*hapter Four*

# ntegration and Ethnic Similarities

order to understand how specific groups of immigrants and refugees
e affected differently by the consolidation of integration policies in
ntemporary Germany, we need to return to the early policies of the
ostwar German state – decades before the start of the guest worker
olicies that are frequently marked in public discourse as the moment
which mass migration began. White subjects marked in some way
s "German" have consistently been privileged in integration poli-
cs. Being marked as both "white" and "German" permitted various
roups – from Eastern European expellees after 1945 to so-called late
ettlers from the collapsing Soviet Union nearly 50 years later – to gain
ccess to German political and public spaces without being compelled
o conform to the rhetoric of integration.

During the postwar chaos in Europe after 1945, millions of people
vere crossing the continent, many of them on foot. Two world wars
ad been fought to defend a variety of nationalist principles, and eth-
ic belonging still served as the foundation for national belonging.
After the war, West Germans rebuilt their society as an exemplary
ocial democracy, with one of the strongest economies in Europe. West
Germans forged a new national identity founded on a sense of guilt for
he destruction waged by the Nazi dictatorship and were committed
o making their country both a democracy and a refuge for displaced
eoples and the persecuted. The West German Basic Law (the place-
olding document created in the context of the East-West division in
949 that serves to this day as Germany's Constitution) included asy-
um as a basic right. Both Germans and international politicians largely
nderstood this move to be a way to atone for imperial expansion and
genocide under Nazi rule.

West German attitudes towards newcomers directly after the war
nd into the 1960s coalesced around two groups of people who played

formidable roles in rebuilding the Federal Republic. One group is known by many different names: *Vertriebene* (expellees), *Aussiedler* (settlers), *Ausgewiesene* (deportees), *Umsiedler* (resettlers) or *Neubürger* (new citizens). All of these names describe more than 12 million people who were expelled from former German territory or from minority German communities in Eastern Europe after the Second World War as mandated by Article XIII of the Potsdam Agreement, signed by the leaders of the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain in August 1945. Ethnic Germans were expelled from territories in Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and other states then part of the Soviet Union. While the French occupation forces, not having signed the Potsdam Agreement, largely resisted accepting them, by 1946 the British and American Occupied Zones had accepted nearly 6 million expellees; the Soviet Occupied Zone had accepted 3.6 million.[1] Those numbers rose into the early 1950s, and later included "refugees" (*Flüchtlinge*) from the Soviet Zone and the German Democratic Republic who moved into West Germany. The other group was colloquially known as guest workers.

The question of how we portray the successful social, economic, and political incorporation of newcomers lingers because local Germans in 1945 were loathe to view ethnic German expellees as equals. The devastation incurred by Nazi aggression was staggering. Despite ethnonationalism serving as the foundation for both territory and demography, local populations resisted the arrival of 12 million expellees into a territory a bit smaller than the state of Montana, where starvation, rape, and disease were everyday occurrences.[2] Historian Adam Seipp points out that while expellees thought they had a "clear claim to sympathy" and "chafed at the ambivalent welcome they received at the end of often harrowing treks," expellees "looked, sounded, and behaved as foreigners in existing German communities already facing occupation, urban refugees, and [...] large numbers of foreign DPs."[3] Seipp cites an ambivalent opinion column from the *Main-Post* from 29 December 1945, in which the author claimed expellees were "the driftwood of war, but they are German like us and so it is our duty to help them build a new future for themselves."[4] Ethnic belonging thus connected locals to expellees and served as the foundation for any gesture of solidarity, no matter how reluctantly given. In spite of this reluctant solidarity, ethnic German expellees were still subject to a process of downward mobility due to the conditions of their expulsion and the deprivations of the postwar period. There was no integrative apparatus to facilitate their incorporation into social relationships or the formal economy. However, the incorporation of the expellees is considered to



be one of the success stories of the nascent Federal Republic, and the obstacles expellees faced have been forgotten in contemporary German cultural memory. The lack of an integrative apparatus served in critical ways to *facilitate* their incorporation, especially as many expellees either maintained or were granted access to German citizenship. It is the convergence of ethnic belonging and national belonging that made the incorporation of expellees easier to narrate, and this process stands in staunch contrast to the incorporation of foreign workers and other newcomers that I will take up later.

Despite the differences between capitalism and socialism, East Germany also incorporated expellees quickly and benefitted from their labour. Consequently, East German migration history shares some similarities with that of the Federal Republic and thus has relevance for understanding integration politics in united Germany today. One important difference, however, is that socialist discourse in the German Democratic Republic suppressed ethnic identity in favour of allegiance to a new collective worker identity.[5] Because ethnic German expellees to the German Democratic Republic were simply expected to adapt in the Soviet Occupied Zone in the years following the war, German historian Michael Schwartz argues that expellees underwent a process of "forced assimilation."[6] To acknowledge that *Umsiedler* (the initial bureaucratic term for expellees in the GDR) had been forcefully expelled from their homes would have required the Soviet Union to acknowledge the violence it had inflicted on both Poland and the German territories during and after the war.[7] Consequently, expellee identity was suppressed in East Germany.[8] Expellees were threatened with imprisonment if they attempted to organize based on their identity, and even singing songs well-known within the expellee community constituted an offence punishable by up to eight years in jail.[9] This suppression made it easier to ignore how expellees were incorporated into the GDR. The official party line simply reiterated that the expellees had been rapidly and seamlessly incorporated into the socialist collective.[10]

### The Expulsion of Ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe

Between 1944 and 1950, 12.5 million ethnic Germans were expelled.[11] Some *Reichsdeutsche* (citizens of Nazi Germany) had already begun to flee west under Nazi orders as the Soviet forces advanced from the east at the end of the war.[12] Others were forced to abandon their homes and livelihoods, having lived in the east for generations.[13] State rhetoric in the 1960s in both Poland and East Germany argued that forced migration was an appropriate response to Nazi atrocities. To those ethnic

Germans whose families had lived in these places for generations, however, the expulsion surely felt like calculated revenge.[14]

The so-called Big Three (Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin) each had different opinions on the viability and usefulness of forcing millions of people to enter German territory after the war's end. The United States officially endorsed the concept of self-determination; for that reason, US officials supported minority ethnic groups' right to choose their national affiliation.[15] According to R.M. Douglas, however, the Americans abandoned their principles under the strain of "total war."[16] British Prime Minister Winston Churchill saw a need for what he had previously referred to as "population transfers," and there are many documents that attest to Churchill's support for expulsion.[17] Specifically, he suggested moving ethnic Germans into "rump Germany" (the FRG) as a way preserve the national identities of European nation-states without permitting Prussian militarism to re-emerge.[18] Stalin, perhaps unsurprisingly, was the most adamant supporter of forced migration under any conditions. Stalin had already grabbed land for Russia from Eastern Poland in 1939, expelling 2 million Poles in the process, and had no intention of giving up that recently acquired land to a newly independent Polish state.[19] Instead, he preferred to see Poland "compensated" for its losses by westward territorial expansion up to the natural borders created by the Oder and Neisse rivers, across territory long considered German.[20]

Without the underlying nationalist logic that touted ethnic homogeneity as the ideal demographic structure for nation-states, ethnic Germans might never have been expelled from Eastern Europe. As historians Rita Chin and Heide Fehrenbach put it, "By suggesting that 'mixture' was politically dangerous and destabilizing, the postwar political strategy of ethnic cleansing contributed to the cultivation of a culture of purity."[21] Today, various kinds of European "purists" continue to construct national identities through the language of ethnic belonging, and these identities are on vivid display among right-leaning Europeans who vehemently reject both economic and refugee migration in the twenty-first century.

During the postwar years, then, the expulsions almost certainly strengthened the notion that ethnic belonging determines national belonging. And yet, the Nazi empire itself – despite its racist rhetoric – had been multiethnic. The Nazi economy relied on foreign and slave labour to increase production, and transporting all of these groups mixed many European ethnic groups and cultures – as migration always does. Consequently, the collapse of the Nazi empire produced migration movements on a scale that is difficult to fathom. Migration



studies scholar Barbara Dietz argues that Germany became "the most important immigration country in Europe" after the Second World War.[22] Expellees, refugees, asylum seekers, displaced persons, prisoners of war, concentration camp victims, and labour migrants all entered Germany after the war. Historian Klaus Bade suggests that the years 1939–45 may have seen 50–60 million refugees – 10 per cent of the European population – in transit across Europe.[23] As a point of contrast, consider that refugee movement into Europe over the years 2015–16 saw a bit more than five million people enter the entire continent.[24]

The expulsions were brutal. Millions of people died, and the testimonies of survivors, recorded in oral histories, recount over and over again stories of rape and sexual violence inflicted on women and girls.[25] The sheer scale of the trauma experienced by expellees would suggest that historians view the expulsions as a trans-European event with consequences for generations to come. And yet, by the early 1950s, political leaders and journalists in both Germanies celebrated the successful incorporation of all ethnic German expellees into East and West German society. Contemporary commentators still view the incorporation of 12 million ethnic Germans, especially in the Federal Republic, as a success story.[26] Telling this story of the expulsions portrays the German state as a competent and functioning entity capable of absorbing millions of assimilated immigrants without inflicting permanent damage on either its democracy or its economy.

This narrative of success also stands in dramatic contrast to how contemporary Germans demand immigrants, refugees, and people of colour integrate. In the Federal Republic, debates about the integration of foreign workers and their descendants have been front and centre in the national political arena for nearly half a century, while discussions of incorporating ethnic German expellees virtually disappeared within a decade. How was it possible for such a large number of immigrants to have been seamlessly absorbed into the German nation in such a short time? And why was a similar narrative of success unavailable to foreign workers and their descendants?

### The Arrival of the Expellees

After the war, Stalin's unwillingness to permit the Soviet Occupied Zone to merge with the French, British, and American Occupied Zones effectively divided the German territory of 1937 into three parts: West Germany, the Soviet Occupied Zone (later East Germany), and the land now belonging to different countries (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Russia, and the Baltic states). These divisions separated West Germany, the

industrial centre of the German empire, from a great deal of land in the east that had previously been used for agriculture. The eastern areas, which now belonged to Poland, had traditionally fed the West German industrial areas: East Prussia and Pomerania had been the breadbasket of Germany. Several states in the Soviet Zone (the areas that would become the German Democratic Republic), like Brandenburg, had also been traditionally agricultural – meaning their separation from the industrial centres of the West also profoundly disrupted the economy. The new German borders were thus just as disruptive to the West and East German economies as they were to German culture, since dividing a country into three parts raised many questions about both what a German state should be or produce and who should belong to it (or them). Against this backdrop of radical geographic change, pressing fears of famine emerged in the Western Occupied Zones. The practice of dismantling factories and other industrial property as a form of reparations paid to the Soviet Union also interrupted the production of goods and the reconstruction of housing and industry in the East for decades.

The lack of sanitation, housing, and industry made survival difficult and formal employment nearly impossible for almost everyone living in Occupied Germany. Despite the population losses created by war and genocide, the expulsion of ethnic Germans into the four occupied zones led to substantial population growth that increased population density and more than made up for soldier and civilian deaths. This population growth made the task of caring for expellees seem an impossible burden for locals to bear. The population of Schleswig-Holstein, the poorest and most rural state of West Germany, grew by a whopping 70 per cent between 1939 and 1948.[27] A decade later, 90 per cent of the population growth between 1950 and 1960 was attributed to the influx of refugees. As of 1960, 23.9 per cent of the total population of West Germany could be classified as either expellee or refugees from the German Democratic Republic.[28] The rapidity of the expulsions and utter material lack left little room for a calculated approach to incorporating the expellees. In the absence of a state, it is very difficult to speak of any coherent integration policy before 1949.

The *need* for some kind of policy, however, became evident as soon as the expulsions began. These early policy choices, which were strongly shaped by the ideologies and value systems of the military occupiers, reflect a policy of incorporation rather than the later insistence on integration which emerged in the 1970s in West Germany. The integrative apparatus requires a sense of historical urgency to justify a system of population management that promotes productivity at the same time



that it neutralizes disintegrative potential; the integrative apparatus is therefore highly normative and encourages assimilation to social and political norms. But an apparatus exists in the networks between institutions, rather than in the institutions themselves, and in the immediate devastation that followed the war, these institutional networks had broken down. Integration politics under these conditions would not arise in an organized form. In the years of the occupation, expellees, displaced persons, returning soldiers, prisoners of war, local civilian populations, *and* the military occupiers were *all* concerned with survival and the provision of basic needs. The local population, however, increasingly viewed the expellees as second-class citizens who should not be entitled to aid at a moment when local Germans were also threatened by famine. It was under these circumstances that the military government – especially in the British and American Zones – tried to create measures to incorporate those who had been expelled.

Housing and employment were two of the most important and pressing issues for all residents. Since bombing had decimated urban housing stock, many expellees were crowded into rural areas, sometimes outnumbering the local village population. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern – which shared a border with the former eastern territories – was majority expellee as early as October 1945. Just five months after the war ended, expellees made up 56 per cent of the state's population.[29] Many were interned with rural local German families with extra space. As could be expected, forcing residents to share their private spaces created tensions and resentment, especially when the arrangements put strangers in such intimate spaces as kitchens, bathing areas, and laundries.[30]

Many locals also considered expellees to be a political threat. The occupiers and other elites expressed concerns that expellees would eventually agitate to take back their land; perhaps even organizing guerilla campaigns to reclaim the 1937 German borders.[31] The military occupiers effectively neutralized this threat by issuing prohibitions on political organizing by expellees and through the rapid recognition of the East German–Polish border by the GDR in 1950 (the Federal Republic did not formally recognize the border until the 1970s). During the early years after the war, especially before the military governments returned political sovereignty to the zones of occupation, fears of expellees becoming a radical element in German society were pervasive.

Locals often viewed expellees in more visceral terms: they saw expellees as parasites. A pastor in Lower Saxony described them as "'potato beetles' that devoured more than their fair share of resources in [an] already suffering region."[32] Other scholars have characterized this early

period of resettlement as one during which conflicts between locals and newcomers were driven by "a spirit of class conflict."[33] In terms of employment, the overcrowding of rural locales meant that many expellees entered into the erratic and seasonal schedule of farm labour – whether or not they had previously worked in agriculture. This arrangement forced many expellees into dependent relationships with local farmers. Meanwhile, the speed of expellee arrivals, their rural housing placements, and the subsequent distance between potential expellee workers and industrial centres slowed the return of German industry.

West German industry had survived the war remarkably intact. According to prominent German historian Ulrich Herbert, "only 6.5 per cent of all machine tools in Germany [sic] industry had suffered any damage."[34] And yet, the recuperation of German industries stalled, because industrial centres had no place to house workers. In some large cities, up to 80 per cent of the residential areas had been destroyed.[35] Military campaigns had also all but destroyed local transportation networks, making commuting impossible. Industrial growth was fundamentally mismatched to patterns of settlement at this time, slowing reconstruction and exacerbating class conflict. Housing will continue to play a role in the integrative apparatus up to the present day.

Those expellees not housed by rural families were placed in camps where conditions were dire. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* ran a story about the 30,000 to 50,000 children under ten years of age who were living in Bavarian camps in March 1946. More than half of the infants were suffering from rickets (a vitamin D deficiency resulting in softening of the bones). Somewhere between 45 and 60 per cent of the children were infected with measles. Mothers' breast milk had dried up, and they were feeding their infants as best they could with pre-chewed black bread. The chief pediatrician for the Swabian Hospital in Munich, Dr. Hussler [sic], commented on the conditions of utter lack:

> Without vigorous aid, these people will completely succumb to misery, and a psychic and physical collapse will provoke chaotic conditions (anarchy and lawlessness); because only a person whose physical needs are met can participate in a democratic sense [...] in the reconstruction of the world, which, after all, is in the interest of all the peoples on earth.[36]

Studies conducted by the American Military Government during the postwar occupation confirmed that local populations initially rejected the expellees. One study from March 1946 found that 20 per cent of the local Germans surveyed wanted to limit the political and economic rights afforded to expellees. Three out of four of those surveyed saw



the expulsion of ethnic Germans as unjustified, and a crucial one in four of those surveyed didn't understand why the expellees (then often called refugees) had left their homes in the first place.[37] One military researcher reported that the most common epithet in his fieldwork area had rapidly changed from *Saupreuss* (damned Prussian) to *Sauflüchtling* (damned refugee).[38]

Hostility towards newcomers in the face of such misery arose partially from the suspicions local Germans held about the motives of those nations that had expelled the ethnic Germans. These suspicions included sending only criminals or withholding men. One of the early reports from the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* about trains transporting ethnic Germans arriving from Czechoslovakia to a Czech–Bavarian border town of Hof in December 1945 included the assurance that trains were inspected so Bavaria would not be forced to accept "Czechoslovakian elements" who were not entitled to residency (as opposed to Sudeten Germans, who were).[39] By January 1946, the American Zone already had 1.5 million expellees; Bavaria alone was supposed to accept an additional million.[40]

The German public's concerns about migration extended beyond border areas. The Social Ministry (*Sozialministerium*) of the state of North Rhine-Westfalia (in the western British Zone) also struggled with the arrival of expellees and "illegal" refugees (some of them simultaneously expellees and refugees) trying to escape from the Soviet Zone. The state's position as the centre of West German industry made it desperate for manpower, however, all immigrants were not treated equally. The Ministry divided "illegal" immigrants into two categories: those with training who were willing to work and those they described as "asocial." A report from the Social Ministry described asocial immigrants as "black market dealers of the kind one generally finds in large cities, like Düsseldorf."[41] They argued that it was of the utmost importance that "asocial" immigrants be rounded up into camps that were heavily patrolled by police.[42] Faced with descriptions like these, it is difficult to ignore the persistent skepticism and distrust with which societies treat immigrants and refugees, either in historical context or in the present.

Even as local Germans hoped that the ethnic Germans would soon return to their previous homes, many expellees largely understood that the migration they had been forced to undertake was permanent. Anecdotes from an ethnography conducted in the 1990s with postwar residents who had passed through an expellee camp in Freiburg-Bischofslinde show that some expellees arrived in their new locations ready to plan their futures. One farmer purportedly carried the official

shaded map of his village with him on his exodus. As the village leader, this farmer was determined to find a suitable piece of land upon which he and his countrymen could rebuild an exact replica of their village. The group settled near Offenburg, but no one in the study could remember whether this group had succeeded in their plans to reconstruct their homes.[43] Even as they awaited housing and employment in crowded camps and were confronted by a hostile local population that did not understand why they were there, expellees like these were clearly preparing for their futures in the Federal Republic.

Demographic shifts related to religion also prompted anxiety, as Protestants flowed into traditionally uniform Catholic areas and vice versa. In Bavaria, a traditionally Catholic state, the shifts were quite noticeable. In 1939, more than 1,400 communities considered themselves "homogenous," that is, either all Catholic or all Protestant; by 1946, only nine such communities remained.[44] The British and American military governments also strictly prohibited expellees from founding political organizations until 1948. The policies in the Soviet Zone were especially repressive with regards to cultural identity, with various cultural practices criminalized.[45] But while both locations prohibited expellees from forming political organizations, at least the West allowed them to continue practising their religious beliefs. West German religious organizations played a significant role in helping expellees enter society by providing access to social services and aid.[46]

In the face of local hostility and extreme suffering, was successful incorporation even plausible? In the context of their forced expulsion, expellees themselves held widely differing opinions about the desirability of assimilating to their new surroundings. While many expellees understood early that their migration was permanent, as Yuliya Komska points out, Sudeten Germans who lived along the border between Bohemia and Bavaria had "political reasons to render this border uncertain or transient, even if [...] they did initially reinforce it. [...] [T]he divide appeared more irrevocable to some collectives than it did to others."[47] Many expellees wrote letters to Konrad Adenauer (CDU), the postwar mayor of Cologne who became the first chancellor of the Federal Republic in 1949. Some of them wrote to Adenauer for help finding their relatives or employment, and in his responses, he clearly uses his influence to help them where he could. Others sent Adenauer long argumentative theses as to why the German government should seize the eastern territories, Silesia, and the Sudetenland and return them to the German state. After the ban against political organizing for expellees was lifted in 1948, arguments like these would enter into German politics. Politicians from this era who were also expellees, such



as the CSU politician Walter Rinke or the CDU functionary and later right-wing extremist Linus Kather, explicitly described incorporation into West German society as only a short-term goal, with a return to the German territorial borders of 1937 as the long-term project. Kather's slogan neatly summed up this notion: "Space to live in the West; Right to a Homeland in the East!"[48]

The policies of military government in all sectors were critically influential to expellee incorporation during the period before the founding of the two German states. In the face of animosity, the American Military Government doggedly pursued a policy of expellee assimilation.[49] British administrators also viewed the expulsions as permanent and acted accordingly.[50] The administration of expellee concerns – in contrast to those of concentration camp victims or displaced persons, who were under the care of the International Refugee Organization – was supposed to be a German responsibility. However, many local Germans in bureaucratic positions pursued these responsibilities half-heartedly and did not wish to recognize expellees as Germans.[51] The American Military Government rejected multiple German proposals they viewed as intending to segregate, rather than incorporate, the expellees. The Americans were emphatic that segregation was to be avoided at all costs – a curious position given the segregation policies in force for Black Americans.

In May 1946, for instance, while the expulsions were still in progress, the American Military Government of the state of Württemberg-Baden rejected a plan submitted by the provincial refugee commissioner because it was an emergency plan rather than a sustainable, long-term plan. In this case, both German administrators and expellees had suggested the construction of separate villages or ethnically distinct settlements (Prussians separate from Silesians, for example). The American Military Government rejected such proposals in order to "prevent the construction of residential ghettos (*Wohnghettos*)."[52] The Military Government objected:

> 3. The organization as outlined in the plans submitted, appears to be built somewhat on the principles of separation: separate budgets, separate staff, separate schools, separate sicities (sic) of settlers, separate industries. The basic principle approved by Military Government is one of assimilation, not separation. [...]
>
> 4. No part of the plan should establish a special category within the population. It is recommended that there be no special registration of expellee by the land.[53]

Faced with such staunch resistance on the part of the locals, three circumstances proved critical to successfully incorporating expellees. First, various legal measures that provided financial relief and citizenship rights acted as a relief valve and may be credited with preventing the radicalization of expellee populations. Second, the economic growth in West Germany spurred by the Marshall Plan and the ensuing *Wirtschaftswunder* eliminated the fierce competition for economic resources that had characterized the immediate postwar period. Finally, as historian Adam Seipp has convincingly demonstrated, the conflicts engendered by the military occupation pushed locals and expellees to come together in shared resistance against their foreign occupiers.[54] Against this backdrop, the "cultivation of a culture of purity" which Chin and Fehrenbach argue undergirded the nationalistic logic of the expulsions converged with the ability of expellees to become invisible based on both their ethnic identity and the concerns they shared with the local population that emerged against the backdrop of the Cold War.

### *Eingliederungspolitik*: Incorporating Expellees

In nation-states with some degree of diversity, relationships between affinity groups can either facilitate newcomers' incorporation into society or fossilize hierarchical relationships based on access to or exclusion from power. When sanctioned by the state, hierarchical intergroup relationships can create permanent underclasses organized by identity (class, ethnicity, race, gender, education, caste, etc.). Public policy can play a role in making power relations more equitable between groups. In West Germany, a number of policy and political changes took place after 1948 that served to incorporate, rather than marginalize, expellees into the new Federal Republic.

This is not to say that social and economic policies uniformly helped the expellees, nor that expellees necessarily wanted to assimilate or be incorporated. In the years immediately following the war, many displaced persons and expellees scraped by in the informal economy. They bartered if they could not access formal employment or picked up erratic and undesirable jobs as day labourers. The Currency Reform of 1948 both dismantled unregulated economic activity and introduced the Deutsche Mark (DM) as a new currency. Christoph Buchheim, a German economic historian, argues that expellees were particularly hard-hit by the currency reforms. They were more likely to become unemployed during this time, and perhaps more importantly, new businesses they had founded were more likely to go bankrupt.[55]



The transition from RM to DM negatively affected small savers – the fixed-term savings account decision in October 1948 simply deleted the balance of such accounts, leading to many feeling that they had been dispossessed of their property (*enteignet*).[56] In terms of the shadow economy, Ludwig Erhard, the director of economics in the Bizone, lifted measures that had controlled both prices and the production of goods. As an effect of this deregulation, shopkeepers stopped hiding products away and returned them to shelves: "the black market virtually disappeared overnight."[57] The effect on the labour market was similar: those people who were engaged in some form of unregulated employment (*Scheinarbeitsverhältnis*) before the reform lost their source of income when money – and by extension, wage labour – once again held meaning and incentives for workers.[58] For expellees, the validity of wage labour did not necessarily lead to higher rates of employment: discrimination in the labour market was a fact of life in the postwar period. By the end of 1951, expellees had a long-term unemployment rate of 30 per cent with an additional 40 per cent working precarious jobs. The federal unemployment rate for West Germany as a whole in 1950 – considered the high point of unemployment – had only been 10.8 per cent.[59] One scholar describes the incorporation of expellees in the Federal Republic as an ongoing process of downward mobility (*Unterschichtungsprozeß*) well into the 1960s.[60]

And yet, these economic hardships were partially mitigated by reparations for expellees and those who had been harmed by the war. In 1948, the Frankfurt Economic Council (*Wirtschaftsrat*) – the Parliament of the Bizone and forerunner of the West German Parliament – initiated a broad sociopolitical discussion on various forms of assistance for the refugees and expellees moving into Germany. Ironically, the expellees themselves were largely excluded from these discussions because of the Military Government's prohibition against political organizing amongst expellees.[61] Nevertheless, expellees still benefitted from the process. In 1948, the Military Government began to work on the *Soforthilfegesetz*, or the Social Need Act, as drafted by the Economic Council. The law first took effect in August 1949, after the Federal Republic of Germany was founded. The *Soforthilfegesetz* provided a monthly pension of 70 DM to expellees, many of whom were also entitled to other forms of social aid.[62] Multiple scholars have described the *Soforthilfegesetz* as a release valve for social and psychological pressures among the expellee population, effectively eliminating the threat of radicalization.[63] Against the backdrop of the currency reform, however, this aid can also be read as a countermeasure to offset the negative economic environment for expellees.

Further policy changes initiated by the West German Parliament used financial benefit programs both to establish the new government's legitimacy and to minimize the threat of political radicalization. After the founding of the Federal Republic, Parliament replaced the *Soforthilfegesetz* with the *Lastenausgleichgesetz* of 1952, a massive, 400-paragraph legislative act that provided scaffolded levels of compensation for damages caused by the war. Not just expellees, but those who had lost their possessions or health due to bombs or violence, late-returning prisoners of war, refugees from the Soviet Zone, or those (with some limitations) who had been harmed by the currency reforms of 1948 could be granted individual subsidies – according to the text of the law – in the name of "social justice and economic opportunity."[64] Claimants could request compensation for up to 95 per cent of documented losses up to 5,000 *Reichsmark* with diminishing rates above that, topping off at 6.5 per cent of documented losses above 1 million RM.[65] Elderly persons and those unable to work were also afforded a pension as a way of extending some of the benefits of the *Soforthilfegesetz* to other groups in need.[66] Over the decades, this system of reparations paid more than 146 billion DM to those harmed by the war, including expellees. While one German scholar notes that "no one got rich" off their government payments, the measure is frequently invoked as an example of how the government used reparations to incorporate expellees into German society:

> In this way, the program of recompensation (*Lastenausgleich*) – above and beyond its economic significance – strongly contributed to constituting the sociopolitical legitimacy in postwar Germany that became extraordinarily meaningful in the face of the decline of the traditionally nationalistic [*nationalstaatlich*] mechanisms of integration.[67]

A fledgling democracy requires trust in the democratic process, but national pride could no longer provide the foundation for such trust in the aftermath of the Holocaust. The success of the *Lastenausgleich* encouraged Germans – new and longtime residents alike – to develop a sense of economic trust in their national government, thereby minimizing the threat of political radicalization.[68] When compared to the economic polarization pervasive across Europe today, the *Lastenausgleich* seems radical in its redistributive politics.

Robust economic growth was an important factor in the expellees' incorporation into German society. In fact, many the subsidies included in the *Lastenausgleich* were classified under the heading of *Eingliederungsdarlehen*, rather clumsily translated as "settling-in loans" or,



more technically, as "incorporation loans." *Eingliederung* can be translated as "integration" or "incorporation" and was the preferred public policy term in the 1950s for what sociologists would call the systemic and social integration of expellees.[69] Economic stability makes willing participation in nearly any system more likely. In this vein, the Cold War likely contributed to a geopolitical climate in which West Germany benefitted both from the presence of US soldiers and from a defence industry that promoted economic growth.

In most locales in postwar Germany, local business owners decided which new businesses would be approved through municipal administrations that asked the local business owners to approve new businesses in their branch. As Ute Gerhardt and Birgitta Hohenester explain, this practice "systematically disenfranchised expellees and refugees and promoted locals," presumably by giving business owners the right to refuse the establishment of new businesses that could represent a competitive threat.[70] The American Military Government eventually declared – by decree – that starting in 1949, every state in the American Zone would permit free enterprise. New businesses emerged immediately in a period of drastic expansion, many owned and operated by expellees. In Bavaria alone, the number of businesses registered between the last quarter of 1948 and the first quarter of 1949 grew from 1,940 to 55,791.[71] The so-called Economic Miracle (*Wirtschaftswunder*) in the 1950s, largely driven by the Marshall Plan and later by the so-called Korea Boom due to the Korean War, accelerated expellee incorporation by producing wealth that could be shared across the German population and that promoted the emergence of a growing middle-class.[72] As Herbert so clearly articulates: "without the economic miracle, the integration of the refugees and *Ostvertriebene* would have been impossible; without the additional labor they provided, the economic miracle itself would have been an impossibility."[73]

As the military occupation of Germany came to an end, American troops didn't leave. Instead, the Korean War prompted the United States to expand its base operations in Germany and attempt to requisition even more land and extant buildings. These requisitions posed a threat to local businesses and farms. Seipp argues that the Korean War prompted locals and expellees in Hessen and Bavaria to find common cause by positioning themselves against a common foe: the American military. Expellees in particular were supposed to be protected by the German government and balked at the thought of being removed from their homes a *second* time.[74] These examples suggest that Germans of all backgrounds were frustrated by the continued presence of military "outsiders" and eventually worked together to protect their

shared interests. As reparations and economic growth moved more locals and expellees alike into the middle class, and military occupiers became more of a nuisance for all German residents, the incorporation of expellees became both more likely and more common. Economic stability and solidarity with local populations, however, was only part of the puzzle. Expellees' access to citizenship and full political participation was also critical for incorporating them into every aspect of national life.

## Citizenship, Political Participation, and Full Incorporation

It is impossible to *over*estimate how important citizenship rights are to immigrants. Expellees' rapid access to German citizenship – and with it, the right to participate in the political process – had long-lasting and positive consequences for the expellees' incorporation into both the West German state and German society. Although this fact should be obvious, it bears repeating: the essential benefit of citizenship is suffrage. Exercising the right to vote is both a civic duty and a privilege – and a basic requirement for social stability and just political representation in multicultural societies. Expellees who were German citizens exercised their right to vote from the very beginning of West Germany's history as a democracy, often in ways that affected the postwar political landscape. German political leaders soon came to understand that the expellee vote and expellee candidates could change a political party's fortunes.

The unique conditions of occupation after the end of the Second World War included some unfinished business when it came to territorial borders, with consequences for the boundaries of German citizenship. When the two German states were founded in 1949, the border between the German Democratic Republic and Poland had not yet been established. Technically, Poland had only been given the right to *administer* the eastern states – not to incorporate them into the Polish state. But this technicality quickly dissolved after the founding of the East German state. The German Democratic Republic recognized the Polish-East German border along the Oder-Neiße line hastily in 1950. The Federal Republic, however, refused to recognize the German Democratic Republic as a state until Chancellor Willy Brandt's famous genuflection before the Warsaw Ghetto in 1970. The open question as to Germany's territorial borders – and consequently, who should be a German citizen – was thus written into the founding documents of the Federal Republic. The West Germans viewed the Federal Republic as the only legitimate German state and drafted a so-called Basic Law



rather than a constitution – a gesture that was supposed to prepare for the eventual incorporation of the Soviet Occupied Zone into the Federal Republic. The German Democratic Republic, as a Soviet satellite state, had no such plans.

Interestingly, the founding documents of both German states relied on the same definition of citizenship: the 1913 Nationality Law of the German Empire and States. This law defined future German citizenship through the principle of *jus sanguinis*, or bloodline descent, which linked ethnic identity to national belonging. As political scientists Karen Schönwälder and Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos argue, the 1913 definition of who was "German" had been explicitly designed to exclude Poles and Jewish people from citizenship in the early twentieth century.[75] When both German states reverted to the 1913 law after the war, it effectively created two countries – the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany – that shared a single definition of citizenship. In 1960, for example, East and West Germans competed together as a single national team in the Olympic Games on the premise that they held a shared citizenship as Germans.[76]

The construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 separated the two countries and prohibited freedom of movement for East Germans. But it wasn't until 1967 that the East German government created a unique and limited category of citizenship in the German Democratic Republic.[77] For the first fifteen years after the war, the idea of "one German citizenship," defined by a shared German ethnicity, had been a political reality for two separate German states.

This historical artefact (that both German states could share citizenship) later facilitated the rapid unification of the two German states in 1990. Decades earlier, this logic of blood citizenship had accelerated the incorporation of ethnic German expellees into the postwar German states. The *Bundesvertriebenengesetz* (Federal Law on Expellees and Refugees) of 1953 granted citizenship to those persons of German descent who had been driven from their homes or subjected to persecution in the Eastern Bloc, made refugees who had been expelled *from* Germany after 1933 eligible to reacquire German citizenship, and made expellee status (and eligibility for benefits) inheritable. In the 1990s, this understanding of ethnic citizenship also permitted rapid naturalization of immigrants from Eastern Europe who had all but lost their connection to German culture – but could still prove ethnic German descent.

Ethnic German expellees certainly faced challenges in adjusting to their new lives – but for most, the fight to acquire citizenship was not one of them.[78] The majority of expellees from East Prussia, Silesia, or other territories east of the Oder-Neisse line who had lived within the

boundaries of the German state in 1937 maintained their German citizenship, despite being forced from their homes. Even as local Germans questioned this sense of belonging, the expellees claimed their rights as citizens. In 1947, the Informational Control Division of the US Military found in a survey that only 55 per cent of the locals viewed expellees as citizens, while 88 per cent of expellees in that same survey reported that they *felt* like citizens of Germany.[79]

For different reasons, ethnic German expellees were quickly incorporated into the polity of both German states. In the case of the German Democratic Republic, however, it is difficult to trace exactly how that process of incorporation played out. Between the suppression of demographic information about expellees, the prohibition against identity-based politicking, and one-party rule, expellees do not usually appear as a group with a unique political identity in discussions of East German national belonging. Thus, by necessity, the remainder of my discussion of how expellees came to be incorporated into the German state focuses on the West German case.

By the mid-1950s, public and political opinion in West Germany generally considered expellees to have been successfully incorporated into German society. The myth of rapid and complete "integration" of *Vertriebene* was politically motivated: the West German state's ability to assimilate expellees was proof that it was a functional democracy that could be trusted to rule its own affairs after years of military occupation and limited sovereignty. Given those stakes, it was politically expedient, if not necessary, to smooth over any integrative difficulties faced by expellees in the 1950s. At least through the mid-1970s, researchers had limited opportunities to question this narrative: many historical and administrative documents were sealed for periods of 30 years as a matter of course.[80] In East Germany, communist ideology actively suppressed not only qualitative and interpretive social science research but also any identity-based movements that could have underscored and perpetuated social differences.[81]

It was only in the 1980s that researchers working in West Germany brought to light some of the difficulties that expellees faced in achieving full incorporation. Sociologist Paul Lüttinger, for instance, showed how expellees continued to fare worse than locals into the 1970s, especially when it came to home ownership, professional status, and educational achievements.[82] German historian Ulrich Herbert also argues that expellee incorporation was – at the very least – uneven. Considerable regional differences "led to a very uneven areal distribution of the various problems" that appeared in incorporating "the uprooted Germans from Eastern Europe."[83]



Invisibility can have both positive and negative effects. The documented financial and educational downward mobility of expellee populations in the early decades of the Federal Republic show that the claim that expellees were rapidly and successfully incorporated into the economy and structure of West German society is at least partially a myth.[84] At the same time, high rates of intermarriage suggest that the expellees *were* rapidly absorbed into broader German society.[85] Some estimates posit that nearly one quarter of the contemporary German population are direct descendants of expellees – a massive proportion of citizens who today are likely to identify simply as "German."[86]

For a certain kind of identity-based analysis, the relative invisibility of expellees, due to their lack of visible ethnic or racial difference, could be a considered an act of sociopolitical erasure that carries a negative connotation. At the same time, the cultural refrain that expellees were rapidly and successfully integrated into German society prevented discourses that portrayed the group as potentially resurgent Nazis, "parasites," competitors, or outsiders from persisting in mainstream discourse beyond a brief period following arrival. Over time, expellees blended into the broader population. Expellees needed policies to facilitate their incorporation into the Federal Republic, but a long-term and expansive integrative apparatus based on the notion of their difference did not emerge, in part because they entered the political sphere early on and were easily incorporated into a national identity category marked as "German." From the perspective of the present, this appears to be a luxury based on the intersection of ethnic German whiteness and the historical consequences of the reversion to the 1913 citizenship categories, as well as a sense of national belonging that existed in a single German citizenship across both German states until 1967. This luxury has not been afforded to foreign workers, their descendants, or contemporary immigrants and refugees.