

The *Volksdeutsche* and victimhood

Negotiating identity in published eyewitness accounts of the German expulsion (1944-1948)

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

“We rejoined the endless caravan of refugees. All bundled up, I was sitting in the front of our wagon. Military vehicles continued to pass us on the left, transporting soldiers with grime-caked faces and shredded uniforms. Many wore blood-soaked bandages. Some had a crazed look in their eyes; others just looked frightened and miserable. Most awful of all, some of the wounded soldiers didn’t look much older than Ilse, who was nearly twelve.”¹

This is one of the many vivid descriptions Gunter Nitsch gives in his book *Weeds like us*, a memoir in which he described in detail his experience of the expulsion of Germans from East Prussia after the Second World War. A boy of seven years old, Nitsch was forced to leave his childhood home with his family and he embarked on a dangerous and traumatizing journey to Germany. His story is one of many which touch upon this controversial episode in postwar German history, the ethnic cleansing of the German minority in Eastern Europe. Near the end of the Second World War and afterwards, large groups of ethnic Germans were expelled from various locations in Eastern Europe in which they had lived for generations, during the expulsion known as Czechoslovakia, Poland and Yugoslavia. These ethnic Germans were expelled in the period between 1944-1948, and were called the *Volksdeutsche*.²

Here, a distinction needs to be made between the notions of *Volksdeutsche* and *Reichsdeutsche*. Both are fluid concepts, which meanings changed over time. *Reichsdeutsche* referred from 1871 till 1945 to ethnic Germans who resided in the German State. Although the meaning of *Reichsdeutsche* changed after the end of the Third Reich as from 1949 it referred to the inhabitants of the newly developed Germany, West and East. This thesis will use the first meaning of the term. *Volksdeutsche* referred, during the period of National Socialism (until 1945), to Ethnic Germans outside the 1937 borders of the German State, without German nationality who lived in Austria or Eastern and Central Europe. Although German ethnicity was a central element of the concept of *Volksdeutsche*, the terms to define this ethnicity were vague and this makes the usage of the term *Volksdeutsche* ambivalent.³ However, the term was put on these ethnic Germans as a label by Nazi Germany, for political reasons and to connect those ethnic Germans to the third Reich. Furthermore, the meaning of this term and those that are included in being *Volksdeutsche* changed over time. During the Second World War the distinction between *Reichsdeutsche* and *Volksdeutsche* became blurred, as well as what defined the right amount of ‘Germanness’ to be considered *Volksdeutsche*.

¹ Gunter Nitsch, *Weeds like us* (Bloomington 2008) 24.

² Ray Douglas, *Orderly and Humane. The expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (Yale 2012).

³ Nitsch, *Weeds like us*, 12.

Who were and were not considered to be *Volksdeutsche* by Nazi Germany was mainly dependent on political reasons. The meaning allotted to this term thus depends on the period in which it was used. For example, in the Second World War it was put into connection with Nazi Germany and the perpetrators of the Second World War, while during the period of the expulsion, *Volksdeutsche* are put into connection with the victims of the Red Army. This ambivalence in the meaning of the term *Volksdeutsche* and the manner in which it was put on these ethnic Germans by an external country because of political reasons, is the way in which this thesis also interprets the term.

The expulsions cannot be separated from the Second World War and the privileged position the *Volksdeutsche* enjoyed during the time of occupation of Eastern Europe during the Second World War, awarded to them by Nazi Germany.⁴ Not all *Volksdeutsche* were innocent people, as there were many instances of collaboration and accusations that the German minorities had served as a fifth column in countries that had been occupied. This differences of attitudes to the Nazi regime during the Second World War can best be shown with the 'volksliste'.⁵ This list was used by Nazi Germany to classify the *Volksdeutsche* in four categories. Class I contained those persons who were of German descent and had been supporters of the Nazi organization before the war, while the last class on this list, class IV, were persons who did have German ancestry but had completely assimilated into the majority nation.⁶ Although there was a big difference between class I and class IV in the manner of collaboration to the Nazi Regime during World War II, all were labelled *Volksdeutsche* and received similar treatment during the expulsions. So, here the ambivalent status of the *Volksdeutsche* comes into play, because not all ethnic Germans were innocent, not all were guilty of collaborating with Nazi Germany either. Whether the *Volksdeutsche* should be considered to have been supporters of Hitler or whether they can even be considered 'German' remains subject of debate until today. Despite the fact that the concept of *Volksdeutsche* is loaded and has multiple meanings, this thesis uses the term *Volksdeutsche* when referring to ethnic Germans.

The forced migration of the *Volksdeutsche* was part of the expulsion of a bigger group of Germans in the period 1944-1948 of which a majority came from parts of Eastern Germany that were cut off from Germany when new borders were drawn after its defeat at the end of the Second World War. These parts were placed under Polish and Soviet administration, and its refugees were not only

⁴ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 38.

⁵ David Curp, *A clean sweep? The politics of ethnic cleansing in Western Poland, 1945-1960* (Rochester 2006) 28.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

Volksdeutsche but also *Reichsdeutsche*.⁷ The forced migration of the *Volksdeutsche* as well as the *Reichsdeutsche* was massive in scale as more than fourteen million people were displaced.⁸

This thesis will look into the politics of memory surrounding the expulsion of the *Volksdeutsche*, through a analysis of the autobiographies of three people who were labeled as *Volksdeutsche* and emigrated to the United States after the expulsion in the 1950s: Elizabeth Walter, Erich Anton Helfert and Luisa Lang Owen. Both Elizabeth Walter and Luisa Lang Owen were expelled from Yugoslavia in 1944, while Erich Anton Helfert was expelled from Sudetenland in 1945. This thesis will research this especially in relation to the negotiation of the dominant discourse in the United States in the 1990s, as all three autobiographies had been published during this time in the United States. This dominant discourse proclaims these *Volksdeutsche* to have been active collaborators with Nazi Germany during the Second World War.

1.2 Research questions and sub-questions

This thesis will focus on the term *Volksdeutsche* and the way in which the German expulsion of 1944-1948 is remembered by the ethnic German victims themselves, by looking at three published autobiographies and their place within a discourse of guilt and victimhood concerning American collective memory in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This thesis is going to look into the politics of memory surrounding the expulsion of these ethnic Germans, especially in relation to the negotiation of the dominant discourse in the United States in the 1990s, as for example described by Smith and Seidel-Arpaci in *Narratives of Trauma* in which these authors propose that all those who could be deemed 'German' were put into the category of perpetrator within this American discourse.⁹ Furthermore, Peter Novick in *The Holocaust and Collective memory* states that these Germans who were deemed perpetrator were seen as 'evil' without relativity.¹⁰ In the foreword written by Alfred M. Zayas for the autobiography of Erich Anton Helfert, this historian states that these expelled ethnic Germans were not the 'consensus victims' and were seen as guilty Nazis during the Second World War.¹¹ Alfred M. Zayas is known for multiple published works concerning Human Rights and the German Expulsion of 1944-1948, for example *The German Expellees. Victims in War and Peace* (London 1993).¹² The main research question will then be the following. With respect to the three *Volksdeutsche* narratives of the German expulsion of 1944-1948; How do the authors use the

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Ulrich Mertel, *Forgotten voices. the expulsion of the Germans from Eastern Europe after World War II* (New Jersey 2012) 1.

⁹ Helmut Schmitz, and Annette Seidel-Arpaci eds, *Narratives of trauma. discourses of German wartime suffering in national and international perspectives* (New York 2006) 1-10.

¹⁰ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and collective memory. The American experience memory* (New York 1991) 53

¹¹ Erich Anton Helfert, *Valley of the shadow. After the turmoil, my heart cries no more* (California 1997)

¹² Alfred-Maurice de Zayas, *The German Expellees. Victims in War and Peace* (London 1993)

ambivalent term *Volksdeutsche* in order to negotiate the dominant discourse of the United States in the 1990s concerning ethnic German perpetrators before and during the Second World War?

This thesis will look at the way in which the authors try to change the subject position the expelled ethnic Germans were allotted in the 1990s American dominant discourse, which also means to examine the references of these authors to similar situations in and after the Second World War. These autobiographies were published at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s in the United States. During this period, conflicts concerning ethnic cleansing were in the spotlight, like the Bosnian crisis and the Rwanda genocide. Furthermore, notions of victim and perpetrator and their exclusive meanings were being redefined in and after this period.

To answer the research question, four sub-questions are established. The first sub-question deals with the historical context of the expulsion, the context of narration. It deals with the events that were connected to the term *Volksdeutsche*. What was the historical context surrounding the events which are narrated? This question deals with the historical events concerning the *Volksdeutsche* in the interwar period, during the Second World War and during the expulsion.

The second sub-question deals with the discursive context of the place and time in which these autobiographical sources were written, the context of justification. What was the dominant discourse of the United States in the late 1990s and the early 2000s? Elizabeth Walter, Luisa Owen and Anton Helfert, the authors of the researched autobiographical sources, all moved to the United States in the 1950s and they published their autobiographies in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The dominant discourse surrounding the *Volksdeutsche* and the expulsion was deeply intertwined with the discourse surrounding the Second World War and the Holocaust. This discourse constructed the notion of 'All-Germans-are-perpetrators' in the period of the Second World War. The expellees could not escape the label of 'perpetrator' and couldn't claim victimhood because of the main underpinnings of this discourse.¹³

The last two chapters of this thesis will focus on the analysis of the three autobiographical sources *Barefoot in the Rubble* (1998) by Elizabeth Walter, *Valley of the Shadow* (1997) by Erich Anton Helfert and *Casualty of War* (2002) by Luisa Lang Owen. Elizabeth Walter was born in 1940 in Yugoslavia, in a village called *Banat*.¹⁴ She was four years old when she, her mother and brother were expelled from their village, her father had been conscripted in the German army and was not heard from until after the expulsion. She and her family were taken from their homes on April 18, 1945 and were moved to airplane hangars close to their village. Here, all the ethnic Germans from their village were assembled.¹⁵ They moved back and forth to abandoned houses in the village and these airplane

¹³ Schmitz, and Seidel-Arpaci, *Narratives of trauma*, 1-10.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble* (2000) 8.

¹⁵ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 34.

hangars throughout 1945 until 1947. They were constantly under guard and received little food. In the summer of 1947 they were moved to a camp called Novoselo, from where they escaped and found their way into Western Germany.¹⁶ Elizabeth Walter's father joined the family in Germany, having spent many years in a labor camp in Yugoslavia. On April 1950, she and her family moved to the United States, where some distant relatives lived.¹⁷ The family wanted to go to the United States because they thought there were many opportunities there to start anew. Elizabeth Walter married in the United States and got two children. Together with her husband, she started up a company.¹⁸

Anton Helfert was born in 1931 in an unnamed city located in Sudetenland. He had both a mother named Maria and a father named Friedrich. Furthermore, he also had a brother who was a few years older than him, Johann. The family was well-off and was named the Wilderts.¹⁹ During the Second World War, Friedrich's company aided the Nazi war effort, while Johann was conscripted and died as a soldier in April 1945.²⁰ From July 1945 on they were expelled from their villa but still able to reside in their city of birth. Here, they remained under considerable threat until they were evacuated to the Western part of Germany in 1947.²¹ Anton Helfert moved to the United States in August 1950, in order to attend the university of Nevada with a scholarship sponsored by the US state department. He developed his career as a journalist and management consultant in the United States and stayed to live there.²²

Luisa Lang Owen was born in 1934 in Yugoslavia in the region of *Batschka*, in a village called *Potiski*. She was ten years old when Russian forces took over her village.²³ In January 1945, she and her mother were removed from their home.²⁴ From January 1945 until March 1948 they are moved between different internment camps, the worst one being *Rudolfsgnad*, described as a 'death camp'.²⁵ In 1948 they were released and they moved to Western Germany.²⁶ In 1951 they moved to the United States, as the mother was born in America, her daughter was eligible for citizenship.²⁷ Here, she studied Arts and met her future Husband, Glenn Owen.²⁸

The analyzing chapters four and five will examine the narratives of these autobiographies and analyze how the dominant discourse in the period and location in which these sources were written

¹⁶ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 113.

¹⁷ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 238.

¹⁸ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 255.

¹⁹ Erich Anton Helfert, *Valley of the shadow. After the turmoil, my heart cries no more* (1997), 5.

²⁰ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 15.

²¹ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 309

²² Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 338.

²³ Luisa Lang Owen, *Casualty of War* (Texas 2002), 9.

²⁴ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 120

²⁵ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 164

²⁶ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 270

²⁷ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 280

²⁸ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 294

is stretched in order to negotiate the ambivalent status of the *Volksdeutsche* concerning the Second World War. The third sub-question is then the following: How do these autobiographies negotiate a subject position which disconnects them from nazism? In order to negotiate the dominant discourse this connection with the main perpetrator of the Second World War needs to be challenged. The fourth sub-question deals with the notion of agency and moral authority. In which way is discourse used in order to claim a moral subject position for the authors and the *Volksdeutsche*?

1.3 Historiographic debate

How does this research fit into the scholarly research that has already been conducted? To answer this question a few important debates need to be analyzed and discussed. Important is the historiographic debate surrounding the memory of the expulsion for the expellees themselves, and the *Volksdeutsche* in particular. Furthermore, also crucial is the debate which deals with the memory culture surrounding the Second World War and how this is remembered in Germany and the United States.

1.3.1 *Volksdeutsche, gender and the trauma of the German expulsion 1944-1948*

Memory can function as a way to cope with trauma suffered in the past. The importance of a memoir or an autobiography is central to the discussion about the memory of the expellees and the processing of trauma. This point is emphasized by Aleida Assman and Maja Zehfuss, who claim that literature and memory are closely connected.²⁹ Here, novels are representations of memory and can be viewed as a way to come to terms with the past.³⁰ Especially the memoirs that were published about the expulsion during the 2000s can be seen as a way to cope with the losses the victims had endured. The memoirs of the expulsion often deal with traumatic experiences.

Trauma can have a considerable effect on autobiographical narratives as it can even be transferred to the children of people affected by it. Marianne Hirsch in her publications 'Past lives. Postmemories in exile' and *The generation of postmemory. Writing and visual culture after the Holocaust* focuses on the children of people affected by trauma, and how this has had an effect even on them.³¹ In her work she coins the notion "postmemory", as she establishes that the power of trauma, mourning and memory is transferred to another generation, to even influence the memory of people who had not witnessed the trauma personally.³² The autobiographical sources which will be analyzed in this thesis deal with memories and with trauma which are partly transferred from

²⁹ Maja Zehfuss, *wounds of memory. The politics of war in Germany* (Cambridge 2007) 21.

³⁰ Zehfuss, *wounds of memory*, 2.

³¹ Marianne Hirsch, 'Past lives. Postmemories in exile', *poetics today* 17 (1996) no. 4.

³² Marianne Hirsch, *The generation of postmemory. Writing and visual culture after the holocaust* (Columbia 2012).

parent to child, as the authors of the memoirs were very young. Therefore, “postmemory” is an important concept for this thesis.

Many scholars acknowledge that trauma can have a huge impact on both individual and collective identities, influencing and sometimes even distorting them.³³ Because of the lifelong impact of a traumatic experience, these traumas are often the core of an autobiographical narrative.³⁴ Traumatized persons often use narratives with symbolism and there is a wish to relay the experience to another generation, in order to provide lessons for the future.³⁵ However, only if public opinion is allowing space for such a story, can it be told from the victim’s point of view.³⁶ Gil Eyal goes one step further and states in his article ‘Identity and trauma. Two forms of the will of memory’ that in opposition to other scholars who believe that the problem of trauma is remembering too much, he proposes that the problem is forgetting too much.³⁷

However, there is also an importance of ‘place’ within this procession of trauma in memoirs. This can be illustrated by the importance of the *Heimat* within the accounts of the German expellees. There are two images of the *Heimat*, the *Heimat of memory* and the imagined *Heimat transformed*. The *Heimat of memory* is the idealized version of the home they were expelled from. *The Heimat transformed* is this home portrayed and imagined as destroyed by foreign people.³⁸ This meant the *Volksdeutsche* could never return to their *Heimat of memory*, because it did not exist anymore.³⁹ Therefore, the trauma that the expellees had experienced because of the expulsion worked through by remembering the importance and the impossibility of returning to the *Heimat*. In contrast, some scholars have proposed that this emphasis on the *Heimat* and the publication of autobiographies were not part of the procession of trauma, but of a conscious attempt to spite the government.⁴⁰

This thesis aims to look at one male (Helfert) and two female (Owen and Walter) accounts, how are gender and trauma connected in relation to memory? First of all, trauma is remembered differently in relation to gender because experiences in traumatic situations also generally differ according to gender. Much has been written about the Second World War and female victims in which accounts of sexual violence gained the upper hand.⁴¹ Take for example *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Woman During the Holocaust* edited by Sonja M. Hedgepeth, which deals with Jewish

³³ Duncan Bell ed., *Memory, trauma and World politics. Reflections on the relationship between past and present* (New York 2006) 1.

³⁴ Kimlay Rogers, Selma Leydesdorff eds, *Trauma. Life stories of survivors* (London 2004).

³⁵ Selma Leydesdorff, *De mensen en de woorden. Geschiedenis is basis van verhalen* (Amsterdam 2004) 107.

³⁶ Leydesdorff, *De mensen en de woorden*, 127.

³⁷ Gil Eyal, ‘Identity and trauma. Two forms of the will of memory’, *History and Memory* 16 (2004) no. 1, 5-8.

³⁸ Andrew Demshuk, *The lost German East. Forced Migration and the politics of memory, 1945-1970* (Cambridge 2014), 5.

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ Eva Hahn and Hans Henning Hahn, “Flucht und Vertreibung,” in *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte. Eine Auswahl* (Bonn 2005).

⁴¹ Selma Leydesdorff and Luisa Passerini ed., *Gender and memory* (New Jersey 2005), xii.

women's experience with rape during the Holocaust and contest claims which state that women were not sexually assaulted during the Holocaust, and Rochelle G. Saidel and *Sexualisierte Gewalt. Weibliche Erfahrungen in NS-Konzentrationslagern* By Katrin Auer and Brigitte Halbmayr.⁴² This publication deals with the appearance of sexual abuse within concentration camps. Furthermore the role of rape recently became a subject in academic research, this is mostly mentioned in life stories and oral histories.⁴³ According to Selma Leydesdorff, for women, memory is used as a tool to find reconciliation with a traumatic past, for individual as well as collective trauma.⁴⁴ Proposed by scholars is that collective memory is essential for the female victims of a tragedy in coming to terms with trauma and gaining empowerment by seeking recognition.⁴⁵

However, not only the articulation of trauma differs in relation to memory, men seem to remember differently than women, a difference that has only recently been examined in a systematic manner by sociologists.⁴⁶ The very act of remembering is thus influenced by gender. According to Richard Ely and Alyssa McCabe, these differences relate to fundamental speech differences between men and women when recalling memories. The main difference being that women make more use of quotations and dialogue when remembering, while men more generally summarize the main points of a story.⁴⁷ The way in which people narrate their life stories is influenced by gender and there are differences in the way male and female accounts relay their memories.⁴⁸ The narrative identity that is reflected in an autobiographical account is severely influenced by who, why and how the story is told.

Gender is also an important factor in defining a victim and a perpetrator. Traditionally in literature, the simplest view is the notion of men as perpetrators and women as victims, usually victims of sexual violence.⁴⁹ In this view women are seen as related to the notions of passivity and peace, while men are brought in relation to the notions of aggression and war.⁵⁰ Though multiple studies have examined this difference in narrating concerning gender, this has mainly been researched in Northern America, this is why there needs to be more extensive research concerning

⁴² Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel ed., *Sexual Violence against Jewish woman during the holocaust* (New England 2010); Katrin Auer and Brigitte Halbmayr, *Sexualisierte Gewalt. Weibliche Erfahrungen in NS-Konzentrationslagern* (Berlin 2004).

⁴³ Leydesdorff and Passerini, *Gender and memory*, xiii.

⁴⁴ Leydesdorff and Passerini, *Gender and memory*, xii.

⁴⁵ Ester Mujawayo and Souad Belhaddad, *Survivantes* (France 2004).

⁴⁶ Leydesdorff and Passerini ed., *Gender and memory*, 3.

⁴⁷ Leydesdorff and Passerini, *Gender and memory*, 8.

⁴⁸ Robyn Fivush and Catherine A. Haden ed., *Autobiographical memory and the construction of a narrative self. Developmental and cultural perspectives* (London 2003) xii.

⁴⁹ Caroline O.N Moser and Fiona C. Clark, *Victims, perpetrators or actors. Gender, armed conflict and political violence* (London 2001) 3.

⁵⁰ Moser and Clark, *State of suffering*, 6-8.

other cultures and other times, as notions of femininity and masculinity can greatly differ.⁵¹ For this thesis, gender is important when looking at the narratives within the autobiographical sources as it is used in relation to establishing victims and perpetrators. Among the collaborators with the Nazis, men were clear perpetrators as they were conscripted as soldiers and instrumental in the setting up of institutions in Yugoslavia and Sudetenland which were Nazi oriented. Women, on the other hand, had a much more ambivalent role in this collaboration, according to all three narratives. Therefore, the notion of victimhood can much easier be allotted to a female demographic. The manner in which the male and female authors narrate reflects this distinction, as well as their emphasis on moral mothers as victims of the expulsion.

1.3.2 Victimhood and the memory culture of the expulsion in Germany and the United States in the 1990s

In Germany, the memory politics surrounding the forced expulsions in the period 1944-1948 is connected to the issue of victimhood of Germans during and after the Second World War. When looking further into this, one arrives at a tension in German collective memory between a discourse of guilt and a discourse of suffering.⁵² This discourse of suffering is tied to the memory of, and the failure to, remember the German expulsions during and after the Second World War. These refugees (together with the prisoners of war) were the most important representatives of German victimhood in postwar Germany. Therefore, the memory surrounding these expellees is both controversial and complicated, as German victimhood during and after the war was and remains a hotly debated and emotionally charged issue in both the academic and public sphere.⁵³ A recurring theme in this debate is the desire to exclude Second World War memories that touch upon German suffering on ethical grounds, as their status as victims would diminish their status as perpetrators. In this debate the Holocaust is seen as the biggest horror of the Twentieth Century, while the Jewish victims are viewed as its primary victims.⁵⁴

The memory culture surrounding this subject ties in with scholarly and public debates about the Holocaust and questions of German wartime guilt. Rainer Schulze in 'The politics of memory. Flight and expulsion of German populations after the Second World War and German collective memory' writes that the problem of remembrance is still a problematic issue in the present. The main question being how these memories of victimhood will find a place within German collective

⁵¹ Leydesdorff and Passerini, *Gender and memory*, 1-4.

⁵² Bill Niven ed., *Germans as victims. Remembering the past in contemporary Germany* (United Kingdom 2006) 7.

⁵³ Moeller, *War stories. The search for a usable past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley 2001) 3.

⁵⁴ Zehfuss, *wounds of memory*, 28.

memory and its discourse.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the issues of guilt, trauma and taboo still underlies the debate about German victimhood. Gitta Sereny in *The German Trauma. Experiences and reflections, 1938-2000* even proposed that guilt was the main element in shaping identity in Germany.⁵⁶ The manner in which Germany tries to remember its past in the Second World War is fractured and incomplete according to multiple scholars. Rudy Koshar and Konrad H. Jarausch demonstrate the recurring themes in German memory which point to incomplete attempts to remember, where only the atrocities and crimes of the Second World War were remembered. They also emphasize the fractured nature of the German collective memory as since the unification, the Germans have been faced with a 'divided memory' of the Nazi past.⁵⁷ Jutta Fahndrich in her publication *Eine endliche Geschichte. Die Heimatbücher der deutschen Vertriebenen* further elaborates this view by writing that there was and is no single collective memory about the expulsion.⁵⁸

So, how is the theme of German victimhood represented in German collective memory? The most widely held assumption among historians about the role of Second World War victims in German collective memory in the 1950s is one of forgetting. This assumption mainly emphasizes the avoidance by the German Federal Republic of all memories of Nazi rule in the 1950s.⁵⁹ Here, West Germany is portrayed as repressing the memories of the Nazi period. This assumption sketched the 1950s as a decade of silence.⁶⁰ It is a story of German forgetting which has recently earned a lot of critique and ties in with the idea of German suffering as this was perceived to be also ignored as it took place within the neglected period.⁶¹

One of the scholars who rejected the assumption that the 1950s was a period of silence was Rudy Koshar in his publication *From monuments to traces. Artifacts of German memory, 1870–1990*, he stated that Germans did not fail to remember their history in the 1950s but that they remembered selectively and that this was a 'synonym of memory itself'.⁶² Also, Robert Moeller in his book *War Stories. The search for a usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* elaborated on this notion of selective memory, as he stated that the West Germans indeed engaged in 'selective remembering' as they *did* came to emphasize German suffering in the 1950s.⁶³

⁵⁵ Schulze, Rainer, 'The Politics of Memory. Flight and Expulsion of German Populations after the Second World War and German Collective Memory', *National Identities* 8 (2006) no. 4.

⁵⁶ Gitta Sereny, *The German trauma. experiences and reflections, 1938-2000* (United Kingdom 2001) 1-10, Helmut Schmitz and Annette Seidel-Arpaci, *Narratives of trauma. Discourses of German wartime suffering in national and international perspectives* (Amsterdam 2011) 2.

⁵⁷ Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces*, 6.; Schulze, 'Memory in German History', 638-643.

⁵⁸ Fahndrich, Jutta, *Eine endliche Geschichte. Die Heimatbücher der deutschen Vertriebenen* (Cologne 2011).

⁵⁹ Moeller, *War stories*, 14.

⁶⁰ Moeller, *War stories*, 15.

⁶¹ Moeller, *War stories*, 16.

⁶² Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces. Artifacts of German Memory, 1870–1990* (Berkeley 2000) 6.

⁶³ Moeller, *War stories*, 2.

Also, in the United States, the debate surrounding the memory concerning the expulsion is mainly influenced by role of the Holocaust in relation to the Second World War. Within the culture of memory surrounding the Holocaust, however, there are proponents of the realist and the antirealist tendency. The antirealist tendency claims that the Holocaust is unique and not knowable and emphasizes the innocence of its victims. While the realist tendency asserts the necessity of considering the event through a scientific prism, inscribing it with its historical context.⁶⁴ Dominating the public debate in the United States is the antirealist tendency, which also emphasizes the sharp divide between victim and perpetrator.

Here, the ambivalent status of victim and perpetrator present in both the discourse of the 1950s in the United States and Germany comes into play.⁶⁵ As Moeller argues in his publication 'Germans as victims? Thoughts on a post-Cold War history of World War II's legacies', in the 1950s, in relation to the question of German suffering, perpetrators and victims were seen as belonging to mutually exclusive categories. Some scholars propose that this is a victimization trope which indicates that the person who is deemed the victim, has suffered the most and can therefore not be found guilty of crimes or injustice perpetrated during this time of suffering.⁶⁶ The establishment of victimhood thus enables the notion of innocence, if one is a victim, one is automatically innocent.

Moeller pleads for a new approach in recent times, when a person can be both perpetrator and victim, which means that different perspectives can be used.⁶⁷ In their publications both Liisa Mallki and Sussanna Trnka emphasize that victims and perpetrators are not always clearly defined, especially not in ethnic conflicts. As Lisa Mallki shows also the ethnic other could be an enemy and a protector at different moments during the Hutu-Tutsi violence,⁶⁸ and Susanna Trnka articulates the possibility of the perpetrator being both the aggressor and savior.⁶⁹ Both emphasize that the term 'perpetrator' is shown to be less rigid and can have multiple shades.

At the international level and during the turn of the millennium, the Western world seemed ready to consider the sufferings of German civilians during the war, though the story of the expulsions are to this date a controversial topic in Poland and the Czech Republic.⁷⁰ The change in discourse on the international level, may be due to the fact that concepts of victim and perpetrator, mutually exclusive in the 1950s, have gained new conceptual perspectives and can be used on

⁶⁴ Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic realism. The demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minnesota 2000) 4, 5.

⁶⁵ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 38.

⁶⁶ Michaela Schäuble, *Narrating Victimhood. Gender, Religion and the making of place in post-war Croatia* (Oxford 2014) 10.

⁶⁷ Robert G. Moeller, 'Germans as Victims? Thoughts on a post-cold war history of World War II's legacies', *history and memory* 17 (2005) no. 1, 1.

⁶⁸ Lisa Mallki, *Purity and Exile. Violence, memory, and national cosmology among hutu refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago 1995).

⁶⁹ Sussanna Trnka, *State of suffering. Political violence and community survival in Fiji* (Cornell 2008) 162.

⁷⁰ Helmut and Seidel-Arpaci, *Narratives of trauma*, 2.

multiple levels. As a consequence the rhetoric of victimization has seen a change, though, according to Moeller in 'Germans as victims? Thoughts on a post-cold war history of World War II's legacies', this change still has to become wider and more common.⁷¹ As a result, the German expulsion of 1944-1948 has gained new interest and numerous autobiographies about the subject have been published. Therefore, the notion of victim and perpetrator have become negotiable for the *Volksdeutsche* within the dominant discourse in the United States. The concepts and methodology used in analyzing this negotiation within the autobiographical narratives will receive attention in the following part.

1.4 Concepts and methodology

In the case of the authors of these sources, through argumentation the authors try to establish an identity for themselves which is separate from the 'ultimate perpetrator' of the Second World War, Nazi Germany. Argumentation means negotiating the subject position within the dominant discourse. In this case, this means negotiating a different subject position of these expelled Germans than which has been given by the dominant discourse. As such, the question is, are the narrators trying to construct an alternative subject position within the dominant discourse?⁷²

In order to understand how the authors negotiate this subject position, the sources will require in-depth analysis.⁷³ This research wants to establish what the sources say, both implicitly and explicitly, and what meaning this has. Also important is what the sources don't say, what is ignored or forgotten and why this is so. This ties in with what Derrida calls 'nontranscendent reading', where the reader is not only concerned with the meaning of the text itself but also the multiple significations of the text.⁷⁴ This means that the source is analyzed while scrutinizing the beliefs, ideologies and world view of the author, in order to figure out why the text was written. While analyzing texts, silences and contradictions need to receive extra focus, in order to understand underlying motivations and beliefs. While employing this method, central concepts will be discourse, identity and agency, while important methodological concepts will be argumentation, focalization and intertextuality.

The text must be read within its time and space and a certain knowledge of the context is needed.⁷⁵ The way in which the subject position within the dominant discourse is formed depends on both the societal and temporal context and the different choices groups and individuals make in

⁷¹ Moeller, 'Germans as Victims?', 5.

⁷² Ibidem.

⁷³ The method of context analysis used in this thesis derives from the course 'Text and Context: From Source to Science' [CH4123-15] taught by Dr. C.L.A. (Karin) Willemse at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Texts and explanations have mostly been provided by this course.

⁷⁴ Zehfuss, *Wounds of memory*, 23.

⁷⁵ Ibidem.

these contexts.⁷⁶ Within this thesis, both the context of narration as the context of justification are of importance. Here, the context of narration entails the context of the events which are discussed in the narratives. In this case, the interwar period, Second World War and the expulsion itself within Eastern Europe. The context of justification is then the circumstances in which the authors wrote their autobiographies. This is the context of the United States and Germany at the end of the 1990s.

When analyzing a narrative, the discourse which underlies this narrative can be examined, this produces information about the truths which the narrator upholds. Foucault establishes three definitions of discourse. The widest meaning of discourse according to Foucault are all texts and utterances which are produced and have meaning within reality. The second meaning Foucault attributes to discourse in narrower and deal with structures within a narrative. These are groups of utterances which are in some way connected and have a coherence in common. The third definition he used regarding discourse deals with the regulated practice of producing narratives. These are the structures which produce utterances. Here, discourse, as defined by Foucault shapes the perception of reality. However, discourse is in turn also shaped by this reality.⁷⁷ In this thesis, the dominant discourse is then the most common way in which a certain topic is given meaning within a certain place and time. While a subdominant discourse is a discourse which exists besides the dominant one, but is submissive. Therefore, the dominant discourse is the discourse in which the author places himself, while a subdominant discourse can also be used in the narrative.⁷⁸

Discourse constitutes the framework in which identity is constructed. Narrative is dependent on discourse, and identity is shaped within a narrative by neglecting and prioritizing certain aspects of the self.⁷⁹ The narrative is then a reflection of one's identity. A central subject in this thesis concerns ethnicity. However, in which manner can ethnicity and ethnic groups be defined? In this thesis the concept of ethnicity outlined in *Ethnic groups and boundaries. The social organization of culture difference* written and edited by Fredrik Barth will be used. Ethnic groups emerge in contact with each other, through boundaries. Ethnic distinction does not rely on isolation or the absence of contact.⁸⁰ The process of defining one's ethnic identity is done through contact across boundaries with other communities, through social interaction.⁸¹

⁷⁶ T. Davids, 'The micro dynamics of agency: Repetition and subversion in a Mexican right-wing female politician's life story', *European Journal of Women's Studies* 18 (2011) 2, pp. 155-157.

⁷⁷ Sarah Mills, *Discourse* (London 1997) 7.

⁷⁸ Saukko, Paula. *Doing research in cultural studies. An introduction to classical and new methodological approaches* (London 2003).

⁷⁹ Karin Willemsse, Ruth Morgan and John Meletse. 'Deaf, gay, HIV positive and proud. Narrating an alternative identity in post-apartheid South Africa', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 43 (2009) no. 1, 1-23.

⁸⁰ Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organisation of Cultural Difference* (Boston 1969), 10.

⁸¹ Ibidem.

These ethnic groups define themselves and are defined by their place within and their reaction to the rest of human society, resulting in ethnic grouping and the subsequent forming of a common culture.⁸² The ethnic community thus defines itself in relation to the 'other' and this ethnic identity is then used to once again define themselves and others during interaction.⁸³ The boundary itself, which separates the 'us' from the 'other' defines the ethnic community as a distinctive group and is the defining characteristic of an ethnic community.⁸⁴ In this research, the concept of identity and ethnicity is defined by the exclusion and recognition of 'the other' and is therefore characterized by a process of exclusion.⁸⁵ Therefore, the way in which the actor positions itself in relation to others constructs their identity.⁸⁶

The establishment of both the internal and external 'other' is important in determining the identity of the author and the groups this author identifies with.⁸⁷ The external 'other' is therefore used to define the group which the narrator identifies with, by differentiating this group from an imagined outsider.⁸⁸ The internal 'other', determines the identity of the narrator himself within this group, by differentiating within the group itself. In doing so, the author is constructing a morally higher position for him or herself within this group. Both internal and external othering are important ways in which the author defines the group she or he belongs too and the position the author holds within this group. The way in which this positioning is formed depends on both the societal and temporal context and the different choices groups and individuals make in these contexts.⁸⁹

While establishing identity, discourse and narrative imply a certain structure which limit and guide the actor.⁹⁰ This structure determines the place of agency, the space in which individuals can act.⁹¹ Agency is thus the manner which is acted within the dominant discourse. Within a narrative, agency is the way in which the restrictions of the dominant discourse are handled.

What is researched in this case is a 'narrative of self'. A 'narrative of self' could be analyzed on several aspects; focalization, intertextuality and the action itself. The focalization is the truth as established in the narrative. The focalization is therefore very important in the narrative, as it is a

⁸² Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 11.

⁸³ Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 14.

⁸⁴ Ibidem.

⁸⁵ Paula Saukko, *Doing research in cultural studies. An introduction to classical and new methodological approaches* (2003, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage) 11-35.

⁸⁶ Stuart Hall, 'Who needs identity?', in: Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman (eds.) *Identity Reader* (2005) pp. 18,19.

⁸⁷ Ibidem.

⁸⁸ T. Davids, 'The micro dynamics of agency: Repetition and subversion in a Mexican right-wing female politician's life story', *European Journal of Women's Studies* 18 (2011) 2, pp. 155-157.

⁸⁹ Ibidem.

⁹⁰ Ibidem.

⁹¹ Ibidem.

representation of the leading perspective in the narrative.⁹² Furthermore, Intertextuality will also be taken into account. Intertextuality can mean the traceable references within the text, when the author explicitly refers to another text or document. For example, references to verses from the bible. However, intertextuality can also refer to texts that fit into a certain literary or societal framework, which subconsciously and consciously influence each other.⁹³

Furthermore, important for the analysis of these sources on the negotiation of the dominant discourse and the subject position is the notion of a 'silence' in texts. Sometimes, what is left out in a text gives much information about a certain discourse the author wants to establish. There are obvious silences, information not named because the author expects the reader to already know this information or because it is taboo. There are also silences which are significant in the sense that the information not provided might be able to disrupt the image which the author is constructing for himself.⁹⁴

So, the dominant discourse is the way in which a certain topic is given meaning within a certain place and time. In this case, the topic would be the *Volksdeutsche* within the Second World War and the postwar period. The place and time would then be the United States in the 1990s. This dominant discourse influences the narrative, as the narrative is placed within this dominant discourse. Then, the identity of the narrator can be understood through the narrative. However, narrative is also formed by a perceived identity. When analyzing the narrative, through argumentation one negotiates the position of the subject, in this case the *Volksdeutsche*, within the dominant discourse. Therefore, through narrative, one can negotiate the subject position within the dominant discourse. In the case of the *Volksdeutsche* in the autobiographies which this thesis discusses, this is an *alternative* subject position than the one allotted by the dominant discourse. Then, focalizations shows the perspective which this narrative upholds and the truth it proclaims. Through intertextuality one can connect the narrative with other sub discourses and use those to strengthen an alternative subject position. Besides discourse, which structures and limits the narrative, one can also use agency. Agency means the choices and descriptions in the narrative made within the dominant discourse.

1.5 The sources and source criticism

This thesis will focus on three published autobiographies in particular. They contain one male and two female eye-witness accounts of the German expulsion of 1944-1948. *Valley of the shadow* (1997)

⁹² Ball, *Narratology*, 25-30.

⁹³ Meijer, Maaïke, *In tekst gevat. Inleiding tot een kritiek van representatie* (Amsterdam 1996,) 18-38.

⁹⁴ Van Stapele, Naomi. 'Intersubjectivity, self-reflexivity and agency: Narrating about 'self' and 'other' in feminist research'. *Women Studies International Forum* (2014) 13-21.

by Erich Anton Helfert focusses on Sudetenland, given back to Czechoslovakia after the Second World War in May 1945, which underwent sudden mass expulsions of its ethnic German population under the Czechoslovakian government. Anton Helfert writes about the experience of displacement during those chaotic years after the Second World War.⁹⁵ The second autobiography was written in the year 1998 by Elizabeth B. Walter and is called *Barefoot in the Rubble* (1998). This narrative deals with the personal experiences of Elizabeth Walter when she was four years old. She, her brother and mother were expelled from their village in Yugoslavia in April, 1945 and forced to live in an internment camp.⁹⁶ The third autobiography is *Casualty of War. A Childhood Remembered* (2002) by Luisa Lang Owen, just like with Elizabeth Walter, she narrates the experience of forced migration from their homes in Yugoslavia and deportation to a concentration for ethnic Germans when she was ten years old.⁹⁷

These sources are accounts of memory which discuss a 'contested' past. This implies a struggle of finding out the 'truth' of an historical event. A 'contested past' means finding out different answers to the question 'what really happened'.⁹⁸ A 'contested past' reflects the notions of 'truth' of the period in which the past is remembered, and the way the world is viewed at that particular point in time. The past is thus colored by the present, as the present in turn is also colored by the past. These memoirs are then a memory constructed and influenced by the present in which they were written.⁹⁹ Furthermore, as the authors of the autobiographical sources were very young when these events took place and as they also discuss events they have not witnessed themselves, the narrated events are not all personal memories. They are most likely the result of stories within their family, research, their own eyewitness accounts and partly fiction.¹⁰⁰ The narrated story is a reflection on the past based on the present in which the autobiographies were written. History and the past are continuously reinterpreted, as accounts of memory actively creates meaning to certain events.¹⁰¹

The reason for the use of these three autobiographical sources are multiple. The use of sources which were published by ethnic Germans within the United States allowed for an analysis in which three identifications can be discussed; with the host country, Germany and the United States. Furthermore, the strong mythology of the Holocaust and the Second World War within the United States makes it very challenging for the discussed ethnic Germans to negotiate an alternative subject

⁹⁵ Erich Anton Helfert, *Valley of the shadow. After the turmoil, my heart cries no more* (1997).

⁹⁶ Elizabeth Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble* (2000).

⁹⁷ Owen, Luisa Lang, *Casualty of War. A Childhood Remembered* (2002).

⁹⁸ Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, *Contested pasts. The politics of memory* (London 2003) p. 1.

⁹⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁰ Selma Leydesdorff, *De mensen en de woorden. Geschiedenis op basis van verhalen* (Amsterdam 2004) 59.

¹⁰¹ Leydesdorff, *De mensen en de woorden*, 9.

position within the dominant discourse. Adding to this, the influence of the United States on the rest of the (Western) world is considerable and the image they portray of the Second World War also influences other countries, through, for example, the famous movie *Schindler's list* (1993). A further, more practical, reason for the decision to choose the United States as location for publication concerns language. Although my German is considerably good, the in-depth analysis of these sources required the reader to possess a very high level of language skills, which I feared I did not possess. Therefore, the choice was to be made between translated works or autobiographies published in English. As this thesis aimed to look at how the authors themselves negotiated their subject position, it seemed prudent to choose autobiographies published in English. Furthermore, this thesis required the date of publication to be in the late 1990s and early 2000s and as both male and female accounts were required, the choice fell on the three autobiographies of Luisa Owen, Elizabeth Walter and Anton Helfert.

1.6 Contribution to scholarly research

Finally, how does this research contribute to scholarly research? First of all, this thesis will study very recent ego documents, which haven't been studied yet in relation to memory studies, ethnicity and victimhood. These autobiographies have been selected to span the period most important to the changing discourse around German suffering and are picked on basis of gender. The method used to examine these documents, in-depth analysis, is also needed in relation to these recent documents in order to examine how an alternative subject position is claimed within the dominant discourse. Moreover, not much research has been done on this kind of ego documentation published in the United States in relation to this case, therefore it will be a valuable contribution to the debate about collective and individual memory. So why is this study important? The German expulsion and the memory regarding the expulsion remains hotly debated at present. This is the case especially because of its relation to the Second World War and its relation with the Czech Republic and Poland. Furthermore, this thesis will examine how an ambivalent term such as *Volksdeutsche* is used to negotiate a different subject position, so in what manner different interpretations of a term can be used. In sum, the concept of victimhood is often central in memory studies regarding the case of the expelled Germans, however, the focus on these particular ego documents, the focus on ethnicity and identity, the focus on very new source material and the focus on the ambivalence of the term *Volksdeutsche*, makes this thesis new and able to contribute to scholarly research.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided in four chapters and the conclusion. The first two chapters will deal with the context concerning the autobiographical sources. Chapter one will elaborate on the historical context of the events which are narrated in the sources. Chapter two will deal with the discursive context, the dominant discourse which influenced the author when they were constructing their narratives. The last two chapters contain analyses of the autobiographical sources, the third chapter will focus on negotiating the dominant discourse, while the other will discuss agency within the sources.

Chapter 2 – The Context of Narration: the historical context of the *Volksdeutsche*, Hitler's ambition and the expulsion

This chapter will deal with the interwar period, the Second World War and the period of the German expulsion of 1944-1948. The chapter will attempt to elaborate on the historical context surrounding the events which are narrated in the autobiographical sources. Special attention will be placed on Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, as these are the countries the authors of the autobiographies came from. Sudetenland located in Czechoslovakia was the home country of Anton Helfert, while Yugoslavia was the home of both Elizabeth Walter and Luisa Owen. Poland will also be taken into consideration as this country and its relation with its ethnic German community was crucial in providing the image of the *Volksdeutsche* as 'fifth columnists'.¹⁰² Here, a fifth column means a minority who undermines the nation from within in favor of an enemy. Central in this part of the chapter will be the question in which manner these ethnic Germans were supporting Nazi Germany in its aggressive foreign policy and its ideology. Moreover, this chapter will examine in which way the *Volksdeutsche* collaborated with Nazi Germany in both the interwar period as in the period of the Second World War. The manner in which the expulsion was perpetrated will also be discussed, as for a big part, this was the main event the autobiographies focus on. This context of narration will therefore deal with the complicated nature regarding the *Volksdeutsche*, as within these events, they can both be viewed as perpetrators and as victims.

The interwar period was the period between the First World War (1914-1918) and the Second World War (1939-1945). This period started with the Treaty of Versailles, which was signed on 28 June 1919. This period was first marked by the dissolution of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires. The 1920s was a period of economic prosperity which came to a halt with the Great Depression in 1929. In most cases, this Depression lasted to the late 1930s. During this period, Hitler's Nazi party took over in Germany in 1933. This started Germany's aggressive policy culminating in the invasion of Poland in September 1939 and the beginning of the Second World War. This war ended with the invasion of Germany by the Allies, the surrender of Nazi Germany on May 1945 and the two atomic bombs dropped on the Japanese cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 1945.

The expulsion of the German population between 1944 and 1948 and the ensuing trauma among the *Volksdeutsche*, the topic of this thesis, is mostly referred to as a 'transfer of populations'. Yet, in German papers, academic work and official documents the term *Vertreibung* is used. This word is illustrative of the perception the German population has in regards to the postwar expulsion.

¹⁰² Cattaruzza and Dyroff, *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War*, 166.

The term *Vertreibung* encompasses and represents not only the organized expulsion in the summer and fall of 1945, legitimized by the Allies. It encompasses a broader period, including the evacuations and the flight of Germans during the war and the organized resettlement in 1946.¹⁰³ The expulsions were systematic policies implemented because of planned border changes determined by the Allies and the desire for ethnic homogenization within Eastern Europe. As the Third Reich collapsed, the separation of its eastern territories unleashed a great amount of resentment and anger directed towards any who seemed to be affiliated with being 'German' among war torn Eastern European countries like Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.¹⁰⁴

2.1 The interwar period and the Second World War. The *Volksdeutsche* and their respective governments

The generalizations made after the Second World War that referred to the ethnic Germans as fanatical supporters of Nazism who had served as a fifth column to the advancing German Armies, justified the German expulsions of 1944-1948.¹⁰⁵ The ethnic Germans, for their part, proclaimed that they had only fought against assimilation attempts of their respective governments in order to preserve their distinct culture and that they had, as a majority, remained loyal to the state they lived in. These ethnic Germans stated that they were the victims of prejudicial generalizations and that the expulsions were in no way justified, but perpetrated under the guise of revenge.¹⁰⁶ In order to examine the status of ethnic Germans as perpetrator during the Second World War, one must examine which role they played in the build-up to the Second World War and the invasion of the countries they lived in.

The end of the First World War in 1918 saw the dismantling of the Habsburg Empire under the principle of the right of self-determination, the results were multiple nation-states. These states were just as multi-ethnic as the Habsburg Empire had been, with multiple minorities living within a majority nation.¹⁰⁷ The states that the authors came from, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, were also formed in this period. The relationships of the Eastern and Central European countries and their ethnic German minorities were problematic as a consequence of the First World War. As the allies had relied on active participation of oppressed minorities in Eastern Europe. In order to gain their

¹⁰³ Alfred-Maurice de Zayas, *A terrible revenge. The ethnic cleansing of the East European Germans* (London 2006) 39.

¹⁰⁴ Pertti Ahonen and Gavin Schaffer, *After the expulsion. West Germany and Eastern Europe 1945-1990* (Oxford 2003) 1.

¹⁰⁵ Anthony Komjathy and Rebecca Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich. Ethnic Germans of East Central Europe between the wars* (London 1980) IX

¹⁰⁶ Anthony Komjathy and Rebecca Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich. Ethnic Germans of East Central Europe between the wars* (London 1980) IX.

¹⁰⁷ Marina Cattaruzza and Stefan Dyroff, *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War. Goals, Expectations, Practices* (London 2013) 2.

support, British and French governments had promised them autonomy and even independence after the First World War. These promises were strengthened by the principle of national self-determination made on January 18, 1918 by President Woodrow Wilson in his 'Fourteen Points'. Furthermore, minority treaties were made in order to protect the rights of these groups, such as the right of the individual to decide if one wanted to preserve their ethnicity or if one wanted to assimilate.¹⁰⁸

Although the ethnic German minority groups were very different from each other, and their relationship with the Reich and with their respective governments varied greatly, the characteristic they had in common was their wish to preserve their 'Germanness'.¹⁰⁹ This was in compliance with the behavior of other ethnic groups at the time, as their right to do so was recognized by these minority treaties. Ethnic communities of different nationalities, in this period, were threatened by two different perspectives from which they had to choose. One was that by maintaining their particular cultural distinctiveness this would mean the possible exclusion of their ethnic group by the host state. The other was that integration would mean a loss of their particular ethnic identity due to absorption in the majority culture.¹¹⁰

These treaties secured the right of minorities to organize their own cultural organizations, such as educational systems, within the host country. Among the ethnic German population, this resulted in a divided loyalty to both the state they lived in and the Third Reich, which they considered to be their cultural homeland. Furthermore, because of the emphasis on the German language within these ethnic communities, the state language was barely learned, resulting in very few job opportunities within the state itself. This halted assimilation.¹¹¹ These divided loyalties and the resulting unemployment coupled with economic hardship and financial aid from the Reich itself drove some ethnic Germans into organizations which were Nazi-oriented. The younger generation was more susceptible to this than the older generation.¹¹² After an initial period of rejection and transmission, in the 1920s, many groups of minorities accepted the situation they were living in, as they accepted that this was the new reality. Some even became active in the political life of these countries.¹¹³ However, revisionist agitation, economic crises and discrimination against these minorities, as well as the rise of Nazism in the 1930s helped to radicalize ethnic Germans in several Eastern and Central European countries.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, X.

¹⁰⁹ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 164.

¹¹⁰ Stefan Wolff ed., *German Minorities in Europe. Ethnic identity and cultural belonging* (Oxford 2000) 1.

¹¹¹ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 165.

¹¹² Ibidem.

¹¹³ Cattaruzza and Dyroff, *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War*, 7.

¹¹⁴ Ibidem.

So, what was the relationship between these minorities and Nazi Germany in the interwar period, in general? The *Volksdeutsche* within Eastern and Central Europe wished to preserve their German culture and according to the minority treaties, they had the moral right to do so. In order to preserve their culture in a sometimes hostile environment, they asked their cultural homeland, Germany, for help. The Reich provided this help, but also used these *Volksdeutsche* to further their own foreign policy aims. This involvement by the Reich in the domestic affairs of these Central and Eastern European states was greatly resented by the host states and countermeasures were taken against the minority ethnic German population, furthering a divided loyalty amongst this group. These ethnic Germans were conscious of Nazi Germany and its prominence within the European continent and Hitler used this radicalization and discontent with the situation to his advantage, as he proclaimed that these ethnic Germans were a part of the Third Reich and needed to be incorporated in it, in order to make a 'Greater Germany'.¹¹⁵ Nazi Germany used ethnic policy to utilize the German ethnic minorities in East and Central Europe in order to strengthen its expansionist aims.¹¹⁶

The very concept which is ascribed to the ethnic Germans, *Volksdeutsche*, played an important role in policies and justifications of Hitler's rule. As the term *Volksdeutsche* was coined by Hitler himself as a way to connect the ethnic Germans outside the Reich with those within, the term meant that those named *Volksdeutsche* had a language, culture or ethnicity with German origins.¹¹⁷

In addition, this term also had elements of blood and race within. The notion of *Volksdeutsche* is connected to Nazi Germany's aggressive foreign policy, as it established a connection between all 'Germans' in Europe and provided a justification in taking over Eastern Europe in order to bring all ethnic Germans together.¹¹⁸

2.2.1 Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia during the interwar period

The territories belonging to both Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia were originally part of the Habsburg Empire before its disintegration in 1918. The first ethnic Germans in the territory that would become Yugoslavia arrived in Vojvodina in the year 1702. In 1716 a German settlement was built outside the town itself.¹¹⁹ From 1723 on, German colonists came to live there as well. These ethnic Germans were among the favored population in the Habsburg monarchy and were provided with security and

¹¹⁵ Cattaruzza and Dyroff, *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War*, 60.

¹¹⁶ Cattaruzza and Dyroff, *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War*, 56.

¹¹⁷ Doris L. Bergen, 'The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche' and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939-45', *Journal of Contemporary History* 29 (1994) No. 4, 569 there 569-582.

¹¹⁸ Cattaruzza and Dyroff, *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War*, 5.

¹¹⁹ Wolff, *German Minorities in Europe*, 144.

economic assistance.¹²⁰ In 1867, with the establishment of the Austria-Hungary dual monarchy this situation changed, as Vojvodina became an important part of the Hungarian monarchy.

Within Czechoslovakia, also part of the Habsburg Empire before First World War, there were 3,747,000 Germans living in the area that would become Czechoslovakia according to an Austrian census of 1910. These ethnic Germans were mainly found in Sudetenland. They lived in territories close to Germany and Austria, where they had also settled centuries ago. These blocks formed language islands in the middle of Czech dominated areas.¹²¹

After the First World War and the disintegration of the Habsburg Empire, Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Hungary and Romania were established. From 1929 on, the kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes changed into the kingdom of Yugoslavia.¹²² Both countries were multi-ethnic and needed to incorporate many minorities within its borders. The first Czechoslovak Republic contained three major racial groups which were the Czechs, Germans, and Slovaks. Furthermore, it also contained three minor racial groups, the Poles, Hungarians and Ukrainians.¹²³ Yugoslavia had more than fifteen national minority groups in 1919 and the ethnic German population lived mainly in the region of Vojvodina, in Banat and Slavonia, while small communities also lived in Croatia and Slovenia.¹²⁴

According to many Sudeten Germans within Czechoslovakia, the self-determination of minorities promised by Woodrow Wilson in his 'Fourteen Points' was given to an unworthy people, who they regarded as less important than themselves.¹²⁵ The main problem was that the inclusion of several unwilling ethnic minorities within a new state, in this case Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, ran counter to Wilson's 'Fourteen Points', which promised self-determination to all ethnic groups.¹²⁶ The Danube Germans of Yugoslavia called for self-determination and the establishment of the 'Republic of Banat' in accordance to these 'Fourteen Points'. However, this was not granted by the Western Powers.

The new Czech leaders, afraid of a disintegration of their newly established country, wanted their minority population to integrate as soon as possible. Therefore, they encouraged assimilation using a liberal approach. That is, awarding more privileges to the ethnic German minority than the minority treaties had proposed. In contrast, the Yugoslav government did not have a special policy in

¹²⁰ Wolff, *German Minorities in Europe*, 145.

¹²¹ Anthony Komjathy and Rebecca Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich. Ethnic Germans of East Central Europe between the wars* (London 1980) 17.

¹²² Wolff, *German Minorities in Europe*, 146.

¹²³ Patrick Crowhurst, *A History of Czechoslovakia between the wars. From Versailles to Hitler's invasion* (London 2015) 3.

¹²⁴ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 125.

¹²⁵ Cattaruzza and Dyroff, *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War*, 47.

¹²⁶ Crowhurst, *A History of Czechoslovakia between the wars*, 8.

dealing with these ethnic Germans. The manner in which these groups were dealt with was largely decided within the three separate ethnic communities, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia.¹²⁷ Serbia looked upon these ethnic Germans with favor due to their longstanding cooperation with each other in Vojvodina. However, In Croatia and Slovenia they were viewed as dangerous bearers of 'germanisation'. Because of the open policy regarding ethnic Germans in Vojvodina in Serbia, the largest number of Yugoslav *Volksdeutsche* came to live there.¹²⁸

Therefore, the *Volksdeutsche* living in both the Serbian part of Yugoslavia and in Sudetenland, had the right to establish German schools, journals and societies. Within Sudetenland, ethnic Germans even had the right to form political parties which would be integrated into the Czechoslovak government.¹²⁹ This right was also given to the German minority in Yugoslavia in 1922 and they formed the party of Germans in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. However, most important for maintaining German ethnicity within Yugoslavia was Swabian-German Cultural Union, set up in 1920.¹³⁰ This Cultural Union, also named *Kulturbund* was formed to promote the German ethnicity and it was the only organization that tried to unify all the ethnic Germans in Yugoslavia.¹³¹ This freedom to share a German system of education and join German organizations in both countries served to make cultural assimilation more complicated, especially in Czechoslovakia.¹³²

During the 1920s, the majority of the ethnic Germans within these two countries, although still in favor of an autonomous status, accepted the reality of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav state and cooperated in these early years of the country's origin.¹³³ This can be illustrated by the political landscape of Czechoslovakia. In 1929, the German voters overwhelmingly voted for activist parties (1,252,281) which supported the Czech government in promoting mutual cooperation, against far less votes for the negativist parties (393,297) which were unwilling to cooperate with the state and who wanted to fight for autonomy.¹³⁴ The creation of a stable multi-ethnic state seemed quite possible in this period, as the advantages of living in a stable state were acknowledged. Political cooperation between the Czechs and Germans grew.¹³⁵

However, this attitude shifted with the economic Depression of 1929 and the appointment of Hitler as Reich Chancellor in 1933.¹³⁶ In the 1930s this cooperative attitude began to shift as tensions began to rise over economic hardships and implemented measures which disadvantaged German

¹²⁷ Wolff, *German Minorities in Europe*, 147.

¹²⁸ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 129.

¹²⁹ Cattaruzza and Dyroff, *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War*, 36.

¹³⁰ Wolff, *German Minorities in Europe*, 148.

¹³¹ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 126.

¹³² Crowhurst, *A History of Czechoslovakia between the wars*, 5.

¹³³ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 19.

¹³⁴ Cattaruzza and Dyroff, *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War*, 47.

¹³⁵ Crowhurst, *A History of Czechoslovakia between the wars*, 81.

¹³⁶ Crowhurst, *A History of Czechoslovakia between the wars*, 9.

nationalities.¹³⁷ The Depression was crucial for this change of attitude in Sudetenland. The Depression hit Sudetenland hard and unemployment within the ethnic German communities was very high, much higher than in other Czech areas. This opened the possibility for many ethnic Germans to turn to extremist ideas.¹³⁸ For Yugoslavia, this turn to Nazism originally started in Romania due to the organization which was named 'National-Socialist Renewal movement of Germans in Romania'. In 1934 this Renewal movement was also organized within the Swabian-German Cultural Union.

The manner in which Nazi Germany interfered within domestic politics of these countries, differs greatly between Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. In Yugoslavia, Nazi Germany did not promote this turn to German nationalism as the relationship between Yugoslavia and Germany had warmed up in the 1930s.¹³⁹ On May 1, 1934, a commercial treaty between Yugoslavia and Nazi Germany was signed. This treaty brought the two countries closer together and they started to establish harmonious relations with each other.¹⁴⁰ Nazi Germany did not want to hinder its foreign relations with Yugoslavia by supporting the separatist group among the *Volksdeutsche* and meddling into Yugoslavia's domestic affairs.¹⁴¹ These pro-German Yugoslav politics in the second half of the 1930s only came under pressure during the Polish-German War in 1940.

In contrast, Nazi Germany did interfere heavily in the domestic politics of Czechoslovakia. This began with financial aid given to struggling Sudeten families. The German Legation in Prague became a channel for sums of money to be sent to Sudeten families and later the Sudeten German Party. Large sums of money were also sent to support Nazi newspapers and other political activities. In doing so, Hitler tried to undermine the state from within.¹⁴² As a result, the Czechoslovak government disbanded and prohibited any association or group which had a connection to Nazi Germany.¹⁴³ This decline in the economic and political situation of the ethnic Germans in the 1930s resulted in a loss of faith in the Czechoslovak government and the German activist parties which were associated with it.¹⁴⁴ This made the Sudeten Germans turn more and more to the negativists side and they became increasingly receptive to propaganda from the German Reich.¹⁴⁵ In this period, the Sudeten German National Socialists secretly received financial aid from the German foreign ministry. Mainly because of this aid the Sudeten German Party (SDP), under Konrad Henlein, was able

¹³⁷ Cattaruzza and Dyroff, *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War*, 34.

¹³⁸ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 21.

¹³⁹ Wolff ed., *German Minorities in Europe*, 150.

¹⁴⁰ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 132.

¹⁴¹ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 133.

¹⁴² Crowhurst, *A History of Czechoslovakia between the wars*, 14.

¹⁴³ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 21.

¹⁴⁴ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 23.

¹⁴⁵ Ibidem.

to procure 1,2 million German votes, unifying two-thirds of the German community in 1933.¹⁴⁶ Heinlein remained in contact with the Third Reich and put pressure on the Czech authorities for the Sudeten German areas to become autonomous.¹⁴⁷

As Hitler's foreign policy became more aggressive and the Czechoslovak government elected a new nationalist president Eduard Benes, tensions grew. The apprehension and imprisonment of all ethnic Germans who were connected to the Nazi Regime caused terror and anger among the Sudeten German population, as it appeared as they were being punished for being German.¹⁴⁸ As these tensions grew, the meetings between Heinlein and Hitler became more frequent. In a meeting between the two on March 28, 1938 Heinlein was informed that Hitler was not only after Sudetenland, but also Czechoslovakia itself. It was the policy of Hitler to encourage the Sudeten Germans to create disturbances so an international intervention and conference was possible. The SDP helped rally the population and fed into their expectations.¹⁴⁹

Konrad Heinlein went on trips to London to speak with Chamberlain about the situation in Czechoslovakia. Heinlein seemed a honest man to many, his claims of the dire situation were believed as well as his denial of contact with Nazi Germany.¹⁵⁰ Hitler used Heinlein to create a situation in which a political crisis occurred that would give him an excuse to invade Sudetenland. He eventually got a hold of the country as German diplomats and the SDP exaggerated the civil unrest.¹⁵¹ Both Chamberlain and Roosevelt believed that the Munich conference in 1939 would bring peace.¹⁵² Czechoslovakia was abandoned by its allies and taken apart by Germany, Poland and Hungary.¹⁵³ The first stage of the transfer in march 1939 went very well, Nazi soldiers received an enthusiastic welcome and Nazi symbols lined the streets in ethnic German territories in Sudetenland. They were welcomed as liberators, however, this image that was put forward was also a staged propaganda event.¹⁵⁴

During the beginning of the Second World War, Yugoslavia had remained neutral. By 1941, Germany increased pressure on Yugoslavia to abandon this neutrality.¹⁵⁵ As international tensions increased, the relation between the ethnic Germans and Serbs deteriorated. From 1939 on, Nazi Germany began to support separatist sentiments of the Yugoslav Germans and Hitler secretly armed and trained special groups of these Germans to form a network of spies. Furthermore, the Swabian-

¹⁴⁶ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 25.

¹⁴⁷ Crowhurst, *A History of Czechoslovakia between the wars*, 160.

¹⁴⁸ Crowhurst, *A History of Czechoslovakia between the wars*, 93.

¹⁴⁹ Cattaruzza and Dyroff, *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War*, 35.

¹⁵⁰ Crowhurst, *A History of Czechoslovakia between the wars*, 261.

¹⁵¹ Cattaruzza and Dyroff, *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War*, 5.

¹⁵² Crowhurst, *A History of Czechoslovakia between the wars*, 209.

¹⁵³ Crowhurst, *A History of Czechoslovakia between the wars*, 261.

¹⁵⁴ Crowhurst, *A History of Czechoslovakia between the wars*, 228.

¹⁵⁵ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 137.

German Culture Union was being used as a source of information for Germany, mostly on Yugoslav civil service and government institutions.¹⁵⁶

by June 1940, flyers were distributed that claimed the *Volksdeutsche* within Yugoslavia were a 'fifth column' for Germany. However, except for a selected few, the *Volksdeutsche* were kept uninformed by Nazi Germany about a possible conflict.¹⁵⁷ To the great displeasure of the Serb population, the Prince of Yugoslavia signed an agreement with Germany which would end the neutrality of Yugoslavia and ally itself with the Axis Powers. As a result, the Serb dominated military organized a coup d'état and removed the existing government. In response to this, Nazi Germany attacked Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941.¹⁵⁸

2.2.2 Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia during the Second World War

Among these ethnic Germans within Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, there was an almost complete integration and subordination to the Nazi political center during the period of the Second World War. Active collaboration was mainly done by German minorities, as some ethnic Germans embraced the new order of the Third Reich and joined government institutions, even spying for the Gestapo. Even though the majority of the ethnic Germans were not Nazi, they also did not defy the Reich and they oftentimes cooperated with them.¹⁵⁹ These *Volksdeutsche* played a valuable role in sustaining the German occupational regime during the war.¹⁶⁰ In Sudetenland, the enemies of the National Socialist ideology were immediately put behind bars. The SDP was swallowed by the NSDAP and almost all its member became part of the Nazi Party.¹⁶¹

Among the *Volksdeutsche* in both countries, there soon was disappointment about perceived discrimination against them by the Nazi Regime. A lot of administrative positions were being occupied by citizens from Nazi Germany. Furthermore, because of the new system of law, activities that had been legal in the interwar period and part of everyday life, were now deemed illegal, causing conflict between the *Volksdeutsche* and the occupying Nazi Germans. Within Yugoslavia, few were given senior positions in the bureaucracy.¹⁶² The differences between Sudetenland and Nazi Germany were exaggerated by the Sudeten Germans as they regarded themselves as outposts of the German ethnicity, the 'truest' German.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁶ Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Hitler's new Disorder. The Second World War in Yugoslavia* (London 2008) 65.

¹⁵⁷ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 140.

¹⁵⁸ Pavlowitch, *Hitler's new Disorder*, 2.

¹⁵⁹ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 145.

¹⁶⁰ Wolff ed., *German Minorities in Europe*, 151.

¹⁶¹ Cattaruzza and Dyroff, *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War*, 43.

¹⁶² Gregor Joseph Kranjc, *To walk with the devil. Slovene collaboration and Axis Occupation 1941-1945* (London 2013) 65.

¹⁶³ Ibidem.

An important aspect of Yugoslav collaboration with Nazi Germany and the image the *Volksdeutsche* had during the Second World War, relates to the matter of conscription in the Nazi army. Around 18,6 percent of these Yugoslav *Volksdeutsche* were soldiers in either the Wehrmacht or the SS. Furthermore, a majority of the ethnic German population supported the German army on a financial level.¹⁶⁴ However, This ethnic German incorporation into the army was mainly by mandatory conscription, as very few volunteered.¹⁶⁵ This resulted in some anti-Reich attitude among the *Volksdeutsche* of Yugoslavia, especially as resisters to the draft were met with violence. The part of the male population that was conscripted was mainly housed in the 'Prinz Eugen Division', which was entirely comprised of *Volksdeutsche*. This division fought in the Balkans against Serbians and Greeks and was known for their cruelty. This made the non-German population in Yugoslavia very hostile towards the ethnic German population.¹⁶⁶ When the war seemed lost and the Red Army was gaining, a large number of these Yugoslav Germans left with the German Army to the Reich.¹⁶⁷

During the occupation, in both countries, the Jewish population was sent to concentration camps and their property was confiscated and distributed among the local ethnic Germans. The ethnic German population therefore profited from the expulsion of the Jewish people from their lands. However, because of the low percentage of Jews existing in Sudetenland during the Second World War, the "Jewish Question" did not play such a big role within Sudetenland during the war. The Czech minorities, however, were regarded as dangerous enemies, plans were made for population transfers or to expel them from the Sudeten lands. They were subjected to cultural, economic and political discrimination.¹⁶⁸ The ethnic German community in Yugoslavia had a similar relationship with its Serbian population during the war. Local governments were placed under ethnic German rule which were overseen by the Nazi German government. In mid-1941 these local governments proposed the expulsion of more than 50,000 Serbian people in order to create the 'Free state of Banat'.¹⁶⁹ In both cases, the tolerance the ethnic German minority had demanded for itself in the interwar period was mostly abandoned when they became part of the majority ethnicity.¹⁷⁰

2.1.3 Poland

The treaty at Versailles in June 1919 restored an independent Poland, where the ethnic group of Germans constituted of around 3,9 percent of the population. However, the city of Danzig within

¹⁶⁴ Wolff ed., *German Minorities in Europe*, 152.

¹⁶⁵ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 144.

¹⁶⁶ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 145.

¹⁶⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁸ Cattaruzza and Dyroff, *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War*, 46.

¹⁶⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁰ Cattaruzza and Dyroff, *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War*, 48.

Poland housed 96,5 percent ethnic Germans and was declared to be a free city, not under Polish rule as it enjoyed independence in domestic affairs.¹⁷¹ From 1933 on, this city was ruled by a domestic Nazi party and had strong connections with the Third Reich and Hitler.¹⁷²

Outside the city, in Poland itself, the *Volksdeutsche* lived under Polish rule. The Poles and ethnic Germans in Poland were very hostile towards each other.¹⁷³ The ethnic Germans were thought to be disloyal and the Polish government even went as far as to establish internment camps in 1939 for those people deemed hostile to Poland.¹⁷⁴ Polish propaganda at the eve of the war went to the extremes, which created frightened reactions from the *Volksdeutsche*.¹⁷⁵ The defeat of the Polish army, the raids of Reich German special forces in Poland and the tension between the two ethnicities made the idea of a 'fifth column' among the *Volksdeutsche* very prevalent, although this existence was not proven.¹⁷⁶ However, it was believed and in some cases apparent, that the German advance was aided by ethnic Germans who had taken up arms.¹⁷⁷

Furthermore, during the occupation, the *Volksdeutsche* of Poland used their local knowledge to uncover secret resistance movements and they compiled lists of people who might defy Nazi rule. Though Poland is not part of the countries the authors of the autobiographical sources used in this thesis came from, the strong emphasis in Poland on the *Volksdeutsche* as being part of a fifth column has had a strong influence on the image of the ethnic Germans as perpetrators in the Second World War, which still exists today.¹⁷⁸

2.2 The expulsion of the *Volksdeutsche* from 1944 to 1948

When looking at the expulsion of Germans in this period, one can distinguish three phases. First the period of 1944-1945 when the Red Army gained ground on the Germans. The *Volksdeutsche* close to the Eastern front as well as German citizens fled to avoid the advancing army. Second, the 'wild' expulsions right after the war in 1945, especially prominent for ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe. Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia began expelling *Volksdeutsche* in a very violent manner as lingering feelings of anger and revenge gained the upper hand. Even though the *Volksdeutsche* had not been German citizens, their German ethnicity still made them a target. The third phase was constituted by the 'organized' expulsions (1946-1948) legitimized by the Potsdam Agreement.¹⁷⁹ This

¹⁷¹ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 65.

¹⁷² Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 67.

¹⁷³ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 69.

¹⁷⁴ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 76.

¹⁷⁵ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 101.

¹⁷⁶ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 102.

¹⁷⁷ Halik Kochanski, *The eagle unbowed. Poland and the Poles in the Second World War* (Harvard 2012) 69.

¹⁷⁸ Halik Kochanski, *The eagle unbowed*, 118.

¹⁷⁹ Ibidem.

agreement stated that the forced displacement of German citizens and *Volksdeutsche* gained legitimization by the great powers of the time.¹⁸⁰

Most of the places effected by the expulsions were those that had been part of the Reich since its establishment in 1871 and which came under Polish and Russian authority after the Second World War.¹⁸¹ However, other regions not formerly part of the Reich and inhabited by a minority population of ethnic Germans, or *Volksdeutsche*, were also implicated by the 'transfer of populations', such as German ethnic populations in Poland, Sudetenland, Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia.¹⁸²

When upholding the meaning of the term *Vertreibung*, the expulsions began in the late 1944s, as the Red Army gained ground and advanced on areas of German settlement. Fearful of reprisals and acts of revenge due to the bad reputation surrounding the Red Army, hundreds of thousands of Germans fled from their homes in Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia, they were joined a few months later by refugees from the eastern provinces of the Reich.¹⁸³ This flight from the Red Army took place in several stages. It began in the Balkans in the autumn of 1944 in Southern Europe. By winter, this had moved up to Eastern Prussia and in October, 1944 the Red Army crossed the German frontier.¹⁸⁴ These last months of the war were filled with looting, rape and other perceived retributions by the Red Army and the victimized population of the countries these *Volksdeutsche* had lived in.

The advancement of the Red Army brought devastation to the German population, whether it were citizens of the Reich or ethnic Germans. Feelings of hatred got the upper hand in this period as the Soviet soldiers undoubtedly remembered their own losses and ordeals when confronted with their bitter enemy and the victimized population of Eastern Europe saw everybody who was German within their country as a traitor.¹⁸⁵ As land routes were cut off, the last option for Germans trapped along the Prussian coast was to flee by boat. This was not without difficulty or danger, as mines and patrolling submarines posed serious trouble for these ships.¹⁸⁶ The sinking of the ship the *Wilhelm Gustloff* on January 30, 1945 resulted in nine thousand fatal casualties and was the main topic of the novel *Crabwalk* by Günther Grass, a publication crucial in shaping the memory culture in the 1990s surrounding the expulsion. After the war ended new forms of local assaults were perpetrated against

¹⁸⁰ Ulrich Mertel, *Forgotten voices. the expulsion of the Germans from Eastern Europe after World War II* (New Jersey 2012) 1.

¹⁸¹ Ahonen and Schaffer, *After the expulsion*, 15.

¹⁸² Ibidem.

¹⁸³ Ahonen and Schaffer, *After the expulsion*, 16.

¹⁸⁴ Lieberman, *Terrible fate*, 223.

¹⁸⁵ Benjamin Lieberman, *Terrible fate. Ethnic cleansing in the making of Modern Europe* (United Kingdom 2006) 227.

¹⁸⁶ Lieberman, *Terrible fate*, 225.

the Germans by Yugoslavs, Poles and Czechs.¹⁸⁷ This were low-intensity campaigns which were essentially a struggle for homes and property of the German civilians, in Sudetenland, Yugoslavia and Poland, German homes were looted and taken over.¹⁸⁸

These campaigns can be seen as the first step towards ethnic cleansing and the beginning of the wild expulsions, the second phase of the *Vertreibung*. Particularly in Polish, Yugoslav and Czech territories, systematic expulsion started in the last months of the war. This was mostly due to feelings of revenge of the new Czech, Yugoslav and Polish governments against the suffered Nazi rule and the idea that the German minorities had committed fifth column treachery.¹⁸⁹ Exiled leaders of these countries had been actively promoting the removal of these minorities from their countries.¹⁹⁰ Not only revenge motivated these decisions, there was also a strong belief that in order to build up a new Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia or Poland, one needed to get rid of its minorities.¹⁹¹ These wild expulsions were perpetrated in a period of chaos, without any concrete organization. The German minorities were driven out on a local level, this period is deemed as the 'wild expulsions' because they were perpetrated without international organization or official approval.¹⁹²

In Poland, the 'wild expulsions' mainly affected those living near the Western territories along the borders drawn in the aftermath of the Second World War, the Oder-Neisse. There, small groups of armed local militia displaced people from their homes, they were only allowed to carry a small suitcase.¹⁹³ The most prominent element of these expulsions was the speed in which they were conducted. This was also the case in Czechoslovakia, where Sudetenland was mostly affected.¹⁹⁴ Here, the expulsions followed a certain pattern. First, a delegation of armed men appeared in a German town. Next, all civilians were ordered out onto the streets. Just like in Poland, they were only allowed to collect a small amount of luggage and money, before they were forced to leave. The remaining possessions were plundered.¹⁹⁵ The city of Brno in Czechoslovakia is notorious for being the largest site of these wild expulsions. In two days' time, twenty thousand people were displaced from their homes and escorted away in what has been named the Brno death march.¹⁹⁶ This phase of the *Vertreibung* was marked by chaos, brutality and theft. During this period thousands of people

¹⁸⁷ Lieberman, *Terrible fate*, 229

¹⁸⁸ Ibidem, 230

¹⁸⁹ Ahonen and Schaffer, *After the expulsion*, 16.

¹⁹⁰ Ahonen and Schaffer, *After the expulsion*, 17.

¹⁹¹ Lieberman, *Terrible fate*, 233.

¹⁹² Lieberman, *Terrible fate*, 233.

¹⁹³ Lieberman, *Terrible fate*, 234.

¹⁹⁴ Lieberman, *Terrible fate*, 236.

¹⁹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁶ Lieberman, *Terrible fate*, 237.

were affected and deported under very harsh conditions. The people who stayed behind lost their property and Civil Rights, oftentimes confined to concentration camps.¹⁹⁷

On 1 October 1944, the Red Army entered the Banat area and cut it off from other German controlled territories, making evacuation impossible. In the same month it was decided to isolate the remaining Yugoslav Germans in detention camps which were placed in deserted German villages.¹⁹⁸ How these *Volksdeutsche* were treated was often dependent on local commanders because of a lack of any defined policy relating to the case of these ethnic Germans. These camps remained operational from 1944 to 1948. The winner of the Second World War in Yugoslavia, Tito's partisans, continued to set up its communist Regime in the country.¹⁹⁹

The Allies, for the most part, condoned or agreed with these wild expulsions, seeing it as retribution for the Second World War.²⁰⁰ However, there was also the notion that the expulsions needed to be humanized as they were extensively chaotic and brutal. A formal agreement from the Allies in regards to the removal of German minorities in Eastern Europe was established during the Potsdam Conference, held from July 17 to August 2, 1945.²⁰¹ This agreement placed German provinces east of the rivers Oder and Neisse under Polish and Soviet authority and sanctioned the expulsion of the German minority from these territories.²⁰²

After this agreement, there were months of uncertainty and waiting before expulsion would begin for the German minorities. In the formerly expelled towns, the changeover could already be noticed as German street names, shops etc. were removed, the *Volksdeutsche* perceived this as a destruction of their culture.²⁰³ Orderly transports started in the first half of 1946, after the allies detailed how the expulsion should take place.²⁰⁴ These deportations were less brutal than the ones that had gone before, but were still exhausting and cruelly performed. Normally the journey would begin by foot or wagon, afterwards transport to the West was conducted by train, in severely overcrowded cars.²⁰⁵ By 1950, approximately 12,5 million Germans had found residence in areas on the Western side of the Oder-Neisse border.²⁰⁶ This completely redrew the ethnic map of Central and Eastern Europe.²⁰⁷

¹⁹⁷ Ahonen and Schaffer, *After the expulsion*, 18.

¹⁹⁸ Wolff ed., *German Minorities in Europe*, 154

¹⁹⁹ Wolff ed., *German Minorities in Europe*, 155

²⁰⁰ Ahonen and Schaffer, *After the expulsion*, 17.

²⁰¹ Lieberman, *Terrible fate*, 238.

²⁰² Ahonen and Schaffer, *After the expulsion*, 18.

²⁰³ Lieberman, *Terrible fate*, 240.

²⁰⁴ Ahonen and Schaffer, *After the expulsion*, 20.

²⁰⁵ Lieberman, *Terrible fate*, 243.

²⁰⁶ Ahonen and Schaffer, *After the expulsion*, 20.

²⁰⁷ Lieberman, *Terrible fate*, 247.

The homogenization of these countries was seen as a positive element on which postwar rebuilding of Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and other Eastern European countries could take place. Many people in Eastern and Central Europe saw the ethnic cleansing of their German minorities as a logic step after the brutal Second World War and accepted that it was an effect of this war.²⁰⁸ Furthermore, these expulsions also need to be seen in the broader context of Eastern European ethnic conflicts. Long-standing tensions between the German people and Slavs also fueled the flames of hatred.²⁰⁹ However, while these populations perceived the expulsions as a retribution, necessary for the survival of their country, the expellees themselves viewed them as an deeply traumatic occurrence.²¹⁰ In their view, the *Vertreibung* had been a period full of atrocities, massacres, theft and chaos. The *Vertreibung* was the site of confinement in concentration camps, death marches and organized killings, taking the lives of around 1.5 million Germans.²¹¹ Both groups, the expellees and the expelled, saw themselves as the victims and the 'other' as the perpetrator, creating divided memories and contested pasts.²¹²

2.3 Conclusion

After the First World War, the Habsburg Empire was dismantled in 1919, creating small multi-ethnic states. Due to minority treaties and Wilson's 'Fourteen points', these minorities had the right to preserve their ethnicity and their culture. This produced tensions between minority and majority populations within these states. Nazi Germany used this tension in order to influence the ethnic German population within these nations, creating divided loyalties among the minorities. The term *Volksdeutsche* was coined to connect these ethnic Germans with the Reich and in order to find justification for its aggressive foreign policy by wanting to include all Germans within a 'Greater Germany'. In the countries Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Poland, there were instances of collaboration with the Nazi Regime by the ethnic German communities. This was preceded by an initial period of cooperation in the 1920s, before economic problems and political changes in the 1930s pushed the *Volksdeutsche* to more separatist ideas.

During the Second World War, there were both instances of far-reaching collaboration, as well as a resistance to the Nazi Regime among the *Volksdeutsche*. Although Nazi troops were cheered on when they arrived, the far-reaching changes implemented by the Third Reich were often seen as too severe, especially with the establishment of new laws and forced conscription. However, the tolerance the *Volksdeutsche* had demanded as a minority group within their majority states in the

²⁰⁸ Lieberman, *Terrible fate*, 249.

²⁰⁹ Ahonen and Schaffer, *After the expulsion*, 22.

²¹⁰ Ahonen and Schaffer, *After the expulsion*, 21.

²¹¹ Ibidem.

²¹² Lieberman, *Terrible fate*, 249.

interwar years was largely abandoned when they became favored subjects of Nazi Germany. The expulsion saw the removal of these *Volksdeutsche* from the Eastern and Central European countries. First this was perpetrated by local governments in a chaotic manner. However, the Potsdam Agreement in August 1945 gave legitimization to this expulsion through Allied oversight.

Within this context of narration, these *Volksdeutsche* occupy a very ambivalent position in which contradictory notions of both victim and perpetrator can be allotted to them. They can be seen as collaborators with the Nazis and part of the atrocities during the Second World War. However, they can also be viewed as a minority group which struggled against discrimination and were forcefully expelled from their countries because of violent homogenization policies. The authors of the autobiographical accounts need to move between these two positions within the context of narration. As the same ambivalent status of the *Volksdeutsche* can be found in the context of justification, the next chapter will handle this subject.

Chapter 3 – Context of Justification and recent historical events: American Public opinion

This chapter will look at the discursive context in the United States and Germany which influenced the way the autobiographies were written. This is the context of justification and deals with the dominant discourse of the place and time in which the three autobiographies were published. All three authors moved to the United States in the 1950s and they published their eyewitness accounts in the late 1990s and early 2000s in this country. The dominant discourse of the expelled Germans is connected to the discourse surrounding the Second World War and the Holocaust, therefore, the discourse surrounding these events will be first taken into consideration. The first part of this chapter will therefore deal with the evolution of the United States discourse on the Second World War and the Holocaust. Then, the general perspective of the United States in the late 1990s on the Second World War and the *Volksdeutsche* will be examined. Furthermore, all three authors fled to Germany and lived there in the 1950s, so the perception of a postwar Germany on the expulsion will also be discussed. Moreover, the discourse of Germany surrounding the expulsion was crucial in changing the discourse surrounding German victimhood. Finally, this chapter will look at some key moments in recent history which influenced and motivated the authors to publish their autobiographies.

3.1 The evolution of the United States' discourse on the Second World War

In the United States' discourse of the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Second World War constituted *the* central event of the 20th Century, present in public discourse and public consciousness. This importance of the Second World War is mainly due to the fact it brought about the Holocaust, a pivotal event for American memory and identification. Furthermore, this importance is also due to the many Jewish and other European migrants after the war. Because of this, the main discourse surrounding the Second World War and the United States of the late 1990s and early 2000s is tied to the Holocaust. But why, 50 years after the event and a continent away, does the Holocaust, and with it the Second World War, still resound so strongly in public consciousness and discourse?²¹³

For the Americans of the 1990s, the Second World War manifested some of the worst traits that humanity had to offer, in which the Holocaust was the worst offence of all.²¹⁴ If, in the American consciousness, the Second World War was the most central event of the Twentieth Century, this was

²¹³ Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Crises of memory and the Second World War* (Harvard University Press, London 2006) 24.

²¹⁴ Erich Anton Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow* (California 1997) XIX.

largely the case because the Holocaust was in it.²¹⁵ The Holocaust had become part of the cultural mainstream of the United States, becoming part of the language, the discourse, and thus inescapable.²¹⁶ The United States treated the Holocaust as a great crime against humanity, which had an impact on the whole world and the Allied forces as the great force of good which stopped this crime.²¹⁷

During the 1970s the Holocaust entered general American discourse and developed as presenting not just a Jewish memory but an American one, this reached its pinnacle in the late 1990s. The Holocaust was put into connection to modernity. As numerous Americans began to feel victimized by aspects of modern life, non-Jewish persons began to identify with the victimized Jewish person, as this identity was already endowed with meaning.²¹⁸ An important moment in this development was NBC's presentation of the series *Holocaust*. This miniseries aired on April 1978 on a Sunday, which was dubbed 'Holocaust Sunday'.²¹⁹ The mass viewing of this series can be seen as a public ritual which highlighted the chaos of the breakdown of society and offered reassurance that good and evil remained separate and distinguishable.²²⁰ Here, the Holocaust was seen as a symbol of ever-present evil. This served to decontextualize the event and to make the Second World War no longer an historical event but a symbolic and moral one. The story of 'good' against 'evil'.²²¹ In this view, the Nazis were seen as the ultimate evil, the ultimate perpetrator. The Allies were the absolute good and the victims, the ones that had suffered in the Holocaust, were completely innocent. Inherent in the dominant discourse was this distinction between good and evil, without relativity. Furthermore, the Holocaust became a screen on which to project values.²²²

This first major representation of the Holocaust before a mass audience was also the start of the debate whether the holocaust could be represented at all. Supporters against the representation of the Holocaust claimed it was an unique event, a sacred mystery only understandable and comprehensible for the survivors. In this case, the survivors of the Holocaust had a privileged interpretive authority. But who were these survivors? After the Holocaust had entered American discourse, a conventional understanding needed to be established, especially for those proposing that only the survivors could understand this atrocity. This spurred on debate between the notions of six millions victims or eleven million victims, and it was questioned who the main victims of the Holocaust were. Some supported the claim of six million, only acknowledging that the Jewish

²¹⁵ Luisa Lang Owen, *Casualty of War* (Texas 2002), XIV.

²¹⁶ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and collective memory. The American experience* (New York 1991) 53.

²¹⁷ Novick, *The Holocaust and collective memory*, 181.

²¹⁸ Novick, *The Holocaust and collective memory*, 285.

²¹⁹ Novick, *The Holocaust and collective memory*, 78.

²²⁰ Novick, *The Holocaust and collective memory*, 80.

²²¹ Novick, *The Holocaust and collective memory*, 81.

²²² Ibidem.

population had been victims of the Holocaust and the rest of the victims had been subjected to war crimes.²²³ Proponents of the '6 million victims' underlined the specificity, the Jewish essence, of the Holocaust. They insisted that the Jewish victims died differently, and had died because of different motives and in a different way. They formed the image of the Jewish 'unique victim', which had a privileged and elevated status.²²⁴ This distinction mattered a great deal for those people – mostly Jewish themselves- which saw the Holocaust as a holy event and the deaths of the Jewish victims as sacred.²²⁵ There was no consensus between the two sides, not in the debate around the representation of the Holocaust and not in the six million versus eleven million debate. A certain ambiguity and uncertainty characterized general American discourse about the conventional understanding of the Holocaust.²²⁶

For the American public in general, however, these distinctions were not that important. For the most part, especially in practice, the Jewish victims were taken to the center of the tragedy that was the Holocaust. But why did it remain such an important topic within American consciousness? Mainly, it remained relevant. From the 1970s on implications caused by the aftermath of the Holocaust kept appearing in the American news. In 1977-1978 there was a controversy concerning the organization of a Nazi march in Skoki, a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. In 1985 president Reagan visited the Brithberg cemetery in Western Germany and overlapping these events, there was the search and trial for people which had been participants in the Holocaust.²²⁷ A problematic person concerning these hunts was John Demjanjuk. At first he was symbolic for the image of the Holocaust murderer and he was convicted. However, his conviction was reversed as there was reason to believe there had been improprieties in the Justice Department Conduct.²²⁸

So, during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s there was a flood of representations and commemorative events, making the memories of the Holocaust unique, but the lessons universal. These were representations such as *Sophie's choice* about a female Holocaust survivor, and *Shoah*, a detailed documentary about the Holocaust. During the period of the Cold War, the lessons which the Holocaust provided were turned into a moral compass.²²⁹ It was removed from its original context, and the memory of the Holocaust was compared to other events, sometimes legitimizing political and military actions.²³⁰ As Michael Rothberg proposed in *Multidirectional Memory*, this placed the

²²³ Novick, *The Holocaust and collective memory*, 89.

²²⁴ Novick, *The Holocaust and collective memory*, 98.

²²⁵ Ibidem.

²²⁶ Ibidem.

²²⁷ Ibidem.

²²⁸ Novick, *The Holocaust and collective memory*, 89.

²²⁹ Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia 2006) 131.

²³⁰ Ibidem.

victims of this atrocity on an unique platform, the ultimate victim deserving of sympathy.²³¹ In this way, the Holocaust became a frame of reference to understand and measure up with other atrocities and crimes.²³² By comparing other atrocities with this ultimate example, the implication was that they were somehow alike and the victims were deserving of the same sympathy and understanding. To do this meant to link the victims of those other events to the 'ultimate victims' and the perpetrators of those other events to the 'ultimate perpetrators'.²³³ In doing so, the Holocaust became a powerful prism through which one could look at other atrocities.²³⁴ The Holocaust became an archetypical narrative of suffering.²³⁵ The promoters of certain cases or actions could use associations with the Holocaust to further their goals and enhance legitimacy. Because of this, references employing the Holocaust became a political instrument and a way to dramatize victimhood.²³⁶

Even though there were some misgivings about the representations of the Holocaust, popular media in the United States continued to represent the event, with successful receptions. This affixed the event on the American cultural map. Because of renewed ethnic violence and this firmly affixed memory of the Holocaust, together with an increasingly integrated global communications technology which renewed attention to the memory of the Holocaust, the year 1993 became 'the year of the Holocaust'.²³⁷ Important commemorative events were Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's list* and the opening of the Holocaust museum.²³⁸

As a result, there was a further identification of the American public with the Jewish victim. This caused a dual identification with both the victims and the liberators of the Second World War, the 'good side'.²³⁹ Thus, there is a stress on the role of the American Army in liberating the concentration camps and defeating Nazi Germany. The American soldiers having been the brave fighters for 'good' against the ultimate 'evil' which were presented by the Axis Powers. There is also an identification with the Jewish victim, made possible by the de-contextualization of the Holocaust and placing its Jewish victims at the center of a hierarchy of victimhood, rendering them abstract and only relevant within the context of Nazi Germany's atrocities.²⁴⁰

²³¹ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (California 2009) 9.

²³² Sarah de Mul, 'The Holocaust as a Paradigm for the Congo Atrocities: Adam Hochschild's King Leopold's Ghost', *Criticism* 53 (2011) afl. 4, 587-606 aldaar 592.

²³³ Ibidem.

²³⁴ Owen, *Casualty of War*, XX.

²³⁵ Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic realism. The demands of Holocaust representation* (Minnesota 2000) 219.

²³⁶ Novick, *The Holocaust and collective memory*, 96.

²³⁷ Novick, *The Holocaust and collective memory*, 102.

²³⁸ Ibidem.

²³⁹ Rothberg, *Traumatic realism*, 250.

²⁴⁰ Rothberg, *Traumatic realism*, 252.

3.2 Public debate in the United States on the Second World War and the *Volksdeutsche*

The story of the expelled ethnic German is not a history that receives much attention in the dominant discourse of the United States in the late 1990s and early 2000s. During this period, the many eyewitness accounts of the event remained largely unknown, most believed such victims had it coming, as they were seen to have been collaborators with the Nazis.²⁴¹ A certain mythology of the Second World War had taken place, so attention was mostly paid to certain aspects within a certain framework. The *Volksdeutsche* of Eastern Europe did not fit within this discourse, as they were not the 'consensus victims'.²⁴² Looking at the Second World War through a patriotic prism, this prism filters out the idea of 'Germans-as-victims' and only wanting to acknowledge 'Germans-as-perpetrators'.²⁴³

The continuous representation of the Second World War and the Holocaust, produced an image of 'the German' which cannot be reconciled with being a victim or a mere bystander.²⁴⁴ There was almost no legitimacy in placing German suffering at the center of any historical narrative of the Second World War.²⁴⁵ There is no room for the ordinary German speaking victim,²⁴⁶ only those individuals which are cast in a particular situation or are in a position of titular authority can become to be seen as a victim.

Therefore, The difficulty of claiming victimhood for the expelled Germans of Eastern Europe lay in the fact that they were associated with Nazi Germany, which are in this discourse, the ultimate perpetrators. The problem in proclaiming victimhood for this group lay in the idea that the notions of Germans-as-perpetrator and Germans-as-victims were mutually exclusive.²⁴⁷ In this view, to acknowledge the victimhood of the expelled Germans would mean to relativize German guilt for the Second World War. In order to claim that they had been victimized, this mutual exclusiveness needed to be rejected. They couldn't claim victimhood for the *Volksdeutsche* because that would mean rejecting that the group they were associated with, Nazi Germany, as a perpetrator. However, the admittance that there were also some German individuals that suffered is different than the acknowledgement that the *Volksdeutsche*, tied to Nazi Germany, were, as a collective, victimized. Moreover, because of the idea 'all-victims-are-innocent', this acknowledgement of victimhood would relativize crimes perpetrated by Nazi Germany during the Second World War.²⁴⁸

²⁴¹ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, X.

²⁴² Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, XIX.

²⁴³ Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci, *Narratives of trauma*, 7.

²⁴⁴ Owen, *Casualty of War*, XX.

²⁴⁵ Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci, *Narratives of trauma*, 25.

²⁴⁶ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, viii.

²⁴⁷ Helmut Schmitz and Annette Seidel-Arpaci, *Narratives of trauma. Discourses of German wartime suffering in national and international perspectives* (Amsterdam 2011), 6.

²⁴⁸ Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci, *Narratives of trauma*, 7.

In regards to the discourse on German victimization in the Second World War, a shift started in the 2000s from a culture of focusing on German crimes and responsibilities to a culture of focusing on pain, suffering and traumatization, this shift originated in Germany and will be discussed in the following segment. During this period, the acknowledgement of German wartime suffering became more valid. This shift suspends the till this time prevalent notion of the mutual exclusive notions of Germans as victims and Germans as perpetrators.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, the role of the Allies as heroes is also taken into consideration, as the indifference to the plight of the Jewish victim during the war is emphasized, creating the notion of the 'guilty bystander'.²⁵⁰

3.3 German Collective Memory and the *Vertreibung*

Because the perception concerning the *Volksdeutsche* is central in this thesis, the question arises in what way the discourse of victimhood was promoted in the years after the expulsion in Germany, as all three authors of the autobiographies fled to Germany after the war and stayed there during the first half of the 1950s. The dominant narrative concerning the expulsion and the Second World War might have influenced them in these early years they stayed there. Furthermore, Germany was also the country which sought to change the memory culture of German victimhood concerning the Second World War at the end of the 1990s, partially influencing a shift in discourse in other countries.

In Western and Eastern Germany in the 1950s there was an emphasis on the victimization of the ordinary German who had been presided over by a hostile regime. Especially in West Germany and during the 1950s, the expellees played an important role in coining the notion of a victimized German population. The story of the expellees became the story of all German citizens and was critical in shaping identity in postwar Western Germany.²⁵¹ After the war, both sides of the border emphasized their status as victims in the 1950s, although in different ways and influenced by the politics of the Cold War.²⁵²

In both the 1960s and 1970s memories of German victimization and thus the expulsion, prominent in the 1950s, were contested by the government of the Federal Republic by emphasizing accounts of Nazi atrocities, changing the perception of these events.²⁵³ The German Democratic Republic also rejected these expellee memories, as it threatened the moral status of the Soviet Union, since the Red Army had been responsible for much suffering during the expulsions according

²⁴⁹ Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci, *Narratives of trauma*, 6.

²⁵⁰ Novick, *The Holocaust and collective memory*, 104.

²⁵¹ Moeller, *War stories*, 12.

²⁵² Jolande Withuis and Janet Mooij eds., *The politics of war trauma. The aftermath of World War II in eleven European countries* (Amsterdam 2010) 108.

²⁵³ Moeller, *War stories*, 19.

to numerous expellee witness accounts. Because of this rejection of expellee memory, expellee's demand for returning home to their country of birth were seen by the German Democratic Republic as an expansionist desire of an aggressive German people.²⁵⁴

Eastern and Western German history until 1970 was a period of difficult and complicated remembrance, not a matter of a purposeful neglect of the memory of victimization, so even in this period the memory of the expelled Germans was not forgotten, even though they had often been pushed aside.²⁵⁵ However, a certain 'tabooization' occurred during the period of the 1970s.²⁵⁶ In this period the expellee group was rejected by society because of their continued demands for a return of the lost homes, this was viewed as an unjust and even dangerous desire.

However, since roughly the turn of the millennium, the debate around German suffering has shifted.²⁵⁷ A new change set in after unification, as the question arose how to deal with non-conventional victims of the Second World War.²⁵⁸ This debate was triggered in the 1990s and was influenced by a large body of fictional and non-fictional publications about German wartime suffering.²⁵⁹ Important for this shift was W.G Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literature* (1999), which spurred the debate about the taboo that rested on German victimhood. Other important works were Günther Grass's *Im Kregsgang* (2002), Jörg Friedrich's *Der Brand* and memoirs like Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel Bruders* (2003).²⁶⁰ According to Helmut Smidt and Annette Seidel-Apaci in the introduction of the book *Narratives of Trauma. Discourses of German wartime suffering in national and international perspectives*, the 1990s were the decade in which Holocaust remembrance received emphasis, while the 2000s were the period in which the question of German wartime suffering gained emphasis.²⁶¹

3.4 Key periods in history which influenced the autobiographies

The autobiographies were published in the years 1997, 1998 and 2002, this paragraph will explore the key events that possibly influenced the authors to publish their works. Tied to the reason why the authors published their works, is the reason why they thought it prudent, or now possible, to make their narrative of this long forgotten event known to the public. Therefore, these events were

²⁵⁴ Zehfuss, *wounds of memory*, 45.

²⁵⁵ Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces*, 6.

²⁵⁶ Andrew Demshuk, *The lost German East. Forced Migration and the politics of memory, 1945-1970* (Cambridge 2014), 264.

²⁵⁷ *Narratives of trauma* 1-10.

²⁵⁸ Jolande Withuis and Janet Mooij eds., *The politics of war trauma. The aftermath of World War II in eleven European countries* (Amsterdam 2010) 110.

²⁵⁹ Helmut Schmitz, and Annette Seidel-Apaci eds, *Narratives of trauma. discourses of German wartime suffering in national and international perspectives* (New York 2006) 1-10.

²⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

²⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

also of importance to the American public and their perceptions on atrocities similar to those events the authors of the autobiographies write about. So, which key periods can be distinguished?

The first key event would be the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the globalization of Human Rights which followed. After the breakdown of the Soviet Union there developed a consensus about Human Rights, in which protection of a populations basic rights became an important part of the legitimacy of the modern state.²⁶² The international community had a 'responsibility to protect' and established legal provisions for humanitarian interventions.²⁶³ This globalization of Human Rights was a change in global attitude, with the United States as its most prominent supporter. Discussing the German Expulsion of 1944-1948, the first high commissioner stated on May 28, 1995 that the event had been unlawful and wrong.²⁶⁴ Most importantly, mass population transfers were deemed a violation of Human Rights under article 12 of the Covenant on Civil and political Rights, which established freedom of movement as a right, as well as the possibility to reside in and return to one's country.²⁶⁵

Moreover, the first 'hard law' regarding forced population transfers was adopted on 17 July 1998, stipulating that it was a crime against humanity. This was in response to a report by al-Khasawneh in July 1997, which emphasized that forced population transfers were a violation of international criminal law and a criminal act.²⁶⁶ These new ideas on Human Rights and the heavy support that the United States gave them were an establishment of international values which many countries, especially the United States, proposed to uphold.

The second key event was the war in Iraq against Saddam Hussein and the influence of live television. The Gulf War of 1990-1991 was fought with troops as well as with the media. As the United States poured troops into the Middle East, it also had to retain the moral high ground. Here, comparisons with the Second World War were again of importance. Saddam Hussein was portrayed as a new Hitler, invading Saudi Arabia, 'raping' and plundering Kuwait and killing its people.²⁶⁷ It was portrayed as a war against tyranny which threatened the very way of life in the United States. The use of this sort of discourse was not new, however, what *was* unique about the Gulf War was that it was the first television war which could be covered on live television, the media had a central role.²⁶⁸ In the living room, citizens could see the war as it was happening. The Iraq War and the emerging of live coverage of this war served to bring the events in other countries even closer.

²⁶² Joe Renouard, *Human Rights in American foreign policy. From the 1960s to the Soviet collapse* (Pennsylvania 2016) 279

²⁶³ Ibidem.

²⁶⁴ Steven Béla Várdy, T. Hunt Tooley ed., *Ethnic cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe* (Michigan 2003) 787

²⁶⁵ Várdy, *Ethnic cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe*, 194

²⁶⁶ Várdy, *Ethnic cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe*, 797

²⁶⁷ Philip M. Taylor, *War and the Media. Propaganda and persuasion in the Gulf War* (Manchester 1992) 5

²⁶⁸ Taylor, *War and the Media*, 7

The Bosnian crisis in 1992, can be considered a key event and also the most important one. The Bosnian crisis was an ethnically rooted war that occurred in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the period 1992-1995, following the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. The population was compromised of Bosnian Muslims, Serbs and Croats, the years of fighting concerned these three ethnic groups as well as the Yugoslav army.²⁶⁹ In this conflict, ethnic cleansing was to be observed. Moreover, the term 'ethnic cleansing' itself, has come into common usage as a result of this Bosnian conflict.²⁷⁰

The war in the former Yugoslavia was the event which coined the term 'ethnic cleansing' and popularized this term with the public. This gave the term as distinct a notion as the term 'genocide' had.²⁷¹ So, although the phenomenon of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s was not the first time an inter-ethnic struggle produced many deaths, this war coined a new term which gave a name to the practice of expelling minorities on ethnic grounds. The establishment of the notion 'ethnic cleansing' enabled people to look at the past in a new, clearly definable, way.²⁷² So how was it to be defined? Although the notion was established after the war of Yugoslav secession, it has since developed and been used for multiple cases, in order to describe and elaborate upon a wide range of ethnic conflicts, the term includes the removal of indigenous populations, forcible population transfers, mass expulsions and elements of genocide.²⁷³

As the German expulsion of 1944-1948 had not received much attention for the American public and from historians, the occurrence of ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia and the defining of that very term allowed for parallels to be drawn between the two tragedies. This created the possibility for an emerging discussion on ethnic cleansing in the past, perpetrated against the ethnic Germans of Eastern Europe. In the case of Elizabeth Walter and Luisa Owen, their expulsion occurred in the same country as the Bosnian crisis did, in Yugoslavia.²⁷⁴ These parallels once again shed light on a forgotten episode of history, one which, according to the authors, could provide lessons for the present in regards to ethnic conflict and strife.

Furthermore, the ethnic conflict in Rwanda and the implementation of the laws constructed by the 1948 Genocide Convention on 2 September 1998, served to put focus on occurrences in the world in which ethnic conflict produced atrocities and even accounts of Genocide. The Rwanda Genocide was caused by tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi population in the country, resulting in the massacre of the Tutsi population. During the killings in the months April, May and June in 1994,

²⁶⁹ Edine Bećirević, *Genocide on the Drina River* (Yale 2014) X-XIII.

²⁷⁰ Várdy, *Ethnic cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe*, 3.

²⁷¹ Várdy, *Ethnic cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe*, 7.

²⁷² Várdy, *Ethnic cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe*, 787.

²⁷³ Ethnic Cleansing, History of Riga, Lilita International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, 83-90.

²⁷⁴ Várdy, *Ethnic cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe*, 239.

there was an initial denial in the US media and government that a Genocide was taking place.²⁷⁵ Furthermore, there was a failure to provide aid as it was proposed that in Rwanda a mutual Civil War was taking place. This assumption could not speedily be opposed as there were very few journalists at that time in Rwanda.²⁷⁶ Recognizing that a genocidal event was taking place would've meant that, morally, the US had to take action. Only after France intervened in Rwanda, was the term Genocide connected to the conflict in American media and government.²⁷⁷

The main perpetrators of the atrocities were convicted by the Genocide convention. The Genocide Convention was established as a reaction on the Holocaust after the Second World War, as international scholars sought to define the concept of genocide and how to persecute such acts. The Result was the convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, also called the Genocide Convention, in 1948. This was therefore the legal basis on which genocide could be defined and persecuted. The Rwanda Genocide was important as it served to conceptualize the concept genocide and renew attention to its use.²⁷⁸

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the context of justification, which is the context surrounding the publication of the autobiographies. The three autobiographies that are discussed in this thesis were published in the United States at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. When analyzing the sources, the dominant discourse of that time needs to be taken into consideration. During this time, the expulsion of the *Volksdeutsche* was a largely untold and forgotten story and they were mainly put into connection with Nazi Germany, as the *Volksdeutsche* were ethnically German themselves. Therefore, the dominant discourse surrounding this expulsion was mainly influenced by the discourse concerning the Second World War and the Holocaust. This dominant discourse emerged from the late 1970s with the public viewing of the miniseries *Holocaust* and developed further in the 1980s and 1990s.

Concerning the expelled ethnic Germans, the main problem in getting acknowledgement for their suffering as a collective group lay in the dichotomy of Germans-as-victims and Germans-as-perpetrators. Because the expulsion had received such little attention within the United States, the *Volksdeutsche* were mainly seen as connected to Nazi Germany and thus seen to having been compliant and even supporting of its politics. This placed this group of ethnic Germans within the notion of 'ultimate perpetrator'. If acknowledging victimhood in this discourse, one also proclaims

²⁷⁵ Allan Thompson ed., *The media and the Rwanda Genocide* (London 2007) 5.

²⁷⁶ Arthur J. Klinghoffer, *The International dimension of Genocide in Rwanda* (London 1998) 99.

²⁷⁷ Ibidem.

²⁷⁸ Klinghoffer, *The International dimension of Genocide in Rwanda*, 103.

innocence, as the victim is always perceived as innocent. Proclaiming victimhood for the *Volksdeutsche* would mean to relativize German guilt for the Second World War and rejecting the guilt of the 'ultimate perpetrator'. This impossibility to see Germans connected with the Second World War as victims was challenged by a large body of fictional and non-fictional German publications in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. Important for challenging the taboo on German victimization was W.G Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literature* (1999).

Furthermore, in the 1990s some key events influenced the publication of the autobiographies. Especially the Bosnian crisis and the Rwanda conflict, but also the Gulf War and other injustices around the world were in breach with Human Rights, now global in nature, and readily available to see on television. The expelled Germans could now name the crime which was committed against them 'forced population transfer' because of the globalization of Human Rights and they could define the notion that explained their experience as 'ethnic cleansing'. The atrocities committed in Rwanda and especially Yugoslavia served as a parallel for the experienced expulsion of the authors. It underlined atrocities perpetrated in ethnic conflicts and people targeted because of their ethnicity. Drawing parallels between the present and the past, these narratives try to serve as a mirror which could teach lessons to the future, giving meaning to past suffering.

Furthermore, within this discursive context of the United States in the 1990s, the *Volksdeutsche* occupied an ambivalent position. Just as in the context of narration, within this context of justification the *Volksdeutsche* could be termed as both victims and perpetrators. Because of their underrepresented status they were put into connection with Nazi Germany, the main 'evil' of the Second World War who committed atrocities against the 'ultimate victims'. This was the 'evil' opposite of the Allies, which were the main 'good' of the war. However, these *Volksdeutsche* could also be perceived as victims of ethnic violence comparable to the widely condemned atrocities of the 1990s, as victims whose Human Rights had been violated. The manner in which the authors of the autobiographies used this ambivalent position in order to claim an alternative subject position will be the topic of discussion in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 – Negotiating the dominant discourses on the *Volksdeutsche*

In this chapter the negotiation, within the narratives, of the dominant discourse on *Volksdeutsche* will be examined. In these sources the authors try to negotiate the ambivalent notion of *Volksdeutsche* as perpetrators and *Volksdeutsche* as victims. This chapter will therefore look at how these authors deconstruct the dominant notion of the *Volksdeutsche* as collaborators with Nazi Germany, in order to construct an alternative subject position within the dominant discourse. In doing so, this chapter will examine in what way these ethnic Germans use othering and how intertextuality and focalization are used in order to claim a different subject position and what identity they establish through the narrative. While examining these authors, their narratives will be divided in the periods before, during and after the Second World War. Furthermore, the narrative of Luisa Owen and Elizabeth Walter will be examined together, as their place of origin is the same and their manner of argumentation is similar.

4.1 The narrative of Anton Helfert

4.1.1 Narrative in the interwar period and the Second World War

“Even as children they had become aware of the growing tensions between the Czech people and the Sudeten population. [...] Discrimination against the Sudeten population had increased steadily, the brothers also learned about the expanding role of Nazi sympathizers among the frustrated Sudeten. Such agitators found the festering discontent fertile soil in which to plant and nourish the seeds of radical change, pushing into a reluctant majority the beguiling idea of finding common ground with their ever more powerful German neighbors.”²⁷⁹

In this quote the situation in Sudetenland concerning the *Volksdeutsche* is elaborated on. By September 1938 the Sudeten German population of Czechoslovakia was more and more in favor of being incorporated into Nazi Germany, as pan-German sentiments were on the rise. This resulted in conflicts between the Czech and the ethnic German population.²⁸⁰ However, the Sudeten community is portrayed by Anton Helfert as being separate from Nazi Germany as they are simply deemed ‘German neighbors’. This is also an instance of hidden intertextuality as Anton Helfert seems aware of the prevalent notion that Nazi Germany used the fate of the *Volksdeutsche* in order to legitimize its actions in claiming Sudetenland for itself.

Anton Helfert’s father agrees with this notion, as he proclaims on 30 September 1938, as the Munich Agreement became public.

“‘If only Prague had given us fairer treatment! Now we’ll be at the mercy of the Germans, and lord knows what they’re up to, with that fanatic inciting them.’

²⁷⁹ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 18, 19.

²⁸⁰ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 37.

[...] 'You can be sure they'll dominate us too' [...] 'Except now our new masters will speak our language!' ²⁸¹

During this period, the family had just received information that Sudetenland would be incorporated into Nazi Germany. While many Sudeten Germans thought this to be good news, Anton Helfert's father did not agree. Nazi Germany is portrayed by him as not being part of them, he calls them 'the Germans' and he uses the focalization 'they' when mentioning them. Furthermore, he goes on to say that he has 'got the feeling we'll again be ruled by people other than our own kind.'²⁸² The Germans from Nazi Germany are therefore not deemed their own kind. The implication is that they have always been ruled by people other than their own, Sudetenland having had different suppressors.

"'Hitler has written a book, Mein Kampf, in which he supposedly lays out his philosophy and his goals.' Friedrich could not help a wry chuckle. 'My friends who tried to read it tell me they couldn't get past the first page because it is so poorly written. Still, I suppose we'll have to get a copy and try to understand what this man is about. After all, he will soon be our leader, too.'"²⁸³

He goes further to discuss the ideological component of Nazi Germany in the form of Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*. There is an absence of ideological identification as they do not yet know what the book is about and thus what Hitler's goals and philosophy are. Here, intertextuality can also be detected as *Mein Kampf* is seen in the present as an important book within the Nazi Regime and is greatly detested as an important part of the ideological Nazism. His father is not sure if the situation of the Sudeten Germans will improve, as he finds Hitler untrustworthy and frightening. Furthermore he finds the situation in Germany itself appalling.

The following quote relates to the period in which the Nazi troops have entered their city, days after the Munich agreement was put into effect, in September 1938.

"'You people here have not been involved in the glorious changes and the cleansing which our führer brought to Germany. You will not understand until you have been integrated.'"²⁸⁴

This statement is made by a Nazi soldier who resided at the Wildert family's dinner table. As the Nazi troops arrived in the city, the soldiers were placed as guests in the houses of *Volksdeutsche*. The Wildert family asked a lieutenant of the *Wehrmacht* named Schmidt, to stay with them. When at the dinner table, the conversation turned to the recent events and the Nazi policies. Here, Schmidt proclaims that the *Volksdeutsche* were not involved in the establishment of Nazi Germany and even unable to understand the ideology and manner of thinking. As the officer had retired to bed,

²⁸¹ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 20.

²⁸² Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 30.

²⁸³ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 24.

²⁸⁴ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 30.

Helfert's father makes the following statement about the brother of his wife, who had been conscripted to the Czech army.

"'I'm sure Walter will be home before too long- he won't be needed by the Czechs anymore!' Friedrich paused and grimaced. 'But he'll very likely wind up in the *Wehrmacht* once the Germans take over.' He shook his head as the thought of the irony of it all.'" ²⁸⁵

Here, The father touches upon the irony of having to fight on both sides, the contrary notion that the people Walter fought with, would instantly become his enemies because of the Munich Agreement. While the people he fought against would then become his comrades.

Soon after Sudetenland was incorporated in Nazi Germany, the Wildert family started to notice the more ideological and racial stance of the new regime. Anton's father speaks about this in a severely disapproving manner.

"'I heard that a high official from Düsseldorf has already taken over the Blum villa, and there are rumors that any remaining Jewish families will be moved out before long. These Nazis are enriching themselves with the property of the ones that fled, and plan to confiscate what the few others still own.' Friedrich's face betrayed his disgust." ²⁸⁶

The focalization 'these Nazis' is used to distance them from the community Anton Helfert identifies himself with. The acknowledgement of the mistreatment of the Jewish community, as the Nazis were 'enriching' themselves on the property of the Jewish people, which is expressed here is significant.

The following quotes deal with the period of the Second World War, as Sudetenland was incorporated within Nazi Germany in this period.

"'Haunted by unremitting Nazi government pressure to increase his company's output, debilitated by poor food rations and a gnawing stomach ulcer.'" ²⁸⁷

During the Second World War, companies within Sudetenland were made to facilitate the war effort. The last year of the war, as the German side was losing, high demand produced high pressures on these companies. Anton Helfert's family – the Wildert family – also had to work with the Nazi Regime in this period, but this is portrayed in a favorable light for the family. The implication is that they had been forced to work for an oppressor who demanded the impossible from them. The Nazi government is not seen as 'their' government. This is repeated several times in the narrative. As it is mentioned that Anton Helfert's father had been "helpless [...]" when the Nazi dictates kept streaming in from Berlin, demanding the impossible of him and his associates." ²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 20.

²⁸⁶ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 30.

²⁸⁷ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 8.

²⁸⁸ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 104.

As the war neared its end, the Red Army moved into Sudetenland in May 1945. They also arrived in the city in which Anton Helfert and his family lived. Setting camp near the villa of the family, the family was able to see the army from their window.

“In the meadow below the unconcerned soldiers made plenty of racket, banging their equipment, revving up engines and shouting to each other in melodic Russian singsong. To the Wilderts the noise seemed unreal. The scene was like a Kafkaesque dance of doom – burly soldier figures floating dreamlike in a ritualistic orgy of celebration before consuming their victims.”²⁸⁹

Here, the arrival of the Red Army is described as very frightening and dangerous. As they are portrayed as a ‘Kafkaesque dance of doom’ which points to the works of Franz Kafka, which focuses on surrealistic situations. The author is labelling the situation they found themselves in as surreal and nightmarish, in this situation the Red Army is the external ‘other’.²⁹⁰

4.1.3 Narrative after the Second World War

When the war ended in May 1945, the new Czechoslovak government began to take control with the help of the Russian army. They began to restrict movement of the ethnic Germans in Sudetenland and newcomers who had moved there during the war.

“The ominous stream of rules and threats was chilling, especially the requirement to wear white armbands in the street. These white markers, like the yellow stars which Jews had been forced to wear under the Nazi regime, would instantly single them out as vulnerable, lacking any legal standing and leaving them open for attack.”²⁹¹

And, somewhat further in the narrative, Anton’s father remarks,

“By making us wear white armbands they obviously intend to treat us the same way the Nazis used to treat the Jews.”²⁹²

Here, intertextuality is highly meaningful as the comparison with the ‘ultimate victim’ of the Holocaust is explicitly made. New rules by the Czechoslovakian government required the ethnic Germans to wear identification markers, which were ‘white armbands’, these are compared in the narrative to the yellow stars which the Jewish population had to wear during the Nazi occupation.

Czechoslovakia had begun to expel the Sudetenland region of its German speaking population across the newly established border with Germany. This was also the case in Anton’s hometown and he witnessed many in his neighborhood being forcibly led away.

“Laden with sparse bundles of belonging, most of the expellees were women, children and elderly people pushing baby buggies and tugging carts, many crying silently as they walked.”²⁹³

²⁸⁹ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 65.

²⁹⁰ Emily Troscianko, *The literary science of the ‘Kafkaesque’* (Oxford 2009) 1-3

²⁹¹ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 85.

²⁹² Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 105.

Strikingly about the quote is the demographic that is addressed, the mention of ‘woman, children and elderly people’ refers to their unlikely ability to have been part of Hitler’s army and their status as being an ‘innocent demographic’. Furthermore, Anton’s father proclaims that ‘the Sudeten population was now paying for the follies and crimes of the Nazi system that imposed itself on them only seven short years ago.’²⁹⁴

“[the neighbour] described the mob falling, upon men, woman and children, beating them mercilessly with sticks, fence pickets, and any available weapons [...] The mob fell upon them and flung many into the water, including mothers and their baby carriages. The militia began firing at the victims in the river and arrested many of the men, marching them off to concentration camps.”²⁹⁵

In this quote Anton Helfert described a scene witnessed in October 1945, when a huge explosion at a chemical factory close in the city, produced mass hysteria among the population. This resulted in a Czech mob attacking any person they saw wearing a white armband. Not distinguishing between men, woman and children and even attacking ‘mothers and their baby carriages’. The men were marched to a ‘concentration camp’. Furthermore, when the coming expulsion was still only a rumor, in June of 1945, Anton’s father mentioned the following.

“Ugly rumors have it that the Czechs don’t give a damn, they’re just anxious to be rid of us and get their hands on the wealth of the region!”²⁹⁶

The main motivation put forward in the narrative for the Czech expelling them and taking away their possessions seem to be centered on greed, not on revenge. The main motivation proposed is for them to ‘get their hands on the wealth of the region’.

In his introduction to *Valley of the Shadow* Anton Helfert also mentions some contemporary problems facing the world in the 1990s.

“It is only now, after the unprecedented changes in Eastern Europe during the early 1990s, that this portion of history is beginning to receive some public attention at a time when the and treatment of minorities and ethnic groups is increasingly recognized as an important factor attaining regional and world stability. [...] Unfortunately, the story of the Sudetenland has many parallels in past history and in current events. Supression of people’s rights in the name of political expediency or nationalistic fervor still occurs in today’s world.”²⁹⁷

Furthermore, he mentioned that,

“We have seen mass murder and ‘ethnic cleansing’ occurring in other parts of the world, most recently in Cambodia, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia.”²⁹⁸

Here, through intertextuality Anton Helfert alludes to the more recent conflicts in the 1990s like the Bosnian crisis, the genocide in Rwanda and the conflict in Cambodia, as scenes of ethnic conflict.

²⁹³ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 3.

²⁹⁴ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 96.

²⁹⁵ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 158, 160.

²⁹⁶ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 106.

²⁹⁷ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, XV, XVII.

²⁹⁸ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, XX.

Using the term ‘ethnic cleansing’, he proposes that the ‘treatment of minorities and ethnic groups’ is an important issue, as the ‘suppression of people’s rights’ is happening even during the time in which he is constructing his narrative. He ascribed these events to be parallels to the expulsion of the *Volksdeutsche* in Eastern Europe, them being similar to each other. Anton Helfert also claims that his narrative would provide lessons for the present.²⁹⁹

“Beyond the fate of its many victims, the Sudeten episode is but one more example of lack of statesmanship in settling the status of a small territory or a minority population within a larger nation. The lesson is as valid today as it was half a century ago. [...] The convenient guise of national retribution cannot be used to justify cruelty and deprivation, for morality must transcend political boundaries, nationalism, and expediency. [...] When will we adhere in spirit and deed to lofty ideas we so proudly proclaim in our institutions and memorials?”³⁰⁰

4.2 The negotiation of Sudeten German guilt

4.2.1 Context of narration – Before and during the Second World War

When writing about the interwar period, Anton Helfert tries to deconstruct the notion of the Sudeten Germans as supporters of the Nazi Regime and of them being Nazis themselves. He had to directly negotiate with this dominant idea as both the lead-up to the Munich Agreement and the show of support of the Sudeten Germans for the incorporation into Nazi Germany, discredit him.

He does this by negotiating an alternative subject position in which discrimination suffered by the Czechoslovakian Regime against the Sudeten Germans was the main reason for the support the *Volksdeutsche* gave to Nazi Germany. This discrimination is portrayed as having been used by individual fanatics to push the ‘reluctant’ Sudeten population to the side of Nazi Germany. Anton Helfert proposes that the discrimination his people underwent resulted in the ‘fertile soil’ which Nazi sympathizers could use to entice the Sudeten population in allying themselves with Nazi Germany.³⁰¹ Therefore, he argues that individual Nazi supporters ‘tricked’ the majority of the population in thinking that Nazi Germany was on common ground them.³⁰²

The narrative is distancing the *Volksdeutsche* from Nazi Germany through othering. In the narrative of Anton Helfert, Nazi Germany is portrayed as the external other. Through focalization Anton Helfert states that the Sudeten Germans would be ‘at the mercy of the Germans’, as these ethnic Germans don’t know what ‘they’ are planning.³⁰³ These Nazis are portrayed as the new

²⁹⁹ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, XXI.

³⁰⁰ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 341, 342.

³⁰¹ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 18, 19.

³⁰² Ibidem.

³⁰³ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 18,19.

external 'masters' who would 'dominate them', just as the Czechs had done. Nazi Germany is further labelled as separate from the Sudeten Germans by calling them 'German neighbours', 'these Nazis' and always using 'they' when referring to them.

This distance between the Sudeten Germans and Nazi Germany is further emphasized and legitimized by claiming both an ignorance and rejection of Nazi ideology. The absence of the ideological identification with Nazi Germany is elaborated on while discussing Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*. This ties in to the discourse surrounding this document as the most important publication elaborating on Nazi ideology. The father and many of his friends had not yet read the book which touches upon Hitler's 'philosophy and goals' and he did not yet know what Hitler was 'about'.³⁰⁴

It is implied that people simply 'did not know any better', as they weren't aware of the ideological and political realities of Nazi Germany. However, even if Anton Helfert's father did not read *Mein Kampf* he is portrayed as being aware and therefore doubtful about the Nazi takeover due to his international business contacts. The family of Anton Helfert is put in a morally higher position with the help of internal othering. For example, when others surrounding them are convinced that the approaching Nazi Army is a good development, the family is afraid and skeptical.³⁰⁵ This rejection of ideology connected to Nazism is mentioned several times in the narrative, as Hitler is named a 'fanatic', and is thus portrayed as single-minded in his extreme political ambitions.

The father does 'know better', and is portrayed as aware of the ideological and political realities of the Nazi Regime. The acknowledgement of the mistreatment of the Jewish community, as the Nazis were 'enriching' themselves on the property of the Jewish people, which is expressed in the narrative is significant as this is also a matter of intertextuality.³⁰⁶ As the Jewish victim is seen as being the 'ultimate victim' in the dominant discourse, it is significant that Anton Helfert's father denounced this treatment before anything happened to him. The treatment of the Jewish people reminds of the suffering endured by the ethnic Germans, as they also had their possessions confiscated and their houses taken over. Even more significant is the time in which Friedrich says it, at that point in time he is part of the population which had the upper hand and which are able to take possessions from the Jewish people. However, he denounced this, making him different from the people in his community who agreed with these events and also making him different from the perpetrators of *his own expulsion*. Furthermore, here, he constructs an indirect connection between the Jewish 'ultimate victim' and the expelled *Volksdeutsche*.

The narrative also acknowledges the dominant discourse by mentioning the 'ultimate perpetrators'. When the family is in conversation with a Nazi lieutenant of the Wehrmacht. In this

³⁰⁴ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 24

³⁰⁵ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 21.

³⁰⁶ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 6.

conversation, the soldier proclaimed that the *Volksdeutsche* had not been involved in the 'glorious changes' and the 'cleansing' which occurred in Germany. These changes, the lieutenant proclaimed, the *Volksdeutsche* can only fully understand once they 'have been integrated'. The author touches upon the idea that the 'ultimate perpetrator', an ideologically indoctrinated Nazi officer, did not consider the *Volksdeutsche* involved in the happenings in Nazi Germany.³⁰⁷

Furthermore, The narrative of Anton Helfert also focuses on the irony of this period within Sudetenland. As men conscripted in the army were first forced to fight for the Czech army and then for the *Wehrmacht*. By mentioning Anton Hefert's uncle who first fought for the *Czech Dragoons* and then had to fight for the *Wehrmacht* it shows the lack of control these men had in deciding which side to fight for.³⁰⁸ Therefore, within Anton Helfert's narrative before the Second World War he tries to deconstruct the notion of the Sudeten Germans as supporters of the Nazi Regime by claiming that the discrimination suffered by the Czechoslovakian government was the main reason for the support they gave to the Nazi Regime, by establishing that they were a community separate from the Third Reich, by trying to establish that the Sudeten population did not support the ideology of Nazi Germany and, lastly, by proposing that they had no control over the situation at all.

However, there are a few silences within this narrative. The claim that discrimination was the main reason for Nazi support is partly correct as perceived economic discrimination opened up Sudeten Germans to more extreme political solutions, for example, the wish for cultural or political autonomy. However, this turn away from cooperation with the Czechoslovakian government in the early 1930s enflamed tensions between the two sides. The further political affiliation, pan-Germanist ideology and nationalist notions within the Sudeten German community further escalated assimilationist policies by the Czechoslovakian state. Therefore, cooperation with Nazi Germany was not only a result of the discrimination suffered, as Anton Helfert proposes, it was also the reason for this discrimination. The tensions between the two groups were enflamed and perpetrated by both sides.³⁰⁹ Furthermore, German organizations and political parties within Sudetenland which were financed by Nazi Germany in secret, did show signs of promoting the ideology of Nazism, these organizations were popular among the population. So, there was no complete rejection of the Nazi ideology.³¹⁰

While narrating the period of the Second World War, in order to negotiate the dominant discourse, Anton Helfert needs to deconstruct the notion that the Sudeten German population actively collaborated with the Nazi Regime during the war and construct a subject position in which the *Volksdeutsche* were also victimized in the Second World War and by Nazi Germany. This is mainly

³⁰⁷ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 30.

³⁰⁸ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 29.

³⁰⁹ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 23.

³¹⁰ Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, 24.

done through two instances of othering. Here, both Nazi Germany and the Red army are portrayed as being the external other for the Sudeten Germans.

As the narrative proposes, the 'unremitting Nazi government' forced them to work for them and put them under very high pressure, even to the point that it was dangerous to the health of the father, Friedrich. It is proclaimed that they were 'helpless' and that the Nazi government demanded the 'impossible of him and his associates'.³¹¹ Implied here, is that even though some *Volksdeutsche* worked for the Nazi government, this was forced upon them. The connection between Sudetenland and Germany is presented as being an unfair one, as the author speaks of the Second World War as if the Sudeten Germans were also occupied by a foreign force.³¹² By distancing themselves from Nazi Germany during the occupation, Anton Helfert can claim that the Sudeten Germans were victims of the Second World War as well.

Furthermore, the other external other during the Second World War is the Red Army. The arrival of the Russian Army at the end of the Second World War is notable as the Russians are portrayed almost animal-like, as they appeared like a 'Kafkaesque dance of doom' and as they would 'consume their victims'. Here, 'their victims' are the ethnic Germans, making the Red Army the external other. Intertextuality is shown in the use of the word 'Kafkaesque' which points to the works of Franz Kafka, which focuses on surrealistic and absurd situations. The use here of the word 'Kafkaesque' is made to describe a highly surreal situation, which is a scene from a nightmare and comes close to the notion of 'evilness', however the scene is both viewed as unsettling and compelling.³¹³

Anton Helfert positions the Sudeten Germans in the Second World War as living in an occupied state and being victimized in this occupied state. The external other in this narrative is the Third Reich and later the occupying force of the Red Army. However, there are some points of critique on this interpretation of these events. This can best be illustrated by the silences in the text surrounding the Second World War. There is no mention how other ethnicities besides the *Volksdeutsche* and the Jewish population experienced the occupation. This makes the Czech reaction in the postwar period, when expelling the Germans, seem more sudden and unfair. Furthermore, there is also almost no mention of the opportunities and privileges the *Volksdeutsche* enjoyed while the Second World War was underway.

4.2.2 Context of narration – After the Second World War

³¹¹ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 104.

³¹² Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 104.

³¹³ Emily Troschianko, *The literary science of the 'Kafkaesque'* (Oxford 2009) 1-3.

The postwar period focuses on the context of the expulsion itself, when people with a German ethnicity were driven from their homes and even attacked as retribution for the events in the Second World War. When the narrative provided by Anton Helfert touches upon this period, he wants to construct an alternative subject position within the dominant discourse which is comparable to the Jewish victim during the Second World War.

The connection made with the 'Ultimate victim' of the Second World War is important, as the Holocaust had gained such an important status in the 1990s when the narrative was produced, this comparison with the 'Ultimate victim' served to imply that both atrocities were somehow alike and were deserving of the same manner of sympathy.³¹⁴ Comparing an atrocity with the Holocaust served to enhance the legitimacy of the victims.³¹⁵ Moreover, in this case, it also served to diminish the status of the *Volksdeutsche* as perpetrators. Anton Helfert thus uses intertextuality to connect both victims which each other, the *Volksdeutsche* suffered, the narrative suggests, comparable to the 'ultimate victims'. This connection with the main victims of the Second World War is an acknowledgement of the dominant discourse surrounding the Jewish victims.

Anton Helfert makes this connection in the narrative most prominently by comparing the 'white armband', meant as identification marker for ethnic Germans and mandatory to wear in the postwar period, with the 'yellow star which Jews had been forced to wear'.³¹⁶ Here, this white armband is perceived as a symbol for oppression and hatred. As the *Volksdeutsche* were required to wear white armbands which would 'single them out' and mark them as being a *Volksdeutsche*.³¹⁷

This connection with the Jewish victim is again made when discussing the chaos after a hysterical Czech mob had attacked those people who were wearing a 'White armband'. Victims of this event as well as others wearing the symbol of identification were marched to holding camps. In the narrative, these camps are named 'concentration camps', providing another comparison with the Jewish victims of the Second World War. It is implied that both were imprisoned in the same kind of camp.³¹⁸

Moreover, Anton Helfert also connects the expelled *Volksdeutsche* with a sub discourse regarding an 'innocent demographic'. People targeted for expulsion are described as 'women, children and elderly people' including 'mothers and their baby carriages'.³¹⁹ Here, the narrative refers to the expellees inability to have been part of Hitler's army and their status as being an

³¹⁴Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (California 2009) 9.

³¹⁵Sarah de Mul, 'The Holocaust as a Paradigm for the Congo Atrocities: Adam Hochschild's King Leopold's Ghost', *Criticism* 53 (2011) afl. 4, 587-606 there 592.

³¹⁶ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 85.

³¹⁷ Ibidem.

³¹⁸ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 158, 160.

³¹⁹ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 3.

‘innocent demographic’. It is implied then, that people who had no part in the atrocities of the Third Reich, having not been part of the army, were being punished for the crimes of the guilty. This also connects to the view that traditionally in literature, women are brought in relation to passivity and peace. They are thus often seen as victims and not as perpetrators.³²⁰

Within the narrative of the expulsion, the Czech government and population is deemed as the external other. Anton Helfert connects the Nazi Regime with the new Czechoslovak government, as the Czechoslovakian government is accused of treating these *Volksdeutsche* in the same way as ‘the Nazis’ treated the Jews. The narrative first proposes that the actions of the Czech population in expelling them and attacking them was not motivated by revenge, as the narratives acknowledges this was the case regarding the Red Army, but was instead motivated by a far-reaching greed. The Czech population is therefore proclaimed to be opportunists of the worst kind, taking away possessions from people who suffered during the Second World War as well.³²¹ Their main motivation is to ‘get their hands on the wealth of the region’.³²²

Anton Helfert tries to construct a subject position within the dominant discourse of a victimized ethnic German group comparable with the Jewish people in the Second World War. Moreover, the people that were victimized were often part of the ‘innocent demographic’, being women, children and the elderly. Within this narrative there is a silence regarding the suffering which the Czech external other had to endure during the Second Word War.

4.2.3 The established subject position of Anton Helfert within the dominant discourse

The separation of Anton Helfert’s argument in three parts; before, during and after the Second World War, serves to build up Anton Helfert’s argumentation, the establishment of an alternative subject position within the dominant discourse. The narrative during the interwar period served to diminish Sudeten German guilt for the transfer of Sudetenland to Nazi Germany. This separates Nazi Germany from the Sudeten ethnic Germans. The period of the Second World War serves to establish the Sudeten Germans as victims of the war as well and thus not responsible for the sufferings inflicted during this period, as it is implied that these sufferings are only the fault of Nazi Germany. The postwar period, the expulsion itself, positions the *Volksdeutsche* as innocent victims, which suffering is comparable to the Jewish population, the ‘Ultimate victim’. Therefore, the narrative before and during the Second World War deconstructs the notion of *Volksdeutsche* as collaborators and perpetrators of the Second World War, which makes it possible in the postwar period to construct a

³²⁰ Moser and Clark, *State of suffering*, 6-8.

³²¹ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 106.

³²² Ibidem.

subject position for the Sudeten Germans within the narrative as victims which are comparable to the 'Ultimate victim'.

4.2.4 *The Sudeten Germans and ethnic cleansing in the 1990s*

The 1990s were a decade which saw renewed ethnic conflict in the Bosnian crisis and in the genocide committed in Rwanda. This spurred on a heightened focus on the targeting of people in war or conflict because of reasons of ethnicity or race. Anton Helfert acknowledges this renewed focus, as he proclaims that the 'treatment of minorities and ethnic groups' is now seen as an important factor in 'regional and world stability'.³²³ However, instances of the 'suppression of Human Rights' are still prevalent in his contemporary world.³²⁴

He acknowledges the discourse of the 1990s which deems the mistreatment of minorities for their ethnicity, human Rights violations and ethnic cleansing as terrible atrocities which could be labelled as 'evil'. Then, these tragedies and notions of the 1990s are put into connection with the experiences of the German expulsion of 1944-1948. This connects these notions and these events in the 1990s and the feelings associated with them by the American public to his experience in 1944-1948. He proclaims that his experience can be viewed as a lesson in how the 'guise of national retribution' cannot 'justify cruelty and deprivation'.³²⁵ This also establishes a moral high ground for himself, as he is portrayed as a person who is able to provide a lesson for the present.

This places the *Volksdeutsche* of Sudetenland in the position of being victimized for their ethnicity. By emphasizing that the events in 1990s are parallels to his experience, he is demanding the same sympathy which exists for the victims of the atrocities in the 1990s. Therefore, he is connecting these victims with each other, as being innocent and targeted for their ethnicity, race, nationality or minority status.

4.3 The narrative of Elizabeth Walter and Luisa Owen

4.3.1 *Narrative in the interwar period and the Second World War*

"Near the end of the war all over Yugoslavia, Schwabos – as we were called by our non-German neighbors – were rounded up by the communist government of Marshall Tito."³²⁶

³²³ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, XV.

³²⁴ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, XVII.

³²⁵ Helfert, *Valley of the Shadow*, 341, 342.

³²⁶ Walter, *Barefoot in the rubble*, 1.

This quote of Elizabeth Walter relates her perception of what happened to the ethnic German people of Yugoslavia. This is the same location and period in which Luisa Owen also narrates. Ethnic Germans had inhabited the region that was later called Yugoslavia, from the Eighteenth Century on. Most of these ethnic Germans lived in the region called *Vojvodina*, in the Serbian part of the kingdom. This region was divided into three parts; Slovenia, the Banat and Batschka.³²⁷ Elizabeth Walter lived in Banat, in a village called *Karlsdorf*, while Luisa Owen lived in Batschka, in a village called *Potiski Svety Nikola*. In the following quote Elizabeth Walter describes her village, as it was perceived by her before the Second World War started.

"We called ourselves *Schwowe* or, in high German, *Schwaben*. Because the Danube River has flown in and out of our history we are also called *Donauschwaben*, or in English, Danube Swabians. Most of us lived in the regions of Banat and Batschka, then known as the 'breadbasket of Europe'. [...] Our villages became time capsules. [...] there was no dominant ethnic style, therefore people wore the styles of the time."³²⁸

For Elizabeth Walter, the use of the focalization 'we', 'most of us' and 'our villages' in her narrative implies that she greatly identifies with the 'Danube Swabians' of Yugoslavia and in particular with the region and the village she came from. Luisa Owen uses the same type of focalization when discussing her village, as her usage of 'our village', when describing her place of birth.³²⁹ Just like Elizabeth Walter, she also discusses the construction of her village.

"It was known that almost five thousand people lived in our village and that the majority of them were Serbs and Hungarians in equal number. About five hundred Germans, less than two hundred Slovaks, five Jewish families, and four families of Gypsies made up the rest of the population.[...] The most colorful people, flamboyant in dress and manner, remote from the rest of us by customs, the Gypsies, represented the exotic in our village.[...] The wealthy farmers and merchants cultivated a relationship with them and all enjoyed their distinction from the rest of the population."³³⁰

The focalization 'we' relates to the fact that Luisa Owen saw the community as separate. This community had different ethnicities and different languages co-existing and regarding it as 'home'. Therefore, both Luisa Owen as Elizabeth Walter portray in their narrative a situation before the Second World War where they lived in communities which were in harmony. This changed, however, when the war grew near.

³²⁷ Wolff ed., *German Minorities in Europe*, 146.

³²⁸ Walter, *Barefoot in the rubble*, 3.

³²⁹ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 34.

³³⁰ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 72, 73.

"I soon noticed that people changed and became distant; some were unfriendly. Instead of being themselves, they suddenly became Serb, German, Hungarian, Slovak, Jew, and Gypsy."³³¹

As the Tripartite Pact was signed in March 1941 with Nazi Germany, allying Yugoslavia with the Axis Powers, tensions grew among the different ethnicities in her village. These tensions were further heightened because of the coup d'état by the Serbian military and the subsequent invasion of Yugoslavia by Nazi Germany. For the people in her village who became more insistent on ethnicity Luisa Owen uses the focalization 'they', marking them as separate from the village and illustrating the breakup of a harmoniously multi-ethnic community.

"My father would have to go to war, he said. She was disbelieving. 'it is not a matter of choice' I heard him say, 'it is the law.' 'The law,' she repeated condescendingly. 'Just wait and see, the rich will stay home. None of those who support this political venture are going to war themselves. They will stay home.'"³³²

As the Second World War started, members of the ethnic German community were called to fight in the Nazi Army. In Luisa Owen's narrative, this is perceived as having been mandatory for the *Volksdeutsche* of Yugoslavia. As the war was nearing its end, the Red Army occupied the region of Banat and other German territories in October, 1944. Luisa Owen continues her narrative.

"Anyone would plunder and harass us, just for the sake of it. Some did it to repay a wrong they had suffered during German occupation. Because the offenders were no longer present, the retribution was doled out indiscriminately."³³³

This placed the Danube Swabians at the mercy of local and Russian authorities. Instances of harassment and rape became frequent during this period. The focalization 'us' is used here, to signify that the author identifies with the affected German minority within Yugoslavia and not with the 'offenders', Nazi Germany.

"We clearly knew, for we were told by those in power, that our fault was simply that we were members of an ethnic group. This was something we could not change, something against which there was no reasonable defense."³³⁴

Here, Luisa Owen proposes that the *Volksdeutsche* were targeted because they were 'members of an ethnic group', this is also an instance of intertextuality, as this focus on ethnicity connects both the ethnic German victims and the victimized group of the Second World War, the Jewish community. In the following quote, Elizabeth Walter also alludes to the notion that she was found guilty for reasons of ethnicity.

³³¹ Owen, *Casualty of War* 82.

³³² Owen, *Casualty of War* 86.

³³³ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 106.

³³⁴ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 115.

“At the tender age of four, I was considered an enemy of the people. A Nazi. A word that no four-year-old could even know the meaning of or what it stood for.”³³⁵

4.3.2 Narrative after the Second World War

‘The saddest part of all was that the rest of the world was meanwhile rejoicing. Peace, peace was being shouted from all corners of the Western world. Never again would such inhuman treatment of people be tolerated as it had been during the war, never. Never except in Eastern Europe. As the world powers cheered “freedom”, they condemned us to hell.”³³⁶

On May 9, 1945, the war came to an end. At this point in time, both Luisa Owen and Elizabeth Walter were interned within a camp which allowed for hard labor and meager food rations. In this quote, Elizabeth Walter illustrates the contrast in which how the end of the Second World War is experienced for the *Volksdeutsche* in comparison with the rest of the Western World. She uses the focalization ‘they’ to refer to the allies which signed the Potsdam Agreement, legitimizing the expulsion of the ethnic Germans from Eastern and Central Europe. Here, the allies are seen as the ‘other’. The following quote derives from Luisa Owen’s narrative.

“It is May and we are out in the fields barefoot, weeding vineyards. The guards shout to each other: ‘The war is over!’ They shoot their rifles into the air and repeat their shouts, ‘The War is over!’ [...] We eat our cold soup, our potato soup, as always. We pray aloud. And, as always, I add my modified three-part prayer, asking for the war to be over.”³³⁷

Even though the war is over, nothing changes for Luisa Owen and her people. They are treated the same way, from her perspective, the war and the sufferings which a war provides is not over. The sufferings she endures after this point are not influenced by the circumstances of war.

In the camp Elizabeth Walter and her family lived, many families had to live together in only a few houses, with guards posted on the streets in which these houses stood, imprisoning the families. They stayed there until the early winter of 1945, in this period, a typhoid epidemic broke out among the prisoners, as a result, many died. Elizabeth Walter states that,

“By late fall, the dead were collected daily in a wagon that went from house to house. Then they were just thrown on top of one another and buried in mass graves.”³³⁸

Afterwards, her grandparents were taken away in the fall of 1945 as well.

“It was the fall of 1945 when all old people and children who had no one to care for them were gathered together and shipped off to Rudolfsgnad, a name which ironically translates as Rudolf’s mercy.[...] *Rudolfsgnad* was a death

³³⁵ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 30.

³³⁶ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 35.

³³⁷ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 144.

³³⁸ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 55.

camp, a camp for old people and young children whose parents had been shipped off to Russia or had died.”³³⁹

This ‘extermination camp’ which Elizabeth Walter mentions in her narrative, is the same camp which Luisa Owen was sent to in October of 1945. As Luisa Owen narrates.

“There is disturbing talk. We are being transported to another camp. [...] ‘The camp you are going is an extermination camp!’ She speaks in whispers, I hear her only because I cling to my mother.”³⁴⁰

They arrive in a ghost town and are herded in houses which are fenced with high barbed wire. Twenty people a room and forty a house. The village they must now inhabit is *Rudolfsgnad*, a previously all-German village whose inhabitants fled a year ago. The usage of both the terms ‘death camp’ and ‘extermination camp’ alludes to the same sort of camps the Jews found themselves in the Second World War. Luisa Owen further states that,

“Seven thousand die in our camp this winter, some say more. It is the winter of 1946, and still more people come, brought here to die. People die of starvation, diseases, some are shot or beaten to death, caught begging for food, taking wood, fetching water, trying to escape. Others kill themselves.”³⁴¹

Then, the narrative of Elizabeth Walter compares the German Expulsion to the atrocities happening in the 1990s in Yugoslavia.

“Almost fifty years later that same town would be the first to be destroyed by the Serbs. Ethnic cleansing would become a household word [...] All the world would be shocked by the events in the nineteen nineties in Yugoslavia. But Yugoslavia’s first “ethnic cleansing” of its half million ethnic Germans would still be hidden from the history books.”³⁴²

Here, the German expulsion is compared to the ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia of the 1990s. The acknowledgement of the events that happened in the 1990s is a matter of intertextuality. The emerging importance of the media, as it had also happened during Vietnam War, is also briefly mentioned by Luisa Owen, while discussing the events of the Bosnian crisis in 1992. She states that.

“In 1992 images span the television screen: the faces familiar, hollow eyes staring, looks evading. Bodies, skin over bones, skeletal ribcages behind barbed wire. Live on the screen, all easily put aside with the flick of a finger. I stare. Images of men, mostly, of specific ages, the familiar numbers mentioned on the news. But I remember woman and children of all ages and old men. Still, it is the same game, starting anew.”³⁴³

³³⁹ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 58.

³⁴⁰ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 157, 158.

³⁴¹ Ibidem.

³⁴² Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 102.

³⁴³ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 13.

The authors of the autobiographies also mention the Bosnian conflict as an important event which influenced them to write and, most of all, these authors found a connection between the Bosnian conflict and the German expulsion.

“I started this book in response to revisiting Rudolfsgnad, Kničanin, as a private account to express my experiences, to bring them to clarity. Events that happened in the former Yugoslavia soon after sharpened my intent [...] And now, after fifty years, there is not even a footnote in the news, anywhere, linking the new horrors with past atrocities practiced by the same government to eliminate its ethnic German minority.”³⁴⁴

These parallels sketched by Luisa Owen once again shed light on a forgotten episode of history, one which, according to the authors, could provide lessons for the present in regards to ethnic conflict and strife. As Luisa Owen mentions.

“The act of recalling my experiences was a celebratory act, and the best of my memory was offered to clarify the larger event, the experience in common.”³⁴⁵

They want to use their experience to shed light on the larger event, an experience which was repeated, in their perception, in the 1990s.

4.4 The negotiation of Danube Swabian guilt

4.4.1 Context of narration – Before and during the Second World War

The narrative of both authors which deals with the events before the Second World War tries to construct an alternative subject position for the *Volksdeutsche* in which they lived in harmony within their respective communities, separated from Nazi Germany.

For Elizabeth Walter, there is an identification as a separate community, a community which is shaped over many generations and years. While for Luisa Owen, she lived within a multi-ethnic and tolerant community. Both authors identify greatly with these communities as they insistently use the focalization ‘our village’ and ‘we’ when addressing them. This enables the authors to separate their village from a relevant connection with Nazi Germany.³⁴⁶ For Elizabeth Walter, the town she grew up in was a ‘time capsule’, self-sufficient and without much contact with the outside world. There was ‘no dominant ethnic style’ as identification with ethnicity seemed less important than identification with the village community.³⁴⁷ For Luisa Owen, all ethnicities in her village were united in a single common identity.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁴ Owen, *Casualty of War*, XXV.

³⁴⁵ Owen, *Casualty of War*, XXVI.

³⁴⁶ Walter, *Barefoot in the rubble*, 3; Owen, *Casualty of War* 34.

³⁴⁷ Walter, *Barefoot in the rubble*, 3.

³⁴⁸ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 72, 73.

Both are instances of othering in an indirect way regarding Nazi Germany. As Elizabeth Walter implies that the lack of contact of her community with the outside world limited the influence of Nazi Germany on her people. The assumption is made that an isolated community could not have had significant contact with Nazi Germany and also not significant influence on the outbreak of the Second World War. For Luisa Owen, this instance of othering concerns the Nazi ideology and racial stance. For her the establishment that tolerance was an important part of the village is a separation from Nazi ideology. The focus on Gypsies that represented 'the exotic in the village' is important, as this was also a victimized group by the Nazis in the Second World War.³⁴⁹

Further distancing concerning Nazi Germany is done by the avoidance of the term *Volksdeutsche* within the narrative. Elizabeth Walter names her community 'Schwowe', 'Schwaben' and 'Danube Swabians'.³⁵⁰ While Luisa Owen uses the term 'Swabe'.³⁵¹ Both also often refer to themselves or their community as being the German minority of their country. The usage of these terms is twofold. Firstly, these terms connect both Luisa Owen and Elizabeth Walter to their community and the region itself, as these names are derived from the Danube River and the history these ethnic German minority had in that region. Secondly, the usage of these terms instead of the term *Volksdeutsche* suggests a disconnection with an association with Nazi Germany. As the term *Volksdeutsche* was coined by Nazi Germany and implies a connection with pan-German ideals, the avoidance of the term is a matter of intertextuality.

Established in the narrative of the interwar period is that both Elizabeth Walter and Luisa Owen lived in harmony within their community before the Second World War. Therefore, Elizabeth Walter and Luisa Owen try to establish for themselves a subject position in the dominant discourse in which they lived in harmony and isolation within a multi-ethnic community, separated from Hitler's influence and ideology. However, even though an absence of the Nazi ideology is claimed by the authors, in the mid-1930s Nazi influence was rising among the minority, through the Swabian-German Union. This meant that there was indeed influence of Nazi ideology among the ethnic German minority, these is a silence in the narratives about this.³⁵²

The narratives of Elizabeth Walter and Luisa Owen concerning the Second World War serves to construct a subject position in the dominant discourse in which both authors are victimized because of their ethnicity. Ethnic Germans were targeted because of their perceived connection to Nazi Germany, at the end and after the Second World War. However, Luisa Owen establishes that she and her family had no control over their situation during the occupation. As her father was ordered to go to war for Nazi Germany, he is fighting in the army of the 'ultimate perpetrator' of the

³⁴⁹ Ibidem.

³⁵⁰ Walter, *Barefoot in the rubble*, 3.

³⁵¹ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 284.

³⁵² Pavlowitch, *Hitler's new Disorder*, 65.

Second World War, but he is portrayed as being forced to do so. The quote proposes that this was 'not a matter of choice', because it was 'the law'. Furthermore, as Luisa Owen's father is forced to go to war for a country and cause he does not support, this establishes them as victims of the Second World War.³⁵³

However, nearing the end of the Second World War the Nazi Germans left Yugoslavia and the ethnic German minority began to be targeted. Both Elizabeth Walter and Luisa Owen stipulate that the biggest crime of their people, the *Volksdeutsche* of Yugoslavia, was that they existed. As they were collectively seen as belonging to the main perpetrators of the Second World War, but as they, according to her, did not belong to this group, the crime they had perpetrated was to be in existence, was to be ethnic German.

Luisa Owen elaborates that because 'the offenders' weren't present anymore, they were targeted 'indiscriminately'.³⁵⁴ By stating that the guilty Nazi Germans had left the country and naming them 'the offenders', she is stating that the ethnic Germans were not guilty. Furthermore, the use of the word 'indiscriminately' is also important, as it implies that people of their ethnicity were randomly attacked, without judgement if these people had been guilty during the occupation. Instead, they were targeted because they were 'members of an ethnic group'.³⁵⁵ Elizabeth Walter also emphasizes this point as at 'the age of four' she was considered an 'enemy of the people' and 'a Nazi', even though she did not know these notions yet at that age and was far too young to bear guilt for events which had happened during the war.³⁵⁶

Furthermore, this assumption that they had been deemed guilty because of their ethnicity also connects the ethnic Germans to the Jewish victims of the Second World War, as both were condemned for belonging to a certain ethnic group. This is then again a matter of intertextuality, as a comparison with the Jewish victim is used to emphasize the author's own narrative.

Both authors claim that Nazi Germany was the external other for them during the Second World War, as they suffered as well during this period and they had no control over the situation. By establishing that they had no control over the situation, and therefore separating themselves from the perpetrators of the Second World War, they can then claim that the revenge doled out on them was not perpetrated because of the actions the ethnic German minority had perpetrated during the Second World War, but only because they possessed a certain ethnicity. By claiming that they were only targeted because of their ethnicity, they reject any guilt about the circumstances during the occupation in the Second World War and they connection their suffering with that of the Jewish

³⁵³ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 86.

³⁵⁴ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 106.

³⁵⁵ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 115.

³⁵⁶ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 30.

people. Furthermore, as will be shown later in the chapter, this also serves to connect their suffering with instances of ethnic cleansing in the 1990s.

Though the assertion that Luisa Owen's father had no choice but to fight in the Nazi Army is most likely true, as conscription was often violently enforced during the period of occupation. The statement that the ethnic minority was only prosecuted because of the ethnicity they possessed can be questioned. There is a silence in the narrative about how the Danube Swabians *did* collaborate with Nazi Germany and they profited from the occupation at the expense of the other non-German population. This, coupled with the belief among the non-German population that these ethnic Germans had been a fifth column for Nazi Germany and the cruelty in which army divisions made out of *Volksdeutsche* had treated the Serbians and the Greeks, were also reasons why an explosion of violence erupted towards these ethnic Germans at the end of the Second World War and in the postwar period.

4.4.3 Context of narration – After the Second World War

Elizabeth Walter and Luisa Owen proclaim to be an unique victim due to their continued suffering even after the Second World War, which is for most people seen as the end of the conflict. As Elizabeth Walter narrates that while the 'rest of the world' was in peace, she and the Danube Swabians were 'condemned [...] to hell'.³⁵⁷ Luisa Owen states to have witnessed the joy among the guards of the internment camp she was locked in, when these guards heard the war to be over. However, she continues to pray 'for the war to be over' after this date.³⁵⁸ For both her and Elizabeth Walter, the war suffered by the ethnic Germans did not end on May 5, 1945. This implies that a justification to cause suffering can be found in wartime, but as the war ended, this justification ceased to exist. After this date, both authors propose, the suffering inflicted on them was no longer legitimized by the circumstances of war.

Furthermore, The allies had stated 'never again' to tolerate inhuman treatment as had happened in the war. However, Elizabeth Walter proclaims this statement as being ironic, as the same inhuman treatment was being perpetrated against the Danube Swabians and other ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe. In making this statement, Elizabeth Walter is comparing the inhuman treatment of her people with that of the Jewish community. Proclaiming both 'treatments' to be comparable to each other.³⁵⁹

This comparison to the victims of the Second World War is made multiple times in both narratives, this is a further negotiation of the subject position of these ethnic Germans. Especially in

³⁵⁷ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 35.

³⁵⁸ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 144.

³⁵⁹ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 35.

relation to their experience during the expulsion and their stay within internment camps set up by the government under Tito. Elizabeth Walter uses terminology to describe these internment camps like 'death camp' and 'extermination camp', which are clear references to the concentration camps to which the Jews were deported. Further comparisons are made by the mention of *Rudolfsgnad*, in which Luisa Owen is imprisoned from October, 1945 on. The picture she paints of displacement, taking of possessions, the journey to an internment camps in trains with overcrowded cars and the internment camps themselves which are dubbed 'concentration camps', all imply a connection with the 'ultimate victim' of the Second World War.³⁶⁰ These descriptions made of this camp as well as Luisa Owen's statement that 'seven thousand died' in the camps and were placed in 'mass graves', are further comparisons.³⁶¹ All these comparisons serve to connect the sufferings of the Jewish victims during the war to the ethnic Germans after the war, using similar wording and terms in order to connect them, this is an usage of intertextuality.

Moreover, the claim is also made that the people victimized by these circumstances were part of the 'innocent demographic'. As Elizabeth Walter oftentimes emphasizes her youth when experiencing these atrocities. She also proclaims that 'old people and young children' were sent to *Rudolfsgnad*.³⁶² While Luisa Owen underlines that she was still a child when sent to *Rudolfsgnad*, clinging to her mother.³⁶³ This demographic is often portrayed and seen as innocent, the emphasis on these victims is therefore a matter of intertextuality, in which the authors portray these people as defenseless and absolved of guilt.

The narration of the period after the Second World War then serves for both authors to claim a alternative subject position for the Danube Swabians as a victimized ethnic German group, which can be compared to the Jewish victim but is unique in its suffering after the war.

4.4.4 The established subject position of Luisa Owen and Elizabeth Walter

The narration before the Second World War serves to claim that the ethnic Germans of Yugoslavia lived in harmony within their community, there was a non-existent relationship with Nazi Germany. Therefore, the Danube Swabians are proposed to have not been involved in the invasion of Yugoslavia. By claiming that during the Second World War, they had no control over the circumstances of the occupation, it becomes possible to assert that they were only targeted for reasons of ethnicity, establishing a connection with the Jewish victim. Then, the narration of the expulsion itself serves to claim a subject position within the dominant discourse as victims which

³⁶⁰ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 157, 158.

³⁶¹ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 55.

³⁶² Ibidem.

³⁶³ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 157, 158.

were abandoned by the Allies after the Second World War ended and whose suffering was comparable to the Jewish victim during the Second World War.

4.4.5 The Danube Swabians and ethnic cleansing in the 1990s

Elizabeth Walter connects her experiences with the conflict in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, as she describes that 'all the world' was shocked by the events and the term 'ethnic cleansing' becoming an 'household word'.³⁶⁴ She then proclaims that the expulsion of the ethnic Germans is Yugoslavia's first 'ethnic cleansing', however, it remains 'hidden'.³⁶⁵ Luisa Owen also proposes that the ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia in the 1992 was a 'same game, starting anew'.³⁶⁶ Therefore, the atrocities in Yugoslavia in 1992 are seen as a parallel to their experiences. However, in the news or in the public sphere there is no linkage made between the 'new horrors and past atrocities'.³⁶⁷ Both Elizabeth Walter and Luisa Owen want to narrate their experience to 'clarify the larger event, the experience in common'.³⁶⁸ In proclaiming this, both Elizabeth Walter and Luisa Owen are connecting their experience in 1944-1948 to contemporary events which are already termed as an 'ethnic cleansing', in which victims were targeted because of their ethnicity. By connecting these events, both authors are strengthening their claim that the Danube Swabians were victimized only because of their ethnicity. In doing so, the female authors are comparing themselves both to the Jewish victims in the context of narration and the victims of ethnic cleansing in the context of justification in order to legitimize their claim of an alternative subject position in the dominant discourse of a victim of ethnic violence.

4.5 Conclusion - Anton Helfert, Luisa Owen and Elizabeth Walter: a comparison

Concerning the context of narration, all three authors deconstruct the notion that the *Volksdeutsche* were collaborating with Nazi Germany in the interwar period. Anton Helfert's negotiation is more direct in this regard, as he proclaims that the *Volksdeutsche* were separated from Nazi ideology and only in alliance with Germany to stop Czech discrimination. Both female accounts are more indirect, as they use intertextuality to separate themselves from the term *Volksdeutsche* itself. Furthermore, they subtly reject Nazi ideology by emphasizing their isolated multi-ethnic community and the tolerance which existed within this community, contrasting it with Nazi Germany.

The narration concerning the period of the Second World War serves for all authors to position themselves as victimized during the Second World War. All three authors emphasize their

³⁶⁴ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 102.

³⁶⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶⁶ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 13.

³⁶⁷ Owen, *Casualty of War*, XXV.

³⁶⁸ Owen, *Casualty of War*, XXVI.

lack of control during the occupation, in order to imply that they were not guilty of the atrocities which took place. Therefore, all three are able to construct an alternative subject position within the dominant discourse in the postwar period. Anton Helfert is able to portray the *Volksdeutsche* as innocent victims of the expulsion, their fate comparable to Jewish suffering during the Second World War. Both Elizabeth Walter and Luisa Owen can proclaim that because they were an isolated and tolerant community, which had no control over the events of the Second World War, that they were only targeted because of their ethnicity, which they compare to the fate of the Jewish victim as well. They therefore construct an alternative subject position as victims who were abandoned by the Allies and whose suffering was comparable to the Jewish victim.

The focus of all the authors on ethnicity as the reason they were targeted is significant, as this points to a connection to the events during the 1990s in the United States and Europe. The focus which was given during this period to ethnic conflict, Human Rights and the notion of 'ethnic cleansing' is connected by the authors to their own experiences during the expulsion. This strengthens their aim to construct an alternative subject position within the dominant discourse by connecting their suffering to contemporary victims and values.

The main difference between the female and the male authors is the handling of the interbellum period. Anton Helfert explicitly acknowledges the connection between Nazi Germany and the *Volksdeutsche* and tries to justify this. For the female authors there is an almost complete silence regarding cooperation or connection to Nazi Germany. However, all authors emphasize a certain moral high ground for 'the mother'. The positioning of the *Volksdeutsche* within a moral discourse is the main element in all these narratives. The claiming of moral authority and the way these *Volksdeutsche* move within discourses in order to claim a moral subject position or moral high ground will be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 5 – Moral positioning, motherhood and individual choice

This chapter will examine agency in the narratives of Anton Helfert, Luisa Owen and Elizabeth Walter and how this movement within the dominant discourse relates to the moral positioning of the *Volksdeutsche*. The authors need to move between moral discourses related to ‘good’, ‘evil’, perpetrator and victim. Therefore, how do these authors move within the dominant discourse in order to secure a moral subject position, a moral high ground? This chapter will devote attention to the portrayal of women as mothers within these narratives and the moments in these narratives in which persons act in defiance of their group identity. As within these two subjects the claiming of a moral high ground through agency can be found.

5.1 Morality and Motherhood

The following quotes relate to the narrative surrounding the mothers of Anton Helfert, Elizabeth Walter and Luisa Owen and are examples as how they are portrayed throughout the narrative. Within these narratives, the mother has a special place concerning the establishment of both a sub-discourse of ‘innocent victim’ and a ‘good *Volksdeutsche*’.

5.1.1 Anton Helfert and his mother

When the Red Army was approaching Anton’s city in May 1945 and the Russian army was ‘relentlessly smashing its way towards them’, Anton Helfert’s narrative switches to the perspective of his mother.³⁶⁹

“Soon the conquerors would cross the mountain range and descend into the valley to overrun the region. Maria remained alert as she strained for sounds of approaching danger, ready to warn Friedrich and Anton. How many nights had she spent here in silent watch while her family slept in the bedrooms facing the garden?”³⁷⁰

Here, she stands watch over her family as danger is approaching. Furthermore, when Anton and his family are removed from their home, Anton Helfert also takes a moment to comment on his mother’s disposition, observed by him as a young boy.

“Her face was drawn and pale, marked by the recent sorrow over Johann’s death. The black mourning clothes and hat contrasted sharply with the pallor of her skin. But she set her features into a stoic mask [...] She was determined not to look at Dvorak – she would not grant him the satisfaction of the conquest.”³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 33.

³⁷⁰ Ibidem.

³⁷¹ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 8.

His mother is portrayed as grieving for her deceased son, Anton's older brother, but appears to be strong in the face of the dramatic turns that had taken over their lives. She does not acknowledge the men who drove them away from their home.

Much later in the narrative, Anton Helfert's white armband had shrunken in the rain, which resulted in a Czech officer arresting him. He was to be taken to Lerchenfeld, an internment camp. However, his mother begged the officer to let her last surviving son go.

"Impassively the officer studied the kneeling woman's face, aware of the stares of dozen of eyes riveted on him. With a sudden touch of embarrassment he took a deep breath and said quietly, 'take your son and go.' The audience gasped."³⁷²

Here, the mother manages to convince an officer to let her son go, she saves Anton. According to her, they were granted a miracle by god.³⁷³

5.1.2 *Elizabeth Walter and her mother*

In the early fall of 1944, the Red Army had already occupied the village of Karlsdorf. As a result people from the village were taken away to be deported to Russia. First the men were taken away, after this, women between the ages sixteen to thirty were rounded up and taken to a clearing outside of the village. Elizabeth Walter's mother was one of those women, she was then asked to step forward.

"'Lissi, you better step forward, or he'll take us all' a few of the women next to me whispered. Not wanting to get the others hurt, I stepped forward."³⁷⁴

When she was called forward she was let go, mainly because of smart bargaining by the grandmother with the guards. However, when she had been asked to step forward, she hadn't known this. In the narrative this event is portrayed as the mother's willingness to sacrifice herself for the sake of the other women.

When the expulsion started and they had to move from their houses and into airplane hangars in the spring of 1945, Elizabeth Walter's mother managed to save some of her possessions in order to help her mother out.

"My poor grandmother had to sleep on the ground. So the next day, my mother crept under the fence, went back home and got a few things so mutter (grandmother) could rest more comfortably at night. If she had been caught, who knows what would have happened. Mami was a gutsy lady. If you met her

³⁷² Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 167.

³⁷³ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 169.

³⁷⁴ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 24.

for the first time, you would never guess the things that she did to keep her family alive.”³⁷⁵

Here, the mother gains an elevated position, she was brave enough to go back to their previous house and gather supplies which would help her family, these actions could have had dire consequences if she had been caught. As there was not much to eat in the camp, only bluish soup and very hard corn bread, Elizabeth and her family were always hungry. However, her mother also managed to smuggle food for them.

“Sometimes mother would sneak out of camp, go back home, and get something out of hiding from our house. She used these object to barter for food. It took courage what my mother did. But god must have watched over her.”³⁷⁶

The whole period of 1946 until 1947, Elizabeth and her family stayed in these airplane hangars. In the winter it was very cold. But her mother altered her own sweater and gave it to Elizabeth to keep warm. Elizabeth Walter wore that sweater for more than three years and was it her favorite piece of clothing.

“I have my mother to thank for this sweet memory as well as most of the few moments of joy in the concentration camp. My mother helped me retain as much of my childhood as was possible in a world of hunger and hardship.”³⁷⁷

Once again the mother is portrayed as the hero of the narrative, making the suffering Elizabeth Walter able to hold on to some of her childhood and providing some good memories in dark times. At the end of the Summer of 1947 Elizabeth and her family tried twice to escape, the first one failed but they were saved from dire repercussions by a forgiving guard. The second one succeeded, but was very tiring and hard. During this time, Elizabeth saw her mother break down.

“she sobbed as she sat amid her bundles, hugging her legs, crying over and over again. This was the only time in all those years that I had seen my mother fail to pull herself together. She was only 32 years old at the time and had experienced so much pain and worry. I’ve often wondered how she and the other parents and grandparents did it.”³⁷⁸

This breakdown is perceived as shocking for the young Elizabeth, as it had been the only time in the period of expulsion and flight that she had seen her mother unable to hold herself together.

5.1.3 Luisa Lang Owen and her mother

“The Jewish people of our village, among them the lady pharmacist, had been taken away at some point. Now their property was being actioned off. My mother said she could not imagine anyone buying such things, and that doing

³⁷⁵ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 39.

³⁷⁶ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 44.

³⁷⁷ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 85.

³⁷⁸ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 117.

so was worse than stealing. Those that did deserved my mother's full contempt." ³⁷⁹

During the Second World War, the Jewish people of their village were deported, the possessions belonging to those people distributed among the ethnic German population. Luisa Owen's mother refuses to accept this exploitation, Luisa Owen's mother here gains a moral high ground. On the sixth of October, in the year 1944, the local Serbs took control of their village government, with the help of the Russian forces who had recently arrived. Within days, stories of violence and rape were widespread in the village.

"I knew that rape meant forcible violation by the word we used.[...] I knew rape was something terrible because my mother said if it happened to her she would go insane or kill herself immediately after." ³⁸⁰

Rape is portrayed as the one of the most serious offences, especially because her mother would not be able to overcome it.

Luisa Owen and her family are taken from their homes on December, 1944. They are brought to a very large shed and they stay there for three days. During this period, the younger and able bodied women are removed from them and put to work. Luisa Owen's mother is also among the women who is chosen for this, and they are separated.

"My mother's face, pale, marble-like, her expression set into stone, shows only endurance. Gathered up, flung in the face of adversity, she shines like a flashing sword. She has no time for the vanity of words; everything she says is directly said with her body. Our parting gestures, alive with our feelings for each other, remain wordless, whole, large, terrible." ³⁸¹

Her mother is held in very high regard, as she shows strength in the face of terrible circumstances, she is the shining example for Luisa Owen.

5.1.4 Elizabeth Walter, Luisa Owen and Anton Helfert concerning motherhood

The narrative of Elizabeth Walter largely focusses on the experiences of a young child and her mother. Elizabeth Walter, as a four-year-old, was too young to understand what was happening, forcing the reader in her position of uncertainty and confusion. The mother is then put on an elevated position, as she is determined to protect her children. According to the narrative of Elizabeth Walter, she was a 'gutsy lady' who did everything possible to 'keep her family alive'. ³⁸² Her mother smuggled clothes and food in to the camp in order to make life more bearable for their family and she used objects to barter for food. This took 'great courage' because if she was found out

³⁷⁹ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 84.

³⁸⁰ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 103, 105.

³⁸¹ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 127.

³⁸² Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 39.

she would have been severely punished.³⁸³ Her mother was also the one that provided Elizabeth Walter with some moments of joy within the camp, as she helped Elizabeth Walter 'retain as much of [her] childhood as possible.'³⁸⁴ Within the narrative, the mother is considered the person that keeps the family together and alive, showing great courage in the process. Therefore, the moment the mother breaks down during an escape attempt, is extremely shocking and traumatic for Elizabeth Walter. She had never seen her mother fail to pull herself together even though she had been through terrible experiences.

For Luisa Owen, her mother is also seen as a beacon of strength. Her mother held justice in very high regard and complying with the Nazi Regime and taking property from the Jewish population of the village was severely disapproved of by her. Any who did this were deserving of her mother's 'full contempt'.³⁸⁵ Furthermore, Luisa Owen refers to her mother when discussing sexual violence. Not exactly knowing what it entailed at the time, she did know it was something terrible because her mother mentioned that she would kill herself if it ever happened to her. The implication here, is that if it was something even her mother wouldn't be able to overcome, it must be very dire.³⁸⁶ The mother in the story is portrayed as a very strong and moral woman, valuing justice and fairness very highly and showing 'only endurance'.³⁸⁷

For Anton Helfert, the mother is portrayed as a brave and stoic person in the face of adversity. She kept 'silent watch' over her family as the Red Army was approaching, remaining alert in order to be able to warn her family if the Russians came. Even as the father was ready to give up, she wanted to go on in order for her son to live.³⁸⁸ She even managed to save her son from being deported to an internment camp named Lerchenfeld, by begging the officer in charge to let her son go. This is portrayed as being extraordinary, as the audience 'gasped' when Anton Helfert was granted freedom.³⁸⁹

For all three authors their mother is portrayed as a brave and insightful person in the face of adversity, willing to overcome terrible experiences to save their families. This ties into a sub-dominant discourse of a mother's most important task to protect her children. Moreover, this also ties in to the context of justification, as these mothers seem so refer to the iconic photograph made by Dorethea Lange, named the 'migrant mother'. This is an image of Florence Owens Thompson with her children in a migrant's workers camp in 1936, during the Great Depression. The image calls up

³⁸³ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 44.

³⁸⁴ Walter, *Barefoot in the Rubble*, 85.

³⁸⁵ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 84.

³⁸⁶ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 105.

³⁸⁷ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 127.

³⁸⁸ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 65.

³⁸⁹ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 167.

feelings of great suffering and strife, but also of a mother who is doing all she can for her children.³⁹⁰ However, in the narratives of Elizabeth Walter and Luisa Owen, the mother is also central to their experience and a reference to measure their situation to. For example, Elizabeth Walter's mother providing happy memories for her daughter and Luisa Owen's assertion in the narrative that rape must be terrible as her mother had said she would not survive it. Furthermore, the mother is also the moral voice denouncing unkindness towards others. This is shown in Elizabeth Walter's mother who is willing to sacrifice herself for other women and Luisa Owen's mother who refuses to profit from the misery of a Jewish family.

In all three narratives the mothers belong to a demographic which is often deemed innocent, which is the female, and they are portrayed within this demographic as the 'ideal mother', protecting her children. However, in the narrative of Elizabeth Walter and Luisa Owen their mother also portrays the morally 'good' *Volksdeutsche*, who is the moral voice of the narrative. In Anton Helfert's case, this moral component is portrayed by the father. In this morality lies agency, as individual strength and humanity are shown through these women.

5.2 The individual and group identity

The following quotes will relate to the place of the individual within a group identity, how such an individual can move within the discourse to oppose their allotted group identity by making moral choices. In this way, the very structure of a group identity can be challenged. First, the narrative of Anton Helfert will be discussed, before moving to the narratives of Elizabeth Walter and Luisa Owen.

5.2.1 Anton Helfert and individual morality

"Friedrich company employed a number of French prisoners during the last years of the war and he always insisted they be treated well."³⁹¹

During the Nazi occupation and the war in the period 1939-1945, prisoners of war were forced to work in factories and companies of ethnic Germans within Sudetenland. Anton Helfert's father also housed these PoW's in his company.

"Judge Carstens faced the Wilderts squarely. 'Do you realize that this man was ready to shoot his fellow soldier? The troops have strict orders to behave themselves, which seems amazing to me after all that has been done to their own people."³⁹²

In May 1945, the Red Army arrived in the city where the Wildert family lived, even though there is a lot of mention in the narrative of the atrocities perpetrated by the Russian Army during their

³⁹⁰ Anne Whiston Spirm, *Daring to look. Dorethea Lange's photograph and reports from the field* (Chicago 2008) 8.

³⁹¹ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 79.

³⁹² Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 76.

occupation, rape as the most frequent one, there is also mention of orders to minimize these happenings.

“Seconds later he returned with a young soldier who bounded ahead of him, brandishing his submachine gun. ‘Russki soldier nix make people hurt!’ the agitated man in the brown uniform shouted breathlessly. Bellowing in a wild mixture of Russian and German he insisted: ‘Russki soldier good, war over!’”³⁹³

A few days after the Red Army has arrived in the city and set camp, one of these soldiers came into the Wilderts house and threatened them. However, this soldier is chased out by a Russian officer.

“We understand you had no choice but to join the Nazi party because of your position. But we also know you have always been humane in your dealings with employees, neighbors, and people of lesser standing in the community.”³⁹⁴

In June 1945, just before the Wildert family were moved from their house, a member of the Social Democrat party visited them to discuss the coming expulsion with the Wildert family and to offer them some assistance in the coming difficult times. As this political figure was a member of the Sudeten Social Democrats and had been driven underground during the Nazi takeover, he was now part of the political system which was in charge.

“Friedrich stood silent for a long time. Images of people he dealt with over the years came to mind. He never thought of himself as especially humanitarian, but he did have a simple belief about what was fair. To him, the human being mattered far more than the position or the background of a person.”³⁹⁵

Anton Helfert’s father contemplates this just after he got a certificate which postponed their immediate expulsion, provided by Berger, the member of the Social Democrat Party who had visited him earlier. To him, ethnicity did not define a person, nor did the position of a person. A person could be both evil and good, regardless of the community they identified themselves with.

5.2.2 Elizabeth Walter individual morality

“When my aunt’s only surviving child Anna died of typhoid, she became hateful. She asked my mother, ‘Why couldn’t my Anna live instead of your Seppi?’ I guess that’s the reason they could be so cruel.”

This quote discusses Elizabeth Walter’s aunt who had access to food when they all were imprisoned. However, she would not share this food, even though her family was starving. The reason for this is explained as her being resentful of her sister’s children, who had survived the outbreak of typhoid in the camp. This hoarding of food and resentment towards others who were also imprisoned became more common in the camp as the situation became more dire and the people more desperate.

³⁹³ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 75.

³⁹⁴ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 130.

³⁹⁵ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 131.

“People became heartless [in the camp] only looking out for their own.”³⁹⁶

When Elizabeth Walter talks about the Russian enemy she calls them “the communists”, they are portrayed as not really human. However, when she talks about individual people within this group, she humanizes them, and calls them names like ‘the kommandant’ or ‘the Russian soldier’.³⁹⁷

“Isn’t it grand that they didn’t catch her and put her in jail like before?’ I smiled from ear to ear. [...] He probably had no idea what I was talking about. Or he was a kindhearted young man who chose to ignore my childish chatter and pretend not to know.”

One such focus on the actions and moments of mercy of an individual within the Russian army, is when she talked to the a young guard about illegal activities because she thought he was a nice person. This person did not betray them, as she calls him a ‘kindhearted young man’.

“The new commandant often went and mingled with the people and was very civil to us. Perhaps he had learned, as I had, that most people, regardless of nationality are alike. Some are rotten, but the majority are good.”³⁹⁸

In this quote, Elizabeth Walter’s father is narrating his experience in July of 1945 in a labor camp which had been a concentration camp in the period of the Second World War. The commandant in charge was a previous prisoner of the concentration camp when it was still in possession of the Nazis.

5.2.3 Luisa Owen and the individual

“Everything was rationed, even the nails for shoeing horses. Rations were often restricted to preferred customers. The Birgermeister himself delivered our allotment of horseshoe nails. He brought them directly to my mother with the precise order: ‘These are to be used only for shoeing German horses.[...] She went on explaining to him in the same detached, quiet tone that everyone, without exception, who brought a horse to our blacksmith shop would be taken care of till the nails were gone; of that he could be sure.”³⁹⁹

The outbreak of the Second World War changed much in the village, one of these changes was that everything was being rationed. Here, Luisa Owen’s mother was ordered to use the rationed nails for shoeing German horses. She was ordered to do this by the mayor of the village, signifying a compliance with the favored treatment of the ethnic Germans among the village officials.

“The guard with the hat smiles and says, sounding familiar, ‘It is true, you do know how to sing!’ He lifts me on his lap and, it seems, I am at home in the village again; without reminding me of anyone, he looks familiar, and I am briefly reunited with my former self.”⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁶ Walter, *Barefoot in the rubble*, 61.

³⁹⁷ Walter, *Barefoot in the rubble*, 20.

³⁹⁸ Walter, *Barefoot in the rubble*, 136.

³⁹⁹ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 91, 92.

⁴⁰⁰ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 129.

Luisa Owen has a special relation to her guards in the beginning of their expulsion from their village in December 1944. The ethnic Germans in her village are moved to a large shed removed from their village, guarded by soldiers of Tito's army. Luisa Owen sings for her guards and in return they treat her nicely, and she is named the-little-girl-that-sings. She also befriends a guard named Cika Dusan.

"Cika Dusan, unlike most guards, is kind to us, He does not hurry us while we work and lets us take breaks not just at noon. He likes children and carries the tired on his back."⁴⁰¹

She meets this guard when they are moved from the shed after three days to an abandoned village which functioned as a camp. The guard who she meets and befriends is in charge of a group of younger children like her and their daily forced labor which they have to perform in the camp.

"Yes. Yes, I know, it is true! I was there. I have seen what they can do! Germans, Partisans, Fascists, Communists, Croats, Serbs, Russians. Names. Initials. All. [...]This pain is large. Grown past the smallness of name calling, it looks down on the clamor of clenched fists and the futility of pointing fingers; accusing by name is to it nothing – a clinging to denial; an evasion. Our pain rises to where none or our pallid reasoning, our scorn, our good intentions can touch it and upholds an image of us that none of us can belie. I keep looking into her eyes to make room for our pain. I no longer feel separated from her. There is nothing left to defend between us."⁴⁰²

Luisa Owen and her family are released from *Rudolfsgnad* in March 1948 and they move to Germany, to a city called Osijek. She goes to school there, and one morning, a Partisan woman walks into the classroom. She tells the class of her experience in the Second World War. During this period she was sexually assaulted and tortured. Luisa Owen recognizes herself in the Partisan woman.

5.2.4 Opposing ethnicity, the importance of the individual

For Anton Helfert, during and after the war there is an acknowledgement of people who surround them who are in support of the Nazi Regime. The quotes in this period show the moral choice of mainly Anton Hefert's father, who did not support this Nazi Regime. This period then serves to show individual acts of kindness and a struggle against the Regime of the Third Reich. Thus, agency within the political structure of the Nazi Regime, in which a moral high ground is established. The narrative of Anton Helfert in this period show the moral positioning of mainly Anton Helfert's father. Who, for example, did use prisoners of war in his company, however, he is mentioned to have always insisted that these people be 'treated well'.⁴⁰³ He is still mentioned to be a rightful person, even under the circumstances of war.

⁴⁰¹ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 145.

⁴⁰² Owen, *Casualty of War*, 141.

⁴⁰³ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 79.

This is further elaborated on in the narrative when a longtime member of the Social Democrat Party mentioned that the father had always been 'humane' to all people in society.⁴⁰⁴ Here, the acknowledgement that there had been some people who joined the Nazi party who did have a choice, relativizes guilt for the *Volksdeutsche*. However, Anton Helfert's father is proclaimed as having been a 'good *Volksdeutsche*'. These instances of moral positioning, before and during the war, serve to show the humane actions of individuals within the *Volksdeutsche* group, which were ensnared within a hostile political structure.

Moral positioning in the postwar period in the narrative of Anton Helfert mainly serves to show acts of kindness and humanity concerning the Red Army, as these people had 'strict orders to behave themselves' which seemed to a friend of the Wilderts amazing 'after all that had been done to their people.'⁴⁰⁵ Furthermore, a young soldier of the Red Army actively protected the family from harm, proclaiming that no Russian soldier should hurt civilians.⁴⁰⁶ This constructs the notion of an 'external other' who showed kindness to them in defiance of a group identity allotted to them in the narrative, the 'good' Russian soldier.

For Elizabeth Walter, these instances of morality concern mostly the period after the Second World War, when she was living in a camp and interacting with other ethnic Germans and the guards who kept them imprisoned. Noticeable in her story is the conduct in the camps and how these people treated each other. Here, the people became 'heartless' and 'only looking out for their own'.⁴⁰⁷ An important example of this is the mention of a woman, Elizabeth Walter's aunt, who wouldn't share her food anymore when her child died, becoming 'hateful' and wondering why other children hadn't died, almost wishing they would die too.⁴⁰⁸ This is an example of immoral persons within a victimized group.

Furthermore, Elizabeth Walter also notices the moments of mercy of individuals who are the guards of their enclosure. When she talked to a young guard about her mother's illegal activities in collecting food and clothes, he didn't betray them, even though he was part of the external other. She therefore calls him a 'kindhearted man'.⁴⁰⁹

Luisa Owen uses instances of moral positioning before the war to emphasize instances of individual resistance to the political structure of the period, Nazism. An example of this was when her mother was ordered to use rationed nails only for shoeing horses for German people, by the mayor

⁴⁰⁴ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 130.

⁴⁰⁵ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 76.

⁴⁰⁶ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 75.

⁴⁰⁷ Walter, *Barefoot in the rubble*, 61.

⁴⁰⁸ Walter, *Barefoot in the rubble*, 55.

⁴⁰⁹ Walter, *Barefoot in the rubble*, 115.

of the town. However, she refuses to do this, as she proclaimed that 'everyone, without exception' would be helped at the blacksmith shop.⁴¹⁰

In the period after the war, Luisa Owen has a special relation to her guards, as she sings for them and in return they treat her nicely. They become familial with each other as a guard 'lifts [her] on his lap and she feels for an instance that she is 'home in the village again.'⁴¹¹ Here, Luisa Owen associates the guard with a feeling of being safe and protected, just for an instance. She also befriends a guard later in the narrative named Cika Teza, who is in charge of a group of younger children in the camp and oversees their daily labor. However, this guard 'unlike most guards' is 'kind' and 'likes children'.⁴¹² Just like Elizabeth Walter and Anton Helfert, she constructs the notion of the 'good' individual 'other' within a hostile environment. These individuals act independently from the group identity allotted to them by the narrative and exhibit kindness and humanity.

All three authors therefore elaborate on the individual choices of the external other to act in an humane manner concerning the ethnic Germans during the expulsion. These instances of individual moral choice serve to remind that a certain political affiliation, ethnicity, nationality or other label on a group, does not define the individuals within this group. As Anton Helfert mentions that 'the human being mattered more than the position or background of a person', meaning that individuals should be treated and regarded on the merits of their acts itself, not the status or position which is allotted to them.⁴¹³ Elizabeth Walter proposes that 'most people, regardless of nationality, are alike'. She continues to say that some of these people are 'rotten' and some are 'good'. So, she emphasizes that individuals within a group can both be good or evil.⁴¹⁴

Luisa Owen agrees with these statements as she proclaims that 'German, partisans, Fascists, communists, Croats, Serbs, Russians', were all 'names. Initials', labels which are perceived to be hollow. Her memories have 'grown past the smallness of name calling' and looks down on 'futility of pointing fingers' as 'accusing by name is an evasion', her memories and pain rise up from 'pallid reasoning', 'scorn' or 'good intentions'. Here, she is saying that names that are given to groups of people and the assumptions which are attached to these names, are hollow. Her trauma has unearthed to her that name calling and pointing fingers is nothing more than an evasion. According to her, these names do not matter, what matters is the individual bestowing pain or kindness towards another. Therefore, she feels a connection with those who also experienced horrors like her.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁰ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 92.

⁴¹¹ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 129.

⁴¹² Owen, *Casualty of War*, 145.

⁴¹³ Helfert, *Valley of the shadow*, 131.

⁴¹⁴ Walter, *Barefoot in the rubble*, 136.

⁴¹⁵ Owen, *Casualty of War*, 141.

These instances in which the author rejects the importance of an ethnic label and stress individual choice is important, as this is also important for their situation. It is implied that as their external other can make moral choices, then the *Volksdeutsche* which are often seen as perpetrators can also make individual moral decisions. Moreover, the *Volksdeutsche* have been accused of belonging to a certain group or ethnicity which is put in relation with the Holocaust and the cruelty of the Second World War. Both with the context of narration as with the context of justification, this labelling resulted in them being deemed 'evil' or a 'perpetrator'. By rejecting that these labels matter and emphasizing the individual choices they reject both the justification for their expulsion in the context of narration and their place within the dominant discourse in the United States of the 1990s.

5.3 Conclusion

In the case of these narratives, agency shows the ways in which an allotted group identity can be challenged. This chapter serves to show the negotiation of the authors with the dominant discourse and the group identities the dominant discourse establishes. Through agency, the authors move between moral discourses by showing the possibility of moral choice within these group identities. The appearance of agency within these narratives concern the 'moral' mother which is the example of the 'good *Volksdeutsche*', the 'good' Russian which is the example of an humane 'other' and the 'immoral' victim, as imprisoned *Volksdeutsche* became 'heartless' toward each other. Here, the mothers of the authors illustrate the ultimate non-perpetrator and the emphasis on the external other and their ability to make moral choices implies that the *Volksdeutsche* had the same choice. Through this negotiation, the authors are able to establish an alternative subject position as morally superior persons within the *Volksdeutsche* group.

The authors of the autobiographies therefore proclaim that group identities within the dominant discourse do not matter, as individuals need to be examined. Therefore, they reject the way they are labelled within the dominant discourse, as part of Nazi Germany and thus guilty. They propose to have been subjected to an unjust treatment by both the people who expelled them, as well as the subject position allotted to them by the dominant discourse of the United States in the 1990s.

Conclusion

This thesis discussed three autobiographical accounts of the German expulsion in 1944-1948, in order to answer the question, how did the authors use the ambivalent term *Volksdeutsche* in order to negotiate the dominant discourse of the United States in the 1990s concerning ethnic German perpetrators before and during the Second World War? The notion of *Volksdeutsche* is mainly put into connection with Nazi Germany and this ethnic group is perceived to have collaborated with Hitler in the interwar period and during the Second World War. Luisa Owen, Elizabeth Walter and Anton Helfert try to establish an alternative 'truth' in which this term loses this connection. Therefore, this thesis is dealing with a 'contested past', which is the struggle regarding a historical event, period or notion between different 'truths' given to these pasts.

Concerning the use of this term, even though there is a silence in the direct usage of the term itself, the authors do negotiate with it as there is a deliberate avoidance of the usage of *Volksdeutsche* and even of the acknowledgment of a single ethnic community in Eastern and Central Europe during the interwar and the Second World War period. In these periods the term *Volksdeutsche* was put on these ethnic Germans by Nazi Germany for political reasons and this put these *Volksdeutsche* in connection with being a Nazi. So, in the interwar period and the Second World War the authors relate to being part of separate communities. However, the authors do relate to being part of a community of ethnic Germans in central and Eastern Europe when discussing the expulsion, when this ambivalent term can be put into connection with victimhood, as victimized *Volksdeutsche* by the Red Army. In this part of the narrative there is an emphasis on a common fate, as these authors began to narrate that ethnic Germans in Eastern and Central Europe had been prosecuted because of their common ethnicity. Therefore, they used the ambivalence of the meaning of the term *Volksdeutsche* in different period and encompassing different people in order to connect the ethnic Germans to victimhood.

The authors are influenced by two different contexts, the context of narration and the context of justification. The context of narration concerns the historical events discussed in the three narratives and the manner in which the *Volksdeutsche* collaborated with Nazi Germany and experienced the expulsion. In Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia there were instances of Nazi collaboration in the interwar period and in the Second World War. As the *Volksdeutsche* in both countries developed Nazi sentiment. However, in this context of narration these ethnic Germans occupied an ambivalent position as they could be viewed as collaborators with the Nazis but could also be viewed as a minority group which struggled against discrimination and was violently expelled from a country which they had inhabited for generations.

The context of justification is the context which influenced the authors when they published their autobiographies. This was both the public debate in the United States in the 1990s, important literature published in Germany which aimed to introduce the subject of German Wartime suffering and key historical events in the 1990s which influenced the authors. The public debate of the United States in the 1990s connected the *Volksdeutsche* to Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. This dominant discourse surrounding the *Volksdeutsche* positions them as perpetrators of the Second World War. In this dominant discourse there is a dichotomy between 'all-Germans-are-perpetrators' and 'all-Germans-are-victims'. Within Germany in the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, publications like W.G Sebalt's *Luftkrieg und Literature* (1999) and Günther Grass's *Im Kregsgang* (2002) shifted the debate about German wartime suffering by addressing the taboo which rested on this subject. Furthermore, atrocities in the 1990s like the Bosnian crisis and the Rwanda Genocide served to heighten attention to conflicts concerning ethnic groups and minorities. Therefore, in the context of justification, the *Volksdeutsche* could both be seen as the 'ultimate perpetrator' of the Second World War as well as victims of ethnic cleansing. In both the context of narration as in the context of justification, the *Volksdeutsche* hold an ambivalent position in which they can both be seen as a victim and a perpetrator. The authors of the autobiographies try to use this ambivalent position in order to negotiate the dominant discourse through argumentation. They try to construct an alternative subject position within this dominant discourse.

Here, the term *Volksdeutsche* can be allotted within the Context of narration to both collaborators of the Second World War as to victims of an expulsion. In the Context of justification within the United States in the 1990s, the term *Volksdeutsche* is used as those people in the Second World War who were almost the same as the *Reichsdeutsche* or the Nazis and therefore perpetrators of the Second World War. The authors, however, use the different meanings of the term to emphasize the victimhood of the ethnic Germans during the expulsion, connecting this term to a victimized people at the hands of an aggressive external other and allotting an alternative subject position to these ethnic Germans.

The authors do this by focusing their narrative on three distinct periods. The interwar period, the period of the Second World War and the postwar period concerning the expulsion. Within the interwar period all three authors deconstruct the notion that the *Volksdeutsche* were collaborating with Nazi Germany. Anton Helfert does this through direct negotiation as he rejects that the *Volksdeutsche* were connected to Nazi ideology and he proclaims that they were only in alliance with Nazi Germany to bring a halt to Czech discrimination. Luisa Owen and Elizabeth Walter use intertextuality to separate themselves from the notion of the *Volksdeutsche* and they identify with an isolated, tolerant community contrasting with Nazi Germany. The narration concerning the period of

the Second World War serves to establish all three authors as innocent of the atrocities committed in this period, they do this by claiming a lack of control over the circumstances.

In all three accounts, focalization is used to further disconnect from Nazi Germany, using the focalization 'they' when addressing the country and its citizens. Having deconstructed the connection to Nazi Germany, the authors are then able to use intertextuality to compare their suffering to that of the 'ultimate victim' of the Second World War. In doing so, they are able to construct an alternative subject position within the dominant discourse as victims of ethnic violence, comparable to the Jewish victim, the 'ultimate victim'. This focus on ethnicity connects these ethnic German victims to the ethnic conflicts of the 1990s, establishing a connection with their contemporary time and claiming that the events they experienced were similar to these atrocities in the 1990s. Connecting contemporary attitudes and opinions about these events to the German expulsion of 1944-1948.

Furthermore, the fifth chapter examines the way these authors position themselves within a moral discourse. By emphasizing the 'moral' mother which portrays the 'good' *Volksdeutsche* and the 'moral' Russian which portrays the 'good' external other, the authors state that the way a person moves within the discourse, the moral choices this person makes, can be separate from the group identity allotted to them by the dominant discourse or established in the narrative. Therefore, they reject the notion that belonging to a certain group identity determines guilt for individuals or condemns a whole group. By doing so, the authors both challenge the justification Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia used to expel the *Volksdeutsche* and the place *Volksdeutsche* have within the dominant discourse of the United States in the 1990s, in which the *Volksdeutsche* are put into connection to the 'ultimate perpetrator' of the Second World War and are therefore seen as perpetrators themselves.

In conclusion, the authors use the ambivalent meaning in both the context of narration as the context of justification of the term the *Volksdeutsche*. They are able to negotiate their position within this dominant discourse because of the fluid and multiple meanings this term has. The authors thus negotiate the dominant discourse in order to claim an alternative subject position for the ethnic Germans within the dominant discourse. Through argumentation, these authors establish an identity as victims for their ethnic group. Furthermore, they reject the notion that one can be deemed guilty because of their group identity by emphasizing moral choice within a certain group.

Due to the allowed space and time for this research, as well as the chosen topic of the *Volksdeutsche*, some aspects in this research can receive further research and examination. As this thesis focused on different autobiographies, further research could also be conducted with a focus on how different locations produced different locations and why this is so. Furthermore, by focusing more on the differences between male and female autobiographies, further research can also be

done in regards of the gender aspect within these sources. The most crucial neglect of this thesis what needs to be addressed and will need further research is a further and more thorough elaboration of the context surrounding this subject and the concepts used. Especially the context regarding German history needs to receive more focus, as to give the analysis more weight and coherence.

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