

Abstract

This thesis has examined the development of the remembrance culture and the discourses on *flight and expulsion* of the Germans at the end of the Second World War in Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic and the presentation of these topics in seven museum projects that has been conducted since 2000. Thus the relationship of the three countries concerning the evaluation of the topic of flight and expulsion in its national as well as international context and on the European level will be analysed. The methodological basis of this study involves a historical discourse analysis and a museum analysis modified for the items examined here.

The summary of the political background of state organised forced migration and the historical events ends with a list of the decisive elements that are still assessed differently in the historical research and within the involved countries. Two fundamental points have been focused upon. Firstly, are flight and expulsions of the Germans part of a »century of expulsions« and therefore above all a consequence of the modern national state striving for ethnic homogeneity or can this be explained solely by the second world war caused by National Socialist Germany? This study combines the two approaches and uses them as the basis of assessment for the discourse and the museums. The second point is that in the three examined countries, different phases or actions of the events are remembered, which in Germany have been summarised by the term »flight and expulsion«. Whereas flight and forced removal are the centre of the remembrance culture in Germany, memories of the past events in Poland and the Czech Republic are formed by the allegedly correctly executed forced removals after the end of the war. This different way of remembrance is reflected linguistically in the different terms for the events. They form the basis of the continuing conflicts and misunderstandings on this topic.

When examining the discourse on flight and expulsion in the Cold War, both the internal and the even stronger external conflicting positions and confrontations have been analysed which conserved the antagonistic structure of discourse on this topic. Movements of smaller or bigger groups in all countries that have gone new ways to reach a better understanding internally and externally were rather limited in their influence. Only in the Federal Republic of Germany did a decisive change occur when the up to that time common national victims' narrative was put into question in the 1960s.

For the time after 1989, this study identifies how the national perspectives and old master narratives have continued to exist in all of the above-mentioned countries. The discourse on expulsion can be split up into three different phases. In the 1990s, the German-Polish relationship was determined by optimism, more specifically by understanding each other when questions of the present were in focus. In contrast, the relationship between Germany and the Czech Republic in this period of time was already called a small »ice age« because of the discussions, among other things, about compensations for the expellees. At the beginning of the 2000s, the relations between Germany and Poland and likewise those between Germany and the Czech Republic reached their low as reservations in Germany regarding the expansion of the European Union collided with the discussion on the Beneš decrees forced by the CDU/CSU and the project of the *Bund der Vertriebenen* (Federation of Expellees) to create a *Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen* (Centre against Expulsions). This again strengthened both Polish and Czech nationalism. The eastern neighbours of Germany were afraid of a state promoted revision of history by the initiative of the *Bund der Vertriebenen*. Whereas the German-Czech relationship improved after 2010 following the Bavarian-Czech agreement, the German-Polish relationship reached a new low after the change of government in 2015.

The existing historiographical differences and discourses form the background for the seven examined museums. The comparison of the *Schlesisches Museum zu Görlitz* (Silesian Museum in Görlitz) with the *Muzeum Śląskie w Katowicach* (Silesian Museum in Katowice) led to the conclusion that the exhibition that was opened in Görlitz in 2006 was entirely dedicated to the European discourse of the 2000s and the ideal of reaching agreements. The presentation of flight and expulsion is very reserved and tries to be as defensive as possible by forming a strong historical context with the National Socialist regime of terror and the parallelisation with the destiny of the Polish people expelled from the former Eastern parts of the Second Polish Republic (*kresy*). However, the effort that is linked with that, namely to be equally attractive and understandable for Germans and Polish, is only partly successful because in this presentation Polish commentators see above all a German perspective on Silesia. Already before opening the museum in Katowice in the year 2015, a discussion had been started on the structure and layout of this museum. The role that the German history of Silesia should play in this exhibition was hotly debated. After the director's forced retirement in 2013, the hitherto progressively developed concept was largely modified. Now the national Polish narrative of Silesia has once again more space in the permanent exhibition. However, in many places there is a differentiated presentation of the German past of upper Silesia. The occasional negligence of a bipolar German or Polish understanding of Upper Silesia supports the open presentation of the expulsion events.

The discussions on the *Muzeum německy mluvících obyvatel českých zemí* (Museum of the German speaking citizens of Bohemia) in Ústí nad Labem showed the controversial musealisation of this topic also for the Czech Republic. The plans for the museum are close to the discourse determined by a policy of agreement similar to that found in civil organisations working on German-Czech understanding. Without becoming too idealistic, the coexistence will be presented to the same extent as the significant German part of Czech history is honoured. Equally, the expulsion of the Germans is considered in this. However, these plans form a strong contrast to a not too insignificant part of

the political landscape in the Czech Republic. This project was stopped even more by the civil and political indifference towards it. The plan to build a *Sudetendeutsches Museum* in Munich (Museum of Sudeten Germans) can be regarded as complimentary concerning its basic orientation. The expulsion is integrated in a centuries old cultural history and does not form the focus. The ability to connect both for the Czechs and for the (Sudeten-) Germans is not only desired; it is a central element of the exhibition layout. A discourse on this museum hardly took place in public, and the construction of the house was supported by a broad political and civil majority in Bavaria.

After long lasting conflicts within Germany and with its neighbours, the *Stiftung Flucht, Vertreibung, Versöhnung* (Foundation Flight, Expulsion, Reconciliation) is now not far from its opening in the year 2021. Its concept papers contain different demands and points of criticism regarding the discourse as a synthesis. This European approach has been followed by providing an overview on forced removals in the 20th century. It discusses differences and common aspects. These expulsions will be grouped together with the political background of state enforced migration and the National Socialist German war but also with crimes of occupation around the focus of the exhibition, the flight and expulsions of the Germans. In this way, both the elements of the *Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen* and the consideration of points of criticism which accompanied the first years of the *Stiftung* can be found in the concept. This means that neither should the expulsions of the Germans be made smaller by way of over-contextualisation nor should the other expulsions serve to highlight a special German destiny. In the planned exhibition, Polish visitors can find contacts to their past by studying the plan of the ethnic new order of Europe by the National Socialists, which hit their ancestors fatally, and by the forced removals from the *kresy*. Amongst other things, Czech visitors can understand from the presented context of its expulsions that expelling the Sudeten-Germans is not only a specific German-Czech phenomenon related to World War II, but also a political concept still at work today. In contrast to all the other institutions discussed here, the *Stiftung* also puts a focus on the presentation of current flight and expulsion movements. If the successful realisation of the ambitious exhibition concept leads to an end of the often polemic discussions on the institutionalisation of the place of memory of flight and expulsion, and if the foundation can be a basis for understanding, is highly dependent on its future acceptance in Poland and the Czech Republic.

The *Museum of the Second World War* in Danzig, opened in 2017, has been praised worldwide by the serious press. Its assessment of flight and expulsion follows a conventional and patriotic Polish master narrative; the presentation of the destiny of the expellees, however, an empathic perspective. The expulsion of the Germans is dealt with in several parts. In the room that is dedicated exclusively for forced migration at the end of the war, a rather neglecting parallelisation of the differences to other forced migration at this time leads to a certain marginalisation of the events. However, in several places the exhibition also reveals some critical potential concerning flight and expulsions, for example by presenting the rapes at the end of the war, and the presentation of the ship bell of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* as a symbol of the forcibly displaced Germans. Yet, the progressive elements of the museum's exhibition are to be found in other parts. This can also be seen by the fact that the national conservative criticism of this exhibition hardly expressed their opinion on the part of the exhibition concerning flight

and expulsion. In contrast to its initial impulse to face the German initiative of the *Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen* and the *Stiftung Flucht, Vertreibung, Versöhnung* by their own museum, the topic remains a subordinate element because of the sheer dimension of the exhibition.

In the discussion of the *House of European History*, opened in Brussels in 2017, which for a long time was not very dynamic, the presentation of forced removal and the flight and expulsion of the Germans has been a constant topic. Within the exhibition it can be found above all in a small area dedicated to forced migration at the end of the war. This element is different from the rest of the exhibition because it chooses a primarily national historical German approach to this topic without, however, blaming or criticising Poland or the Czech Republic. The end of this, for many regions in Eastern Central Europe, significant elements of the multi-ethnic composition of the population is not displayed, and as a consequence the chance is not used to present the crucial dimension of this loss. Immediately, this conventional German narrative on expulsion was revealed and attacked in a polemic way by Polish critics who attacked the entire Haus severely. Most critics oversaw the especially positive, inquisitive, and dialectic character of this exhibition, which looks the visitor in the face and provokes his own assessment. Especially in the field of flight and expulsion, this opportunity is not offered, and therefore the chance to adapt this narrative to the presentations in Poland and the Czech Republic is not used.

Concerning the question if and how regional, national or European narratives can be found in the examined institutions, it can be stated that all institutions, with different intensity, are attempting European narratives in the sense of multiperspectivity and a presentation that goes beyond the national framework. Old and new narratives continue to be present, or, in the case of the Haus, to be master narratives of the European Union despite its often self-critical approach. Flight and expulsion as part of the National Socialist and Soviet destruction in Eastern Central Europe by genocide and uncountable, at first caused by themselves, forced migrations are in no consistent manner mentioned in any of the examined institutions or concept papers as a history of the loss of European culture.

Although there is as yet no complete agreement in all fields of research between German, Polish and Czech scientists who are especially keen on creating understanding each other, the coming together in science is reflected in the museums in the way that there are no clear dissonances between the different exhibitions and concepts. Differences in content can be seen in details and above all in what is left untold. The assumption that museums tend to rather avoid than offensively discuss especially controversial topics in their exhibitions out of different motives has again been confirmed. Though this does not lead to an imbalance in the presentation, it does not really promote a critical controversy which is to be regarded as the basis of a successful understanding and agreement.

In the study presented here, positive elements, potentials and deficits of the examined museums have been brought to light. They represent conflicts and misunderstandings, but also ways of understanding in the discourse on flight and expulsion. The political developments of the last years bear witness to the fact that historical-political questions and conflicts within the various societies and the European Union have in-

creased. A sustainable understanding and a common language that does not cover up different perspectives and experiences could not be found between Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic on the issue of flight and expulsion. However, understanding each other seems to be especially significant regarding the future of the European Union. All the more important, then, is the task of the museums. They are ideally suited as mediators and as places of understanding, and, as a result, have the capability to promote agreements between nations and people.

