURT HANSKE: Kirchenkreis Lauen, in: Kirchenblatt für Evangelische aus Schlesien 1/2 (1949), p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> “Perhaps we will also be able to entertain the grounded hope that our own cultural goods could exude an enrichment or revitalization of the church-religious traditions in the new *Heimat*.” JOSEF BRAUNER: Schlesischer Volksbrauch im Kirchenjahr, Ulm 1949, p. 9.

<sup>80</sup> REGINA WALTA, letter, in: Das katholische Liegnitz, April 1949, BAK Z 18/222, p. 6.

<sup>81</sup> RICHARD BUSCHKE: Begegnung mit der hl. Hedwig, in: Heimat und Glaube 3 (1951), 10, p. 9.

<sup>82</sup> Pastor Eitner in Hannover, Hildesheim und Detmold (circa 1949), EZA 47/76.

<sup>83</sup> “We found ourselves once again praying blessings together in church to thank God that he had given us this meeting day. Of course we took our leave from each other with a bit of melancholy in our hearts, but we were also filled with deep joy and thankfulness.” URSULA ENGEL, letter, in: Das katholische Liegnitz, September 1948, BAK Z 18/222, p. 5.

Hans-Joachim Gaidetzka's youth group hiked through the Bavarian forest singing songs about Silesia in 1946, and they met time and again until 1949: "Beisammensein – Freude – jugendlich frohes Lachen – Abschied – dunkler Alltag. Wie in einem Traum stehen diese Erinnerungen vor dem geistigen Auge derer, die da die Tage gemeinsam erleben durften."<sup>84</sup> Word of destruction in Silesia was central to any *Treffen*, as when Albert Müller told his 35 fellow Liegnitzer in Cologne in 1949 about his experiences and the conditions in the *Heimat* three months before.<sup>85</sup>

### Seeking a heavenly *Heimat* in the heart

Gertrud Rauch's pastor had proclaimed that the mountains would always remain for them to return to – in the years that followed, many expellees did indeed return, but not to a physical *Heimat*, which was cut off and transformed, but rather to the mountains of memory that they stored in their hearts. This everyday reminiscing coalesced the lost *Heimat*-as-artifact: a timeless, intimate, idealized space and curious manifestation of the second half of the scripture verse – to strive for the *unvergängliche Heimat* to come. Even for traumatized pastors, the image of a static, heaven-like past-space (now lost) and a static, heaven-like future-space (to come) often combined to produce consoling visions of a *Heimat* outside of space and time, offering escape from the suffering and loss of the present. Aware that contemporary Silesia had become a space of suffering, they returned to an intransient *Heimat* of the imagination.

"Meine Sehnsucht nach der Heimat wird immer stärker; so oft träume ich, daß ich wieder 'daheim' bin."<sup>86</sup> The experience Magdalena John shared with her pastor in March 1949 was widespread and often expressed through detailed imaginary journeys, published as poems, articles, or even full-length books that offered an intimate tour within a dreamlike "*Heimat of the Heart*." Underlying all the warm memories was always the threat of reality, that this was a past space and could never be physically returned to. Hence, when most authors woke up from their narratives at some point to face the ruins of the physical *Heimat*, the trauma prompted them to cling all the more dearly to memories.

Luise Stolz imagined *Heimat* within her, intimately, consoling her in exile:

<sup>84</sup> "Time together, joy, gladness, youthful laughing, farewells, the dark everyday. As in a dream, these memories are fixed in the mind's eye of all those that were able to experience these days together." HANS JOACHIM GAIDETZKA: Rundbrief, September 1946, BAK Z 18/213, p. 31; IDEM, June 1948, BAK Z 18/213, p. 51; W. STEFFENS, Menden 1948 (Pentecost 1948), BAK Z 18/213, pp. 54-66.

<sup>85</sup> Und in Köln, Liegnitzer Heimatbrief, Oktober 1949, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> "My yearning for the *Heimat* becomes stronger and stronger. I dream so often that I am back home." MAGDELENA JOHN, letter, in: Das katholische Liegnitz, June/July 1949, BAK Z 18/222, p. 8.

"Heimat. Du kannst sie tausendmal verlassen und kehrst doch immer zu ihr zurück. Sie ist mit Türmen, Kirchen, Gassen Dein unverlierbar letztes Glück. Sie birgt der Jugend reinste Träume, sie schließt Dich ein wie Mutterschoß, sie dehnt sich über alle Räume und nimmer kommst Du von ihr los."<sup>87</sup>

Protestant pastor Konrad Müller's protracted tour through pristine photos and vivid prose of an idyllic prewar Breslau suddenly collided on the last pages with the "bittere Abschied" as hundreds of thousands were forced to separate from the beloved *Heimat*. At once, it shocked him into silence: "davon soll nichts mehr gesagt werden."<sup>88</sup> Such necessity for living in dreams rather than dwelling on reality was explicit on the last page, with a poem that pastor Ernst-Walter Maetschke had preached to his community in 1948: "Sprecht nicht so viel davon, daß hinter uns versank der Heimat liches Glück! Tragt nur im Herzen, was das Auge von ihr trank mit letztem, durst'gem Blick."<sup>89</sup> Thus, as Linde Englert concluded her extended poem about the beauties of *Heimat*: "Und bin ich noch so weit von dort, von meinem lieben Heimatort, komm' ich auch nie wieder hin, nimmermehr vergeß' ich ihn."<sup>90</sup>

After indulging in a journey to the cherished past world, Wolfgang von Eichborn relived his winter expulsion and felt it steal the intimate spaces away:

"Dorf um Dorf, Kirchturm um Kirchturm versank die Heimat in der auflösenden Verlorenheit der weißen Nacht. Die Pyramide des Berges rückte näher, rückte ferner, verschwand; die Landschaft der Heimat sank in die traumhafte Gewissheit der Erinnerung."<sup>91</sup>

Every feature of *Heimat* remained dear in his memory, as they did for many expellees, and, by such reflection, he steadily realized that what he

<sup>87</sup> "You can leave *Heimat* a thousand times, and still you always return back to her. With her towers, churches, and alleys, she is a last good fortune you can never lose. She holds the purest dreams of the youth, she embraces you as in a mother's womb, she stretches herself over all areas, and you never come away from her." LUISE STOLZ: *Heimat*, in: Bielitzer evangelischer Rundbrief 4, ed. by PAUL KARZEL, October 1947, EZA Z 1.142, p. 3.

<sup>88</sup> "Nothing more shall be said of this." KONRAD MÜLLER: *Breslau wie es war*, Goslar 1949, p. 39.

<sup>89</sup> "Do not speak so much about how the *Heimat*'s bright good fortune sank behind us! Just carry in your heart what your eyes drank in of her with the last, thirsty glance." *Ibidem*, p. 40.

<sup>90</sup> "I am still so far from there, from my beloved *Heimat*; and though I'll never go there again, I will never, ever forget it." LINDE ENGLERT: *Das Beskidenland ist mein Heimatland*, in: Bielitzer evangelischer Rundbrief 4, ed. by PAUL KARZEL, October 1947, EZA Z 1.142, p. 4.

<sup>91</sup> "Village by village, church tower by church tower, the *Heimat* was engulfed by the dissolving loss of the white night. The pyramids of the mountains moved nearer, moved further, disappeared; the landscape of the *Heimat* sank into the dreamful certainty of memory." WOLFGANG VON EICHBORN: *Das schlesische Jahr. Landschaften der Sehnsucht*, Stuttgart 1948, p. 122.

yearned for could not be physically reclaimed. Maria von Buttlar explicitly told her readers to take part in her imaginary journey “als Trost und zum Gedenken [...] damit in ihren Herzen das Bild der alten Heimat immer klarer erstehe” (“as a consolation and for reflection [...] so that the image of the old *Heimat* is resurrected in your hearts with ever greater clarity”).<sup>92</sup> Using the destruction of Silesia as a departure point, rather than a shocking interruption, she emphasized that memory was a source of strength from which Silesians should ladle and drink with sober recognition that the remembered *Heimat* was endangered, and that though many families tried to pass on customs of *Heimat* to the children, time would make even this lived tradition they took with them vanish until it lives on “nur noch in der wehmütigen Erinnerung” (“only in wistful memories”).<sup>93</sup> With such a fate in mind, she listened to the singing of expellee children outside her window on the Rhine, “ein Stück Heimat für uns, die Erwachsenen, die schwer an unserem Schicksal tragen” (“a piece of *Heimat* for us, the adults, who carry their fate heavily”). With this sound in her ears:

“während es stetig dunkler wird, die Konturen der rheinischen Landschaft immer mehr zerfließen, hellt sich vor dem inneren Auge alles auf. Wie auf dem sanften Goldgrund, den die alten Meister vollendet malten, steht das Bild der Heimat vor uns, unverloren, unvergessen. Die Bitterkeit, die Sorge, die Angst, alles Fremdsein schwindet vor diesem Bild, das wir alle im Herzen tragen. Es ist unverlierbarer Besitz, es ist unwandelbar in seiner Klarheit.”<sup>94</sup>

The static, idyllic *Heimat* of memory lived on, at least for those that could still remember it. Through her journey, von Buttlar made “ein[en] bescheidene[n] Versuch, das zu erhalten und zu beleben, was einstmal unser Leben bestimmte” (“a humble attempt to retain and enliven what once constituted our lives”).<sup>95</sup>

“Unsere wahre und unverlierbare *Heimat* ist droben!”<sup>96</sup> Like many pastors, Father Ambrosius Rose reminded his flock from Grüssau (Krzeszów) that they were to create a godly *Heimat* in the West, and seek an unfading *Heimat* in the next life. But pastors also undertook imaginary journeys, often to a static, idealized ancient parish church always filled by ever-attentive and

<sup>92</sup> MARIA VON BUTTLAR: *Heimat im Herzen: ein besinnliches Schlesienbuch*, Neuwied 1948, p. 97.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11.

<sup>94</sup> “As it steadily grew dark, the contours of the Rhenish landscape dissolve away more and more, everything lights up before my inner eye. As on a smooth gold background which the old master finished painting, the image of the *Heimat* stands before us, neither lost nor forgotten. The bitterness, the fears, the angst, every alienating context vanishes before this image that we all carry in our hearts. It is a possession that cannot be lost, it is unchanging in its clarity.” *Ibidem*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>96</sup> AMBROSIUS ROSE: Oster-Rundbriefe 1948 an die Grüssauer Pfarrfamilie und Oblatengemeinschaft, BAK Z 18/213, p. 159.

angelic parishioners. *Breslauer* priest Josef Engelbert expressed his joy at the volume of letters he had received that expressed how:

“‘St. Michael bleibt uns unvergessen’ und es geht Euch so wie mir, wenn ich an St. Michael denke, dann sehe und erlebe ich unsere feierlichen Gottesdienste und die mächtigen Kundgebungen anlässlich der Hochfeste und unserer religiösen Wochen. Ich sehe die Kirche überfüllt, Kopf an Kopf stehen die Brüder und Schwestern und mächtig erklingen unsere Loblieder zum Preise des Allerhöchsten.”<sup>97</sup>

Pastor Küster from Patschkau (Paczków) actually sent his flock a picture of their church to invite them to an imaginary *Treffen* there, “bei dem niemand zu fehlen braucht, dass wir uns wieder Seite an Seite setzen.”<sup>98</sup> Another pastor yearned for return but surrendered it to God’s hands; he lived instead in fantasies of a church too idealized to have ever been real:

“Wie schön waren die Gottesdienste in unseren Grafschafter Kirchen, wie fleißig sind die Kinder in die Seelsorgestunden gekommen, wie lauschtet ihr freudig der Predigt, der Belehrung durch eure Geistlichen in den Glaubensstunden der Jugend, in der Kongregation, im Männerapostolat, im Mütterverein [...] Das ist nun alles vorüber. Es war einmal.”<sup>99</sup>

### Expellees who planned for return

This article has shown that, even when hope for return was most realistic, there began a critical dealing with loss that continued on an individual basis through the coming decades; it led most to steadily realize that there was no moving back to a place that no longer existed. At the same time, it is to be expected that the first four years after the war did not result in a sudden end to hope for return to Silesia. The political fortunes of Silesia were not yet confirmed. A peace conference where the border was to gain international recognition never took place; East Germany affirmed the border in 1950; and West Germany only recognized its existence in 1970. Indeed, plans by some to return in these early years seldom evinced the dangerous, hateful denial of

<sup>97</sup> “‘St. Michael’s church has not been forgotten.’ It is just so with me. When I think of St. Michael’s, I see and experience our solemn religious service and the powerful demonstrations during the high feasts and our religious weeks. I see the church overfilled. The brothers and sisters stand shoulder to shoulder and mightily sing our hymns to the praise of the Almighty.” JOSEF ENGELBERT: St. Michaels-Brief 2, Zum St. Michaelfest 1947, BAK Z 18/212, p. 122:1.

<sup>98</sup> “I would like to invite you to worship there in spirit at a meeting in which no one can be missing, so that we sit again, side by side.” KÜSTER UND FAMILIE: Rundbrief Patschkau, Christmas 1948, EZA Z 1.164, pp. 1-2.

<sup>99</sup> “How beautiful the services in our churches in the *Grafschaft* were; how efficiently the children came to their religious education; you joyfully listened to the sermon, to the instruction through your clergy for the youth, in the congregation, men’s group, in the mother’s club [...] now all of that is over. It was once upon a time.” MONSE: Rundbrief, May 1, 1946, BAK Z 18/218.

reality that became the norm among revisionists not long after. In a nostalgic vein, Hans Jaekel wrote his pastor that:

“Vielen war es früher gleich, wo sie waren, sie glaubten sich überall heimatlich fühlen zu können. Aber alle sind nun in einer Ansicht einig, nämlich ‘es ist überall schön, doch in der Heimat, da ist es am schönsten.’ Wir sehnen uns alle von Herzen nach der Stunde, wo wir den Heimatboden wieder betreten werden.”<sup>100</sup>

Others felt that a twin return-migration would simply make everyone happy, even if Silesia itself was in ruins. Having suffered in a ravaged *Heimat* and even befriended Poles, one man asserted in 1948 that Poles, too, had been expelled and yearned for return:

“Es geht ihnen genau so wie uns. Sie fühlen sich im fremden Land nicht wohl und verstehen unsere Notlage manchmal besser, als unsere eigenen Landsleute. Wann wird endlich der Tag kommen, wo wir wieder in Steinau aussteigen und dort bleiben können.”<sup>101</sup>

Through the coming decade, many who harbored concrete desire for return steadily accepted that there was no going back (an ongoing process to be further demonstrated in this author's dissertation). Wilfried von Rekowski, who had spent the end of the war as a prisoner of war in an American camp and thus did not experience the *Heimat*'s destruction, spent the years before 1951 studying agriculture with plans to return to rebuild Silesia. But these hopes faded, and it became steadily “undenkbar [...], nach Schlesien zurück-zukehren” (“unthinkable to return back to Silesia”).<sup>102</sup> He accepted the expulsion's permanence, but retained interest in the *Heimat*. Via a connection with the Quakers, he managed to visit Silesia again in 1958, now a guest to a former *Heimat* rich in memories that had become part of the new Poland.<sup>103</sup>

At the same time, there existed a minority, both in these early years and later on, who nursed their resentment to the point that physical return was always imperative; for them, knowledge of destruction and foreignness elicited rancor and stubborn refusal to accept that Silesia's transformation decreased chances of it being reclaimed. Seldom did these extremists entertain concrete plans to live alongside Poles; most saw the forced expulsion of Polish settlers as justified or ignored this factor altogether by framing themselves as pioneers restoring a German mission in the East. It is most

<sup>100</sup> “To many it was all much the same wherever we were, they believed that they could feel at home everywhere. But now they are all one in the view that ‘it's lovely everywhere, but most beautiful in the *Heimat*.’ We all yearn with our hearts for the hour when we will walk the soils of the *Heimat* again.” HANS JAEKEL, letter, in: Das katholische Liegnitz, April 1949, BAK Z 18/222, p. 3.

<sup>101</sup> “Matters for them are just as they are for us. They don't feel right in a foreign land and often understand the needs of our situation better than our own countrymen. When will the day finally come when we step out in Steinau again and remain there?” Aus der alten Heimat, in: Steinauer Heimatbote 7, September 5, 1948, EZA Z 1006, p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> WILFRIED VON REKOWSKI to Andrew Demshuk, January 16, 2008.

<sup>103</sup> IDEM: Unpublished travel report (1958).

disturbing that this became the narrative for many expellee politicians and *Ostforscher*, who claimed to be the spokespeople for a larger population that simply did not think as they did. For instance, Christian Zeller remained unreconciled to his fate, though settled and employed in Baden for over eight years by April 1956, though having graphically explored a Silesia “grausig verwüstet” (“gruesomely laid waste”), and in spite of this having dragged his family back to Silesia to suffer for a year under Polish administration. For all this, he attested that, because of God’s eternal goodness, “unsere Hoffnung auf Rückwinnung unserer Schlesischen Heimat ohne Krieg ist noch immer nicht erloschen” (“our hope for winning back our Silesian *Heimat* without war has still not been extinguished”).<sup>104</sup>

### Conclusion

Upon the formation of the Federal Republic of Germany in May 1949, things changed but stayed the same. At one level, the trend shown in this article – that expellees sought to preserve an idealized *Heimat* in memory amid the realization, begun amid the ruins of the *Heimat* itself, that the physical *Heimat* had transformed into a ruined, foreign anti-*Heimat* – continued in a solid arc through the coming decades. At another level, the sudden legalization of politically oriented organizations resulted in the creation of an elite narrative that came to dominate public discussion and awareness. Interchange took place between the two levels. The Silesian artifact, outside space and time as it was imagined before May 1949, anticipated and then adapted qualities professed in political narratives (eternally German, efficient and ordered, idyllic until sudden catastrophe, etc.); political spokespeople raced to adapt what they could from the earlier period and ignore what was inconvenient, repeating demands in the coming decades that fewer and fewer expellees (not to mention other Germans) could relate with.

This is not to say that ordinary expellees forgave what had happened to them, much less gave up on the idea that they had some abstract right to the homeland that now lived only in their memories. For many, dealing with the loss of *Heimat* meant nourishing a sense of injustice in its loss. Some rushed to join political advocacy groups, attended their rallies, and voiced a “Recht auf die Heimat” as a way to protest what had happened to them. All the while, this abstract “right” coexisted with the painful knowledge that their *Heimat* no longer existed to be physically reclaimed. Through the 1950s and certainly 1960s, the division between an imagined Silesia of memory and a transformed, foreign physical reality that had little in common with this memory became ever stronger and more widespread. 1945-1949 witnessed the genesis of this process of dealing with loss, before official expellee organizations could form to make political demands for territorial revision, and before the

<sup>104</sup> CHRISTIAN ZELLER to Magnus Freiherr von Braun, April 3, 1956, BAK Nachlass von Braun N 1085/69, pp. 3-4.

return of economic prosperity fostered the material integration of expellees into West German society. It was the first step in a process of dealing with loss that contributed to lessening tensions along what had so recently been Europe's most violent border.

### Zusammenfassung

*“Wenn Ihr wiederkommt, die Berge sind dann bestimmt noch da!” Wie schlesische Heimatvertriebene den Verlust ihrer Heimat in den frühen Nachkriegsjahren verarbeiteten, 1945-1949*

Der Autor untersucht, wie die aus Schlesien Vertriebenen in den ersten Nachkriegsjahren mit dem Verlust ihrer Heimat umgingen bzw. welche Vorstellung der Heimat sie bewahrten. Er zeigt, dass die Sehnsucht nach der alten Heimat, die viele Vertriebene äußerten, nicht dem konkreten Wunsch nach einer physischen Rückkehr entsprach, sondern dass sich darin vor allem das Bedürfnis ausdrückte, in der Erinnerung ein idealisiertes Bild der vertrauten Umgebung zu bewahren. Wie er anhand von unterschiedlichen Quellen nachweist, war unter den Vertriebenen das Bewusstsein für die starke Veränderung der alten Heimat durch Krieg und Vertreibung weit verbreitet. Schlesien war zu einem fremden Ort geworden, der nicht mehr deckungsgleich war mit der Heimat vor Kriegsbeginn. Dieses Gefühl der Vergänglichkeit bzw. Vergangenheit von Heimat führte dazu, dass die Hoffnung vieler Vertriebener auf eine Rückkehr nach Schlesien schon bald nach Kriegsende nachließ. Entsprechende Forderungen seien, so die These, in erster Linie von den Funktionären der Vertriebenenorganisationen erhoben worden und hätten keine Mehrheit unter den Vertriebenen gefunden. So sei zu erklären, warum die schlesischen Vertriebenen Teil einer stabilen Nachkriegsordnung wurden. Das aus einem Gefühl der Entwurzelung heraus entstandene Bedürfnis, ein idealisiertes und unvergängliches, Raum und Zeit enthobenes Bild ihrer Heimat zu entwickeln und zu bewahren, half ihnen, den Verlust zu verarbeiten und sich den neuen Lebensumständen im Westen anzupassen.