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Between Myth and Reality: *Heimat* in Space and Time

1. Introduction

While globalization was meant to ease the free flow of goods and capital across the world, most of us did not realize that the removal of international trade barriers would also drive millions of people from their homes, people whose livelihood had been swept away by market forces beyond their control. If we add to these all the people displaced by war and climate change,¹ it is not surprising to see communities in western industrial nations, after centuries of experiencing relative ethnic and cultural homogeneity, suddenly confronted with an influx of people of different looks, religions, cultures, and customs. If moreover the host population, for various reasons concrete or perceived, feels discriminated within its own ethnic group, all ingredients for an explosive mix of fear, anger, and hatred are in place.

This is what we are witnessing currently in various corners of the world, notably in Europe. In Germany, foremost in the east, nationalist reactionary movements such as the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party have been successful in appealing to their followers' cultural heritage, based on birthplace, ethnicity, and religion—criteria that patently exclude most foreign immigrants. This is not to say that 30 percent of East Germans are inherently racist, antisemitic, or xenophobic, but rather that their frustrations over having been disadvantaged and neglected over the last 30 years since unification, despite grandiose promises by the West German government, are being channeled toward immigrants, the new scapegoats. Even in prosperous Bavaria, overwhelmingly Catholic and steeped in folkloristic tradition, the right of non-Bavarian Germans to move there is being questioned.² Until recently, the state was politically dominated by the center-right CSU

(Christian Socialist Union) party, a sibling of the (still) leading Christian Democrats in the rest of Germany. Franz-Josef Strauss, the party's revered party leader of some 60 years ago, once proclaimed that the CSU would never be overtaken on the right. Today, however, he would be surprised to witness the AfD lure more and more voters away from the CSU, posing a serious threat to the almost monarchical leadership of the old conservatives. In response, the CSU, in an attempt to co-opt the AfD's agenda, has espoused a number of xenophobic viewpoints shrouded in vague political double-speak in order not to lose its center base, and this on top of the creation in 2014 of a new state agency for finance and homeland (*Staatsministerium der Finanzen und für Heimat*).³

Although Germany, flush with money and short of labor, initially welcomed the immigrants, the mood quickly changed when the NIMBY (not in my backyard) principle could no longer be upheld—foreigners simply showed up everywhere, one could no longer keep them out of sight. The perfect storm of reawakened nationalism, cultural elitism, religious intolerance, and plain xenophobia could no longer be staved off. Older Germans who had been convinced that the “Aryan” past has been expunged once and for all could not believe their ears and eyes.

We surely have gathered by now that the catchword dominating the heated public discourse is *Heimat* or, vaguely translated, “homeland.” In their party propaganda, both AfD and CSU have *Heimat* reserved for the white and blond, for church steeples, and for folkloristic *Gemütlichkeit* in traditional folk costumes—no minarets here, no hijabs, and no garlic smells wafting through our village streets.⁴ Again, bowing to rightist pressure, Horst Seehofer, former head of the CSU and now Federal Secretary of the Interior, lobbied for a new *Bundesministerium des Innern für Bau und Heimat*, or agency for regional planning and homeland, responsible for all of Germany. The request was granted by parliament in 2018.

Knowingly or not, these politicians and their followers ignore one simple fact: *Heimat* does not exist. It never has existed.

2. What is *Heimat*?

To explain, let us briefly go back as far as the beginnings of civilization. It all started with space. Space filled with physical features provides humans with the biological and material framework that sustains life. From times immemorial, human life has revolved around the management of space. Indeed, all aspects of life—food, shelter, work, leisure, interpersonal contacts, social arrangements—are dictated by the relationship between the individual and his⁵ surroundings. The simple act of breathing (as exquisitely expressed

in a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke⁶) can be seen as the most fundamental interaction, timed by its rhythm, of living beings with their surrounding space. The space—small or great—which is determined by a person's range of action and movement, may be called that person's individual sphere.

Since most humans do not live in isolation but in communities, their spheres necessarily intersect. Thus, in order to prevent internal conflict and to ensure the survival of the group, these contacts, or interactions, are subject to agreements and conventions which are handed down from old to young, from generation to generation, creating a sort of covenant that ultimately frames the way in which the members of the community think and feel. This is why certain social assumptions that mark a particular group—such as respect for the elders—assume axiomatic significance. Each community tends to have its own specific way of dealing with the great questions of life—animistic beliefs, mythical constructs, or teachings of salvation (as espoused by most modern religions). In all these interactions and negotiations, space experienced over time remains the principal agent.

The most concrete expression of space for the traditional peasant is the land, which has an undisputable hold over virtually every facet of life. To call the human-land relationship a symbiosis, though, would be a mistake because the land can very well get by without human husbandry. It is man that depends on the land, not the reverse. In *The Land Remembers*, his iconic paean to the Wisconsin farm where he grew up, Ben Logan takes issue with the frontier idea of settling land waiting for cultivation:

When the settlers began to come from the East to what is now Wisconsin, they called it "new land." The words reveal so well the arrogance and shortsightedness of man. We think of new land as land not yet conquered by us in our restless and destructive search across the planet earth.

It was not new land. For millions of years before any man left his tracks in the hills, valleys, and plains of Wisconsin, that land, with its rich multitude of plants and animals, was a successful, on-going ecological process. (278)

However, through the input of his work and energy, the peasant transforms the land into a culture that, left unattended, sooner or later returns to its original state. This constant threat of "abandonment" makes the peasant think that the land—in the form in which it serves him as provider of sustenance—depends on him. Once the peasant has transformed wilderness into fields and pastures, he views himself as the steward of the land, and as such indispensable. He is not only tied to "his" land, he has become a

part of it. Land, in its cultivated form, then, and peasant are interdependent. The land (and all that belongs to it—farm buildings, animals, family) has so deeply permeated the farmer's everyday existence that he feels one with it.

Just as man cultivates the land by coaxing it into increased food production, the land cultivates⁷ man, not only by providing him with food but also by instilling in him a sense of purpose tempered by success and failure. This experience, accruing year after year, provides the seed for knowledge and, ultimately, culture, defined in this context as the endowment of one's environment with meaning. No one has explored and explained this fundamental relationship more thoroughly and convincingly than Simon Schama in his magisterial work, *Landscape and Memory*.

2.1. International and Historical Context

While Schama's investigation involves research around the globe and can thus be applied to humanity in general, others maintain that *Heimat*, defined as the natural environment endowed with meaning, refers to an exclusively German experience. Indeed, the corresponding terms in other languages (e.g., "homeland" or "native land" in English, "lieu d'origine" or "pays natal" in French, "patria" or "paese natale" in Italian, "país natal" or "país de origen" in Spanish, "jiāyúán" [country where you were born] in Chinese) generally refer to the place of birth, without the emotional and cultural connotations attached to the German term. (Russian may claim an exception, with its endearing "rodina strana" referring to the motherland.) Can Germans therefore claim a special, "German," relationship to the environment that is somehow different from that of others? No doubt, the last two centuries provide more than enough reasons, if not explosive material (*Sprengstoff*), to challenge the legitimacy of this question. Throughout that period, though, the notion of *Heimat* shifted within different contexts, depending on the politics of the day.

Beginning with the Napoleonic Wars, the term has served changing political purposes. First, it was appropriated by francophobic nationalists at a time when most of "Germany"—still hundreds of sovereign small states dotting the central European map—strained under French occupation. At the same time, it served as the *Leitmotiv* of German Romanticism, reaching back in time to the Middle Ages, before it was taken over by local chauvinists who insisted on the exceptionality of their home region. The adoption of the designation *Heimat* by the Prussian bureaucracy for issuing identity documents, certificates, and inheritance papers marks the mainstreaming of the term during the middle of the 19th century. In imperial Germany, especially after 1888 under emperor William II, who was keen on colonizing whatever was left in Africa and elsewhere by the superpowers of the time, *Heimat* meant

German racial and cultural superiority. During the so-called Third Reich, it was used to justify aggression in Eastern Europe to subjugate or eliminate “inferior races,” reserving “blood and soil” to the “master race.”

Although the word *Heimat*, like many other terms sullied by the Nazis, was initially shunned after 1945, refugees from former eastern German provinces wrote *Heimat* on their banner for revisionist claims to their lost eastern possessions such as Transylvania (in today’s Romania), East Pomerania and Silesia (Poland), and Sudetenland (Czech Republic). In the 1950s and 60s, *Heimat* became the focus of the German movie and penny novel industry, featuring syrupy love stories set in Alpine farms and meadows. What better way to forget the guilt-ridden past? Interestingly, while silently tolerating this apparently unpolitical, kitschy expression of nostalgia, in 1969 the West German government, in an attempt to erase the last vestiges of political misappropriation, replaced the school subject *Heimatkunde* (homeland study) with *Sachunterricht* (study of practical life), a nondescript label that by and large applied to lessons in citizenship. It was only after German unification in 1990 that the academic treatment of *Heimat*, once and for all shorn of its political ballast—or so it seemed—was gingerly rekindled among anthropologists and migration scholars who explored the original meaning of an apparently important concept. This resulted in a spate of literature, from narrow monographs on particular German groups, mostly expatriate, to sweeping general theories (see Selected Literature). Even after perusing these more detached interpretations of *Heimat*, it appears that the term triggers different, somewhat wider implications than what is usually associated with the Anglo-Saxon or French notions of home. As we further explore the concept of *Heimat*, we should be able to determine where to place it on the spectrum of human experience and to what extent *Heimat*—whichever its definition—can be transplanted, whether it is “portable.” In the course of our inquiry we will necessarily probe into our modern, even virtual, world, in a critical application of the term. Throughout, however, we should not forget how in our time *Heimat* is again being misconstrued for political purposes.

2.2. Original Manifestation of *Heimat*

In an agrarian German society before 1800, the principal place to shelter communities of people was the village, the direct result of man’s organized interaction with the land. One might call a village the organizational center of an agricultural cooperative. The European village, like most villages in the world, was physically marked by its small size—not more than a few hundred inhabitants—and the relative compactness of its design, sometimes including walls shared between neighbors. This gave the village dimensions that were

easily negotiated and memorized by its inhabitants, with short distances that could be covered on foot in minutes, not hours. Oscar Handlin writes:

The village was a place. It could be seen, it could be marked out in boundaries, pinned down on a map, described in all its physical attributes. Here was a road along which men and beasts would pass, reverence the saint's figure at the crossing. There was a church, larger or smaller, but larger than the other structures about it. The burial ground was not far away, and the smithy, the mill, perhaps an inn. . . . The fields were round about, located in terms of river, brook, rocks, or trees. All these could be perceived; the eye could grasp, the senses apprehend, the feel, the sound, the smell, of them. (8)

As Handlin implies, the village's layout and topography followed the lay of the land. If the land was mountainous, the village might cling to a hillside or nestle in a river bend; if it was flat, it might sprawl from a central crossroads; near the ocean, it might duck behind a dike. Another important factor was the climate, of course. Where winter brought heavy snow, the roofs had to be sturdy. True, by steeply pitching the roof, snow would simply slide off, but one would lose the insulating quality of a thick snow pack overhead—so better build flat but rugged. By weighing down the shingles with rocks, the wind would have no chance to blow them off. Small window openings prevented heat loss during the cold season while keeping the house, with its thick stone walls, cool in the summer. The type of building materials used in the construction of homes depended on what the land had to offer: limestone, clay, granite, slate, hardwoods, pine, peat, straw, etc. Because of its structural qualities, each material resulted in a particular architectural design. Whether to build with timber, flagstone, bricks or clay, with flat or pitched roofs that are slanted on all sides or propped up by gables, with arched or square windows and doorways—all depended on the given space, the available resources and the seasonal weather patterns. Whether to put stables, barn, and living quarters all under one roof (making the best use of the heat generated by the livestock) or raise separate buildings (so that dirt and stable odors stayed out of the kitchen and fires could be kept under control), whether to dig the ground floor into a hillside, giving level access to the top floor (which serves as granary and insulation blanket), whether to arrange the farm buildings in a square (to provide protection from intruders as well as the elements) or align them along main street (with the yards facing the river), it again was weather, topography, geology, and vegetation, as well as safety, that were the basic determining factors in the management of space, resulting in each village's unique shape.

Another important pillar of *Heimat* was music, performed in church, during festivities on the market common, in the home, or even during work. The term “performed” is misleading, however, as there was no distinction between performers and the audience. During public celebrations or at home, whether on an instrument, singing, or dancing, everyone took part in one way or another. This was the original meaning of *Volksmusik*, a term, like *Heimat*, coined in the late 18th century. Since manual labor, such as planting, weeding, reaping, threshing, weaving, etc., involved repetitive movements, rhythmic singing or playing facilitated endurance and coordination. It also helped take the mind off work. The themes centered on religion, love, or nature. Often, music served as the vehicle for extended narrations about legendary heroes in the form of ballads or epic poems. The words were not written down; their survival depended on each generation’s memory. Given the geographical separation, especially in the southern and Alpine regions, each village developed its own tradition. From the Middle Ages on, simple instruments such as flutes, drums, and early forms of the violin were used. With the development of military music, brass instruments entered the village, followed by the accordion in the 18th century. In the late 19th century, new technology enabling the recording of music began to alienate *Volksmusik* from its social purpose, resulting in what now is called *volkstümliche Musik*, or folkloristic, folksy, music, and eventually in pop music. I leave the tracing of the very first origins of *Volksmusik* to the musicologists. Whether it is music that came first or dance seems to be a chicken-or-egg question, but it is easy to see the correlation between a “walking” 1-2 and a “turning” 1-2-3 rhythm, the former marking the polka, the latter the *Ländler*, precursor of the waltz.

Just as varied as the German landscape, as it rises from the northern flatlands to the central hills and rivers all the way to the edge of the Alps, are the communities that populate it, each with distinct features not found elsewhere and contributing to its regional identity. These features were not only associated with their physical presence in the surrounding nature but engraved into conscious- and subconsciousness by other means. For example, in flat country a hedgerow, planted to break the wind and enclose a field, assumes the quality of an aesthetic adornment. Thus, what had initially been a simple protective measure against the vicissitudes of nature, grew into a cultural tradition. In the south, biblical fresco paintings of saints on stuccoed walls in an Alpine village, designed to protect the house dwellers from fire or disease, transcend their utilitarian purpose by lifting the passerby from his daily toils to a level of spiritual meditation and aesthetic pleasure, while at the same time giving the entire village a unique artistic quality. Basic elements of the building architecture (dictated, as mentioned earlier, by the natural surroundings), for instance a triangular gable, make their way into cabinetry

by adorning the doors of an armoire or a chest; a particular geometric weaving pattern, resulting from the way the shuttle used to move through the stays, graces not only wool shawls but is printed on linen cloth, painted on furniture, carved into wood. These qualitative shifts between materials and artifacts occur mostly on the subconscious level, but they distinctly mark not only the visual appearance of a place but also the mental landscape of its residents.

In short, *Heimat* is marked by acquired patterns that appeal to all senses, including smell and taste. The writer of these lines distinctly remembers the individual smells of different houses where he grew up in Germany. The daily, weekly, and seasonal rhythm of meal successions, too, became such an important, deeply ingrained routine in the peasant's life that any deviation was strongly felt. Each weekday featured its own noon dish, repeated week after week: Monday a casserole of leftovers from the more sumptuous Sunday meal; Tuesday a hearty vegetable soup (which incorporated anything that might have survived Monday); Wednesday some sort of pasta, pancake, or egg dish, depending on the region; Thursday potatoes, maybe with apple sauce; Friday fish (as stipulated by the Church); Saturday bread, cheese, and cold meats; Sunday roast or chicken, potatoes, and vegetables. (Once in a while, the landlord living on a manor nearby may have allowed the peasant to shoot a rabbit or wild turkey, or to fish in the manorial waters, or he himself donated game to the peasants on special holidays.) The main kitchen ingredients were determined by the seasons: The older the potatoes (late in winter), the more likely they were to be roasted or mashed, while the first taste of new potatoes, just boiled and peeled and served with butter or white cheese in June, was a feast worth celebrating. Fresh green vegetables, asparagus, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, green beans, they all marked the calendar by their arrival, just as would fruit. In winter, it was the roots and fermented cabbage that graced the daily table. Of spices there were no more than a handful: apart from salt and pepper the cook added chives, parsley and maybe a few more herbs from the garden, like thyme or savory. While onions were plentiful, garlic was either unknown north of the Alps or despised for its pungency. Throughout the year, it was also the religious calendar that placed demands on the cook in the house, as each church holiday required a set menu, or, as in the time of fasting, denied it. It goes without saying that only the well-to-do peasants and burghers could afford such a regime. For the poor, it was potatoes and onions one day and onions and potatoes the next.

"Eating out," a fast-growing habit of modern city and country dwellers, was simply unknown. Those peasants who had to travel—a few miles to the next market town, perhaps—subsisted on what they carried in their satchel—bread, cheese, an apple—or, at most, were able to purchase a sausage or doughnut-like fritter at the town market, provided they had enough change.

The few inns were strictly patronized by traveling merchants and aristocrats staying overnight, and whatever food they had to offer was limited to a nondescript gruel with potatoes or some grain. Only the rich could demand that the cook kill a chicken or cut into his treasured supply of ham. Vegetables, let alone salads, were a scarcity on the dining table. It was not until the late 19th century that restaurants as we know them began to crop up in the cities, and only much later that we became used to finding just about any ethnic food within a few city blocks. But even today, Germany seems to be the last country in the European Union to adopt, almost reluctantly, the ethnic food trend. While this may have to do with the fact that, among the western European countries, Germany is the one with the shortest colonial tradition, it also reflects a German attachment to *Heimat* and a certain provincialism, cultivated through centuries and cemented, to some degree, in today's decentralized federal structure.

Whereas land and village formed one organic, independent structure which provided the material and spiritual nourishment for the peasant, the artisan's personal sphere of interaction with his surroundings revolved necessarily around the shop. This was the place where he practiced his skill from dawn to dusk. Each trade required its own set of tools which could be seen as extensions of the artisan's hands: anvils, hammers, chisels, bending irons, tongs for the blacksmith; awls, yarn, pliers, leather knives, lasts for the shoemaker; saws, rasps, planes, drills, wood chisels, varnish brushes for the cabinetmaker—and so forth. Add to these the materials to be processed—iron, leather, wood, etc.—with their characteristic smells. Whether butcher, tanner, roper, candlemaker, cartwright, saddlemaker, oil miller, stonemason, printer, or cigarmaker, in each case the shop assumed a distinct, unmistakable flavor which announced itself to nose and ears across the street or downwind farther away. Once inside the premises, the visitor would be overwhelmed by a symphony of visual impressions, scents, and noises that marked the trade: At the blacksmith's, darkness first, then the contours of master and apprentice against the fire in the background, the pungent smell of smoke and metal dust, the numbing, ringing sound of hammers striking the glowing iron,⁸ the vaulted soot-blackened brick ceiling, countless tools suspended from the walls, in the center the anvil evoking the image of an altar. Even in church or at the pub, one could not possibly mistake the blacksmith for his muscular build, singed hair, heavy, calloused hands covered with blisters and bruises, with fingernails reduced to narrow, black lines. But most of all, it was the indelible smell of the shop that gave him away. Likewise, wafts of glue and sawdust betrayed the carpenter, the caustic odor of lye the tanner. What's more, even when not clearly marked by his typical work clothes, on holidays each artisan followed the particular dress code prescribed for centuries by his guild. Thus,

each trade occupied the surrounding space on every level, from the physical presence of its shop and its occupants to its sensory manifestations to its symbolic, ritual custom and appearance in the village or town community. Making a piece of furniture or a stained glass window was not just a job, it was a way of life that branded you and your family from cradle to grave, or so it seemed.

It therefore was only natural that a son did not choose just any occupation of his liking. Having grown up in the all-pervasive milieu of a carpenter's or pipefitter's shop, this was all he knew. He furthermore felt that he owed it to his family to preserve a tradition built over generations. If he was the oldest son he apprenticed in the father's shop until he took it over as its new master; if not, he would find another master of the same trade, in the neighboring town perhaps, who took him in, later maybe to be married to the master's daughter. This way, a succession of generations passed through the same shop. (At the same time, the old custom of journeying, for those who graduated from apprenticeship but needed additional experience of at least three years in other shops before vying for a master's position—in their father's shops, if possible—ensured the ongoing quality of the trade.⁹) And because the shop was the nerve center of the entire family dwelling, with living quarters in the back or above, the trade took up all dimensions of life, including time. In the same manner, the future of a peasant's son held no surprises. While in retrospect we may lament the inescapability of individual fate by chance of birth, it was not seen so in the past. On the contrary, having a trade, or land, to pass on to the next family generation was a source of pride, guarantor of stability, certainty, and respect. There was no alternative. In this way, too, time was an indispensable component of *Heimat*.

But how about the women? In what ways were they included in the concept of *Heimat*? Recognizing that, all the way through the 20th century in Europe, we are dealing with a patriarchal, paternalistic society, the answer is simple: Women's lives were tied to their husbands'; shocking as it might seem through the eyes of the modern observer, they, and the children, were extensions of their spouses. As Thomas Nipperdey writes:

[M]ale-paternal authority was unalterable and impressed upon each child, supported and countenanced by all social forces. The husband made all significant decisions and determined the family's relations with the outside world; he was the 'head' of the family, she was a 'tool,' and humility and obedience were considered virtues. (100)

The woman's role was clearly defined: manage the household, raise the children, and contribute, through sociable and dignified interaction with

others, to the overall objective of her life—assisting her husband in maintaining the general standing of family and business in the community. When, in the town's or village's gossip, reference was made to a woman, her name was not as important as her husband's occupation: "Have you heard of the butcher's, printer's, tailor's wife . . . ?" Children shared the same distinction: the baker's kids, rope maker's Liesl (*die Seiler-Liesl*), carpenter's Fritz (*Schreiners Fritze*). For the wives of peasants, the role extended to taking up a share of the farm work: gathering up the sheaves of wheat, digging up potatoes, milking the cows, feeding the pigs, tending the fowl, were considered women's work, above and beyond the household duties, while all field work involving horses and oxen remained the domain of men. In both, village and town, women also were responsible for the kitchen garden.

It is unlikely that these women could relate to what later would become a hallmark of *Heimat*—its "feminine" qualities. As Peter Bickel shows in his book, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland*, *Heimat* itself (as opposed to "fatherland") became associated with mother and female lover. While this seems to be true, the association is mainly a male construct (as Bickel concedes himself¹⁰), since most manifestations of *Heimat* originated in the minds of men, not only because men tended to outnumber women among emigrants but also because in a patriarchal society, most cultural expressions of *Heimat*, in literature, music, art, etc., were authored by men. In fact, one can safely say that the promulgation of the *Heimat* idea, from early Romanticism to National Socialist ideology, was the work of men. At the same time, it was the women who were primarily responsible for transmitting the folkloristic expressions of *Heimat* to their young children—through storytelling and songs, enforcing the rhythms of day, week, and year, and instilling pride in family and village. In other words, while men tended to transcend their *Heimat* idea into a myth of female fertility and love, as well as the return to the womb (cf. Bickel, 92), women concentrated on the actual work of promoting the family's and village's fortune through the education of the young. (As noted earlier, though, boys after reaching puberty received their professional training from the father or another male master of the family trade.)

While *Heimat* in our time tends to evoke affectionate thoughts of cozy houses in quaint villages, reverberating from laughter and merrymaking in pubs and on the village common, it was first of all the grinding regime of daily chores which determined a person's outlook on life. What made this hard life bearable was no doubt its predictable rhythm characterized by the swing of the hammer, the swipe of the scythe, the fanning of the hearth's flames, or the weeding of the carrot patch. As in music, repetition means confirmation, predictability, reassurance, but also resonance for the biological

rhythms of the body. Yes, there was also the larger rhythm of the annual holiday calendar accompanied by companionship, laughter and mirth. In the end, all was embedded in the ultimate rhythm of life, into the cycle of youth, adulthood, and age, each involved in its characteristic interplay between the generations: father and son, mother and daughter, wife and mother-in-law, grandparents and grandchildren.

Indeed, with the relentless exigencies of daily survival, of putting aside enough food to get through the next winter, of overcoming disease and death in the family, or war, fire, drought and flood, life was anything but easy. If it hadn't been for the satisfying assurance of recurring small pleasures, such as the Sunday meal, the harvest festival, the Palm Sunday procession, life might not have been tolerable. In reality, then, *Heimat* meant not so much the folkloristic traditions that we can today admire in small town museums; *Heimat* was rather a metaphysical concept which ensured that the hardships on earth could be tolerated before a better life awaited one after death. This concept was built upon ritualistic cycles of activities on different temporal scales—daily, seasonal, annual—that were dictated by the rhythmic interactions of man with the physical space surrounding him. By extending their initial purpose and meaning into the realm of aesthetics or art, these interactions were raised to a higher level of expression. Or one could argue that art in this context is nothing but ritualized memory.

In a home where workplace and family residence remained under one roof, where a large part of production still went for daily subsistence rather than the market, the relationship between family members was by necessity more regimented and less spontaneous or emotional than today. Most farmsteads housed not only the farmer's family but also the service staff including farm hands, journeymen, maids. And in a world where death was a much more frequent and accepted experience, widowed men and women were often part of the household. Privacy as we know it today did not exist and was not missed, or, in the words of Nipperdey,

[t]he peasants and craftsmen's families had little 'privacy' from the outside world, but were 'open,' to the neighbours' gaze, to their fellow guildsmen, to the priest. Family life was subject to social control in all its aspects—from the state of the laundry to proper relations between husband and wife. . . . A man was unable to separate his roles of *paterfamilias*, citizen, churchgoer, producer and consumer; that situation was to persist, even once the legal bond between citizenship and fatherhood was long severed. (98f.)

It has become clear by now that *Heimat* is not only tied to natural or man-made physical features but to the people who inhabit it, as well. It is not simply a set of props on a theater stage to be brought to life by actors; the people are a part of *Heimat*, as manifested in their social relations, their traditions, and their art.

3. *Heimat* and Memory

Once we have grasped the rigid structure of village and town life captured in the term *Heimat*, we understand why a question like the following is meaningless: what if one wanted to break out of this structure, choose a different profession, marry a person from a distant town, or not marry at all? Like Karl Marx's famous dog (representing the proletarian worker), that never had occasion to probe the reach of its chain, these villagers and townspeople did not have the opportunity to explore the world beyond their narrow horizon, their fish bowl. In town and village, acceptance of one's station in life was the norm. After all, what could be better than stability in a community of like-minded people whose collaboration ensured that life's basic needs were met and dangers staved off? The rare individual who might have attempted to break out of this system was quickly ostracized. If a woman refused to marry, or, because of some mental or physical deficiency, could not find a husband, she was either allowed to stay as a spinster in her parental home or to live in a cottage on the edge of town, sustaining herself from the kindness of others or by some handiwork. Often, too, she was suspected of possessing supernatural powers, making her secretly sought after while publicly despised. Handicapped males—mental or physical birth defects were common in isolated groups where marriage between relatives was quite common—were kept as farm hands or as “village idiots” whose basic needs were met by the community. Young men who rebelled—few and far between—had no choice but to leave town or village and seek their fortune in the city or, eventually, abroad.

Life was ruled by a strict hierarchy of values, crowned by the command never to question the position into which one was born, followed by the imperative of continuing the family's tradition. Unlike today, education then meant learning just as much as the forefathers had learned, not more, not less. “Growth” or “expansion” were ambitions left to the immodest, the vain, those whose rise would certainly be followed by their fall. Some would argue that all this represented nothing but a means to secure the tight grip of the feudal overlords and the Church. Be that as it may, there certainly was no room for a smooth transition to growth-driven capitalism, once its time had come. Whatever changes it brought, they would be painful.

Despite all the pressing factors that eventually contributed to emigration, we can now imagine how difficult it must have been to sever the strings that tied the Germans to their *Heimat*. After all, sedentariness was institutionalized. Already 2000 years earlier, the biblical command, “Dwell in the land and thou shalt be fed” (*Bleibe im Lande und nähre dich redlich*) admonished the restless. Between town and village, only migrating journeymen and traveling merchants were viewed favorably. Other folk populating the country roads—strolling players, musicians, circus artists, Gypsies—were merely tolerated. Despite their “godless” existence, they provided entertainment, the opportunity of purchasing particular merchandise (such as baskets), or services (such as repairing pots and pans or sharpening scissors).

Once the new economic system of free capital, cash crop production, and assembly line labor encroached on the traditional village and small town, the old concept of *Heimat*, its fabric of a tightly knit community, was not merely challenged; it was torn asunder, casting many of its members into the “world,” a foreign world of cities and distant shores leaving the individual to fend for himself. When by the middle of the 19th century industrialization made the German cities and sea ports swell with displaced peasants, land laborers, and craftsmen from the countryside, internal and external migration dominated the talk of the day. Befuddled and overworked authorities were at a loss when it came to processing and legalizing migration. It was then that *Heimat* assumed the meaning of a place that has been lost. In the new, hostile environment of factories or port cities, common people for the first time experienced homesickness, *Heimweh*, a feeling of disorientation paired with nostalgia, as fittingly reflected in the German adjective *unheimlich*, describing a sense of frightening eeriness.

It was a transition at least as momentous as today’s displacement of physical labor with “intelligent” robots, or as the change from life-long careers tied to one occupation or employer to “pop-up” jobs or “gigs” involving financial insecurity and restless mobility.

While the last two centuries have contributed to the largest, most concentrated migratory movements in history, they also have changed our ideas about home or *Heimat*—of what exactly it is that anchors us, that gives us a feeling of belonging or, in the end, a purpose. Surely, not all of the millions and millions of migrants or refugees generated in the last two centuries by urbanization, by industrialization, by the ravages of war, and—more recently—by environmental degradation, completely lost their bearings to become nothing but straws in the wind. The seasonal worker from Central America picking tomatoes from dawn to dusk under the scorching sun of Florida, may hum a tune while working or think of his family back in Honduras who lives from his remittances, giving him a purpose, a cause

that at least momentarily lifts him from the misery of his current life. We know that African slaves in the tobacco fields of Virginia or cotton fields of Louisiana—involuntary migrants since Columbus—reached deep inside to find their cultural “soul” in the tunes of spirituals—a powerful expression of their religious fervor and ultimate hope. This, in partial answer to our first question at the beginning of this article, is to say that *Heimat* has many modes of expression, not only the “German” one elaborated above.

The release trigger for these modes of expression is memory. Reaching back once more to the very origins of man’s ties to his surroundings, we can learn from Schama’s premise that from the onset of civilization, humans have tied their existence to striking natural features, giving them meaning (*sinnstiftend*, as the Germans would say). It is no surprise that human attachment to woods, to water, to rock often generated religious paradigms symbolized by cultural expressions such as rituals and art. In this sense, landscape has always been “the work of the mind” (Schama 6f.). Whether the oak forest for Germanic people, the Ganges for the Indians, or Mount Fuji for the Japanese, it was natural places revered by humans that assumed a religious quality in their minds, transcending time as these beliefs were passed on from generation to generation.¹¹

Over a period of some 2000 years, transcendental, religious myths in Europe—rooted in man’s memorized relationship to natural features—were institutionalized in order to organize societies along ecclesiastic hierarchies. In Western Europe, it was the Roman Catholic Church whose long arm reached from Rome into the continent’s most remote recesses. But when the French Revolution not only swept away the royal Bourbon dynasty but also loosened the Vatican’s spiritual and material grip first in France, then in the French occupied territories, religion began to recede from public life, church and state began to separate, and peasants and villagers began to identify with their secularly ruled state. This, we remember, was the time when more and more people began to move in order to escape dwindling resources in their home region and when the *Heimat* concept began to emerge in public discourse. Was this merely a coincidence, or could there be a correlation between leaving one’s home and developing a strong sense of home, as expressed through the *Heimat* idea?

We can say now that not only have natural features been given meaning but that their meaning must be memorized, even emphasized, over and over again, generation after generation. Ultimately, memory cultivated through repetitive rituals replaces the remembered object (landscape) itself. One could say, too, that the medium has become the message or, in a more folksy way, that absence makes the heart [i.e., memory] grow fonder. In other words, *Heimat* is not a consciously lived experience, it only rises to consciousness

once it is lost.¹² In fact, when we say in English, “Home is where the heart is,” we seem to somehow get the concept, albeit in its vaguest and most unscientific sense.

If we wish to be truly consistent, then, we must adjust our *Heimat* definition: All the daily routines of a village or a farmyard described above, including their ritualized cycles, do not really constitute *Heimat*. They form nothing but the features of a hard life relieved by small and brief joys such as seasonal festivities. If we had a chance to go back in time and ask the old farmers and villagers about their relationship with their social and physical surroundings, they surely would not wax melancholic and enthusiastic about the breathtaking landscape and the beautiful artifacts, about their harmonious community of family and friends, or the sensual joys of a bakery or carpenter’s shop. For him, those surroundings with their various stimuli simply were here yesterday, are here today, and will be here tomorrow. Could one ever imagine that one day they would be gone? The village or town dwellers may not even have been familiar with the term *Heimat*. But then the unthinkable happened—people were leaving behind a life of certainty, of cyclical recurrence, of security. Suddenly memory and longing began to raise the concept of home, or *Heimat*, to the point of consciousness, a level of acute awareness. *Heimat*, we now understand, is memory fictionalized and idealized, in fact turned into utopia, by the subjective forces of nostalgia and melancholy. In other words, *Heimat* is the product of alienation.

In principle, this insight is shared by most *Heimat* scholars, including Peter Blickle who expertly summarizes the scholarship on *Heimat*, providing an interdisciplinary overview of various aspects of the *Heimat* theme (especially on the philosophical approaches), and arriving at clear yet critical definitions that help ground the concept in German history. Blickle’s observations on *Heimat*, complemented by some of our own, will help us obtain a clearer idea of this elusive concept in order to understand how the German immigrants to other countries, especially the United States, saw their new home and how it related for them to the home left behind.

During a panel discussion on the concept of home organized by the author at his institution, the panelists (second-generation immigrants from Latin America, Laos, and Somalia) unanimously declared home to be the place where their family was (one referred to home as the place where he could eat his mother’s food)—not the village where they came from, not the Andes, not the rice paddies of Cambodia or the nomadic tents of western Somalia. Their parents now lived in apartments or small homes in the Midwest cities and towns of the United States. Also, at the beginning of an honors course on German immigration to Wisconsin, students were asked how they define home. Almost invariably, the answers revolved around “home and hearth,”

i.e., the house in which they grew up, and their family. After that, the students tended to list their church and their school. Conspicuously absent was the mention of any physical features of their hometown or its natural environment, such as a river valley, a bridge, hills or woods. We also find no references to group activities outside the family or seasonal festivities.

On first impression we might conclude that *Heimat* “isn’t what it used to be,” that the idea, apart from its arguably “German” idiosyncrasy, has outlived its usefulness. However, as Blickle reminds us (67ff.), we must not forget that *Heimat*, with its implicit sense of loss and the wish to return to an idealized place, moves to the foreground of human consciousness over time only, as we age. It comes with the subconscious feeling that life’s choices have been made, that most options are off the table—the future has been replaced by the past and, when it comes to memory, an unreliable past at that. So whatever our students or second-generation immigrants may miss, it doesn’t dominate their outlook on life while much still lies ahead of them. *Heimat* requires absence, yes, but it is also determined by diminishing alternatives in life. When thinking about the German emigrants of the 19th century, we recognize that many of them were still young when they emigrated, but their teleology—their projections, that is—for a prosperous and fulfilled future, was clearly tempered by some sense of nostalgia, of homesickness that made them mentally age before their time.

Still, even after considering the relative youth of the respondents to our survey, we cannot shake off the impression that something has been lost. Will these young people, as they grow older, have a village, a stream, a neighborhood, a “folklore” to remember? Or is the idea of land, village, church, woods, folk customs, trade and guild extinct—or at least a closely knit city neighborhood—together with all the sensual stimuli that emanate from a physical space shared by a community of people? Has home or *Heimat* become a simplified, downsized portable commodity, something you carry with you in a backpack or laptop, so to speak? If *Heimat* connotes a sense of belonging, what is it that modern people wish to belong to? Or, how do today’s humans interact with space? We understand that this is a question which touches on the very essence of our being. A brief examination, then, of today’s concept of belonging, of social or spatial coherence, might, especially for younger readers, help to sharpen the contrast to what *Heimat* used to be and how it applied to the early German emigrants.

4. *Heimat* 2.0

It appears that we are witnessing the result of a tremendous transformation in the human concept of self, at least in the industrialized nations. Some 200

years ago, the close bond between people and land began to fray as more and more displaced farmers and other village dwellers streamed into the cities to earn a living as unskilled laborers in the new factories and sweatshops that had caused their *Landflucht* (flight from the countryside) in the first place. Their new lives were no longer dictated by the seasonal cycles of planting and harvesting, by the rising and setting sun, by the vagaries of unpredictable weather. Now their rhythm was determined by the ticking clock, the never-changing movements of their monotonous tasks, the factory siren. Whether it was summer, spring, or winter, light or dark outside—it didn't matter. Coming home for the farmer-turned-worker no longer meant to step into the farmyard with its stable and tool shed, chickens and other fowl scattering about, the kitchen garden, with children playing everywhere and other family members milling around the house. Home now was a cramped apartment in a large tenement where nary a ray of sun found its way down the narrow shaft to the courtyard, where the view through the window offered nothing but walls and more windows, where the air was hardly more breathable than on the factory floor, now only mixed with the same kitchen smells every day and the less salubrious odors associated with close, primitive living quarters. It was not only the new work that alienated man from his natural surroundings (as Marx noted) but the new environment altogether.

Granted, over the last two centuries our homes have greatly improved with material conveniences, our mobility has increased exponentially; only a minority of workers among us, still in contact with the raw elements of nature, is exposed to grime, dirt, and the toxins that are the price of mass production. While our physical health and longevity have no doubt improved, we cannot necessarily say the same of our mental state. Many a sociologist has observed increasing loneliness, even depression, among city dwellers.¹³ The reasons are obvious: No longer are our lives and our sense of well-being determined by the communities in which we grow up—and the land occupied by these communities—but by the family units, large or small, that reside inside the walls of our individual homes. The geographical location of these homes changes frequently, so frequently in fact that the moving industry represents an important segment of our economy. What used to be communities of shared space and destiny, has shrunk to nuclear families, each striking out on its own. One result of this transformation is the gradual—yet in the end catastrophic—negligence and resulting dilapidation of public space.¹⁴ Instead of recreating and nurturing communal forums that further face-to-face public discourse, we rely on an individualized existence within our own walls, our communication with the outside mediated through virtual channels, “from the comfort of your home,” or bent down over the smart phone. Indeed, it is the internet that is driving a wedge between the public and the private sphere.

The other contributing force is our market-driven economy which has moved from fulfilling the basic needs of all to a production system in overdrive that fills the pockets of a few by advertising countless goods to consumers who may or may not need them. When it comes to negotiating our way in the natural or man-made topography of our physical environment, we rely on our GPS unit to lead us—blindly, one might say—to our destination.

If we could magically transplant a person from the 18th or 19th century into our time he would no doubt be greatly confused if not lost. Although to some people of our generation our new-fangled achievements may appear alarming, we must be careful, of course, before condemning them. While we may indict technology in its inexorable march forward, easily outpacing human learning, we possibly should remain open toward a new self-concept of humans, where *Heimat* is embodied no longer in the physical but in a virtual, mediated world, where, moreover, social units such as the nuclear family have shrunk to tiny groups, all the way down to individuals living in physical isolation yet who still claim to be well integrated into a network of virtual friends. Whereas the term “anti-*Heimat*” that came into fashion in the 1960s and 70s (e.g., by writer Peter Handke or film maker Rainer Werner Fassbinder) refers to a modern physical, mostly urban space of ugliness, brutality, and anonymity (and offers—as in the provocative 1973 movie *Hunting Scenes from Bavaria* directed by Peter Fleischmann—a sober reckoning with a “true” rural *Heimat* of mysogeny, homophobia, racism, and sexual depravity in an environment of mud and decay), we may now be witnessing signs of growing “anti-identity,” if we accept identity as a concept of self embedded in a physical environment—people, landscape, and cultural artifacts (cf. Blickle 62f., 142). How this may affect the traditional concept of a coherent, mutually supportive society, aware of and in tune with its natural surroundings, we do not know. Are we witnessing a brave new world where all physical and social obstacles are eventually being overcome by “painless,” virtual interactions, by virtual life itself—or a humanity headed for the abyss like lemmings for the cliff? While our fading interaction with the physical environment does not seem to ring alarm bells these days, this may change, just as most momentous changes in history sooner or later attract the attention they deserve.

We also notice that man’s increasing reluctance, facilitated by information technology, to interact with the physical space surrounding him is accompanied by a rapid growth in the earth’s population, especially in metropolitan areas. As space becomes more and more scarce, are we retreating into an imaginary, “perfect” world, limited by giga- or terabytes, not by miles? Is virtual space the new frontier? While we probably should not dismiss these musings as farfetched or harebrained, we must not forget that more people are on the

move today than ever in history.¹⁵ Surely, for these people the internet, virtual reality and all the videogames in the world do not meet the most basic needs. For those of us who enjoy the privilege of a comfortable home with a well-stocked refrigerator, home is not memory but a reality conveniently forgotten because taken for granted. This brings us back to our fundamental truth: You have to leave home in order to appreciate it.

When the German immigrants began to build their new dwellings in the woods of the New World, they had a clear idea of what home should be like. Home for them was what they remembered from the place they left behind. To build a new home in the wilderness meant—consciously or subconsciously—to replicate as closely as possible the place which had determined their former life. Ideally, their new abode would be nothing but the old home transposed into the New World. If they had been able to, the Germans would surely have carried their houses and farmsteads on their backs. The reality, though, looked quite different. In the following, we will discuss to which extent the Germans were able to recreate their *Heimat* in foreign places such as Wisconsin, a state which attracted a particularly large contingent of German immigrants and thus has become the focus of this author's research. However, before we delve deeper into the German immigration experience abroad, and in order to gain a closer understanding of what home meant away from home, we must explore one last question regarding the relationship between the German emigrants and the German lands they left behind.

5. *Heimat* Away from Home vs. Diaspora

Did the German immigrants, we must ask, thousands of miles removed from their original *Heimat*, form a diaspora, with the understanding that the term describes certain ethnic groups that live outside the borders of their homeland? We are used to speaking of the Jewish diaspora with its numerous smaller and larger accumulations around the world, or the Indian diaspora in many African countries and elsewhere. However, just living outside the borders of your homeland does not necessarily make you a member of a diaspora. First and foremost, after crossing the border into new territory, you are nothing more than an expatriate, the most neutral term describing your physical longterm location outside the political borders of your core ethnic group. Second, you would have to be a member of a group, a "critical mass" with enough "weight" to represent a culture different from that of your host environment. However, to deserve the designation of diaspora, an expatriate group must meet additional requirements. In their introduction to *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness*, Donnell, Bridenthal, and Reagin write:

To qualify as a diaspora, the group should share some basic features: dispersal from a common homeland; a collective memory, myth, and idealization of the homeland; a commitment to its maintenance or creation; the development of a return movement; strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time; a troubled relationship with host societies; and empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries.¹⁶

There are certain German settlements of the past that fulfilled at least part of these requirements. We can think of the Volga-Germans in czarist Russia who consciously developed strong bonds of German culture, to be maintained over many generations, or the Germans in Southwest Africa who upheld their “German ways” until the Treaty of Versailles ended their colonist adventure. However, were or are there German settlements abroad that, like the Jews forcefully dispersed elsewhere, wished or wish to return home? Were or are there German ethnic groups outside Germany that entertain a globe-spanning network—like the Jewish diaspora¹⁷—serving cultural and political goals? To both questions the answer has to be no. It is true that, as the political climate around German settlements in Eastern Europe¹⁸ turned from welcoming to hostile, many Germans felt compelled to move back to Germany (whose government after 1990 welcomed them with open arms), but had they originally been driven from the German lands with force, expelled, resettled against their wish? It is also true that quite a few Germans, having established their own expatriate *Heimat*, sometimes over centuries, experienced horrific treatment, including resettlement, at the hands of vengeful eastern Europeans after World War II. But, eviscerated as they may have felt, what they missed most was their former *Heimat*, the Banat, Transylvania, or Odessa—not Germany.

Apart from Eastern Europe, were or are there German communities in the New World that could be called diasporas? The overwhelming majority of overseas Germans emigrated to North America, while a minority chose South, or Central, America as their new home.¹⁹ It is true that most came in groups which maintained, even enforced, strong cultural traditions from back home; certain communities were defined by their religious, sometimes utopian, beliefs that governed their new lives. But did they entertain close connections to their homeland (as Jewish Zionists dreaming of a new Israel)? Were their strivings and yearnings determined by the wish to return to an idealized homeland? Did they nourish strong relationships between each other (not to mention with German emigrant communities in other parts of the world)? Were their communications marked by expressions of mutual empathy and shared suffering? Did they entertain a worldwide net of political

and cultural organizations, including lobbies, to facilitate the eventual return to the homeland? Did they suffer from discrimination and hostility in their new homes? And most of all—had they been brutally forced from their homeland? In each instance the answer must be no, in some instances maybe a guarded no, but no nevertheless. When it comes to connections to the homeland, we admit that those existed—but rarely on an organized or political level. Almost all communication by German immigrants with the homeland consisted of personal letters describing daily life, often in rosy colors in order to entice other family members and friends to follow, or of published travel and settling guides mostly no less optimistic.

It is true, of course, that a minority of Germans chose to leave their homeland for fear of religious or political persecution. We can't say whether it was a question of sheer survival but we can assume that the alternative to emigrating was a life of disadvantage, discrimination, or—as for some fleeing after the failed revolution of 1848—even prison. Still, the overwhelming majority chose to leave the German lands on their own accord, driven mainly by poverty—looming or present. They settled in the New World, in smaller or larger cohorts, most first in the wilderness, later in cities, and got to work, without looking back.

The foregoing test—trying, in vain as it turns out, to fit German emigrant groups into the mold of “diaspora”—allows us to narrow down the term *Heimat*. *Heimat*, at least for the Germans in the United States, did not follow a narrative of expulsion, persecution, survival in a hostile environment, or political organization with the ultimate goal of returning home. *Heimat* for them was a private matter, shared by cultural traditions and determined by memory. Whatever connections they entertained with the homeland were family- or village/region-centered, not agitational in order to stir up political sentiment. As groups they communicated little amongst each other, especially not over great distances. There was no common tendency to commiserate with each other or to return to Germany. We thus can safely conclude that, because of the mostly apolitical nature of their relationship to the homeland they left behind, and because they by and large resettled in the New World voluntarily, the emigrants' sense of *Heimat* was strictly cultural, marked by the memories they carried with them. While the decision to emigrate may have been prompted by economic circumstances, they were in most cases non-life-threatening. This places much of 19th century emigration in stark contrast to the migratory movements of later ages, all the way down to our time. It also sets the current German *Heimat* movement as described in the beginning of this study in a strikingly different, political, context.

6. *Heimat* and Language

To get a different idea of what *Heimat* really meant for German emigrants, we should consider an aspect that, curiously, has not much entered into the *Heimat* discussion yet—language. This may have to do with the elephant-in-the-room effect: everyone knows it's there, but its presence is so evident, so “normal” as not to be worth mentioning. Whereas among semanticists the elephant tends to represent a major, at times contentious, issue, language in the *Heimat* literature was not ignored because of its potential explosiveness but because of its apparently self-evident ontology—why talk about something that we all know is there and which arguably has no critical impact on the rest of our discussion? Since, as we have pointed out, this discussion drifted largely and, from an historical standpoint understandably, into political terrain, the connection to language has remained loose, to say the least. Language, as Blicke noted,²⁰ was seen as something you grow up with, something you never question, something you share with a select number of other people, even beyond the fish pond we may call *Heimat*, but not as a political tool. Of course, at least since 1933, we know better: language can very well be turned into an instrument of propaganda, into an effective weapon that includes and excludes. But that was a hundred years after the time of German mass emigration to the New World. This doesn't mean that the rise of German as a language of literature and public administration since the 18th century was not politically motivated at a time when a people fought for united nationhood. But when compared to the 20th century, it was a relatively innocent undertaking, unless the effect was to exclude all those, like the Poles, whose mother tongue was not German, even though they had lived for centuries under German rule.

The aforesaid concerns the standard German language, of course, a more or less artificial construct that gradually evolved after Luther published his German translation of the New Testament. What remained despite the unifying force of a common idiom were hundreds of dialects dotting the German landscape from the windswept islands of Frisia to the steep hillsides of the Alps. We have chosen the term “landscape” carefully because the varied, mostly hilly topography of north-central Europe with its countless river valleys and mountain ridges kept population groups—originally tribes—apart all the way down to the time when elsewhere nation states anchored by metropolitan capitals had established strong footholds in Europe and, through colonization, much of the world. German provincialism, including the proliferation of strikingly different dialects, is a direct function of the physical landscape.²¹

Because before 1871 Germany didn't exist as one political entity, and because territorial separation among population groups prevented or at least hampered long-distance communication far longer than in the rest of northern Europe, the people identified primarily with their particular region and their German dialect that separated it from the "outside." This is why, in the U.S. census records of the mid 1800s, German immigrants identified themselves overwhelmingly as "Badeners," "Saxon-Gothaers," "Oldenburgers," "Hesse-Darmstadters," and so on. To call themselves "German" would have been meaningless for them. We submit that this preference was not only politically motivated—as the immigrants referred to the only political unit they knew—but also driven by their local vernacular that both united them and kept them apart from outsiders who spoke differently.

As the rural population of what was to become Germany—mostly farmers, land laborers, and tradesmen outmaneuvered by land reform and industrialization—began to move to the cities where, for the first time, they came into contact with other dialects and customs, many Germans displaced by the same forces had to travel as far as the United States in order to meet countrymen from other German regions whose dialects initially were unintelligible to them. In other words, provincialism emigrated with the Germans. And it was language that marked it most. These first contacts occurred during the emigration process itself.

As they did in Europe, German immigrants to the United States tended to retain their local homogeneity more in rural areas than in the cities. Although the "Over the Rhine" neighborhood in Cincinnati evokes a common *Heimat* among the German settlers there, it quickly became the home of Germans from other regions than the Rhineland, such as Lower Bavaria and Saxony. The best example for a "united" Germany before its political union in 1871 is the Lower East Side of Manhattan, where Germans from all corners of the homeland were rubbing shoulders. They may still have kept to themselves in separate tenements or streets, but commerce and social mingling soon put an end to that. One might well say that Germany was first united abroad before becoming a nation state under Bismarck. In the American countryside, by contrast, it was much easier to keep to yourself, your kin and your neighbors, as whole villages, townships, or neighborhoods were settled by groups that emigrated as one cohort or by a string of emigrants that followed each other, all from the same home area. In Wisconsin, for example, German settlements were often marked by a common home origin and its prevailing dialect. The names alone tend to tell the story: settlers from the northernmost part of Germany, close to the Danish border, founded the town of New Holstein in Calumet County; farmers and craftsmen from a remote Alpine valley in Switzerland named their new home New Glarus in Green County. Although

both groups spoke a form of German, it would have been surprising if any of the New Glarus settlers had understood a New Holsteiner, provided they ever met. Later, though, German-speaking settlers from other regions would join them in their towns, making these communities more “cosmopolitan” among German speakers.

German-language newspapers and book publishers were a great force in unifying the speakers of different German dialects in the United States. In fact, the Germania Publishing House of Milwaukee, home of the German daily, *Der Wisconsin Demokrat*, and the Brumder book publishing company, were among the most active in the United States (together with major German publishing houses in New York City and St. Louis). However, one would be hard-pressed to find in the *Wisconsin Demokrat*, for example, more news about the old homeland than in any English language newspaper. Whatever stories dealt with Europe often were translations from English articles that were routed through Great Britain and New York. And the local news section was little more than a German copy of its English counterpart, including information on the State Government proceedings in Madison, announcements for elections, etc. The advertisements, however, clearly concentrated on German businesses offering their services to their countrymen. In the second half of the 19th century, it was German publishing houses like Brumder in Milwaukee, however, that provided important support for upholding German language and culture in the United States—putting out adult and children songbooks, school books, the Grimm fairytales, and other German literature. Brumder also printed hymnals for various German churches. Finally, the house published German farm almanachs and weekly readers especially geared to the German immigrant farmer trying to familiarize himself with the latest agricultural innovations and techniques in the New World. These periodicals also included advice columns for women on cooking, gardening, and raising children. Regarding the latter, special attention was given to ways of preserving the German language in an Anglo-Saxon environment. In this way, especially through the vehicle of language, Brumder and his colleagues in New York and St. Louis contributed greatly to the preservation as well as rebuilding of *Heimat* for the emigrants.

7. From Old to New *Heimat*

We may assume that, despite common print sources for news and culture, *Heimat* for the settlers of New Glarus constituted something quite different from the *Heimat* conceived by the New Holsteiners (to cite once more two rather homogeneous communities). As discussed earlier, the physical appearance of one’s living environment imprinted itself subconsciously in

the brain, to be evoked by memory when left behind—peat bogs, willows, drainage canals, big cloud-swept skies in Holstein; ragged mountain tops, rushing brooks, rocky meadows, snowy short winter days in Glarus. The same holds true for the cultural traditions that, as we have seen, often grew out of the particular features that marked the environment—here the small reed-covered, half-timbered cottages, the tools and movements associated with processing peat; there the low-slung stone houses clinging to the hillside, the seasonal ritual of driving the cattle up and down the mountain meadows, the echo of church bells ricocheting from the rocky hillsides. Where German immigrants from different home regions shared a community, expressions of *Heimat* necessarily influenced each other, creating a “melting pot” of sorts, even though within the community settlers from the same home region would often cluster in individual neighborhoods, such as the Swabians, the Bavarians, the Rheinlanders in Milwaukee. Wherever you came from, it must have been hard indeed to see your “old” life—wretched as it may have been—disappear in the distance. It is all the more understandable that, once in the brush of Wisconsin or the prairie of Nebraska, the settlers wished nothing more than to recreate their *Heimat* as closely as possible—it was all they knew, there was nothing else to imagine. Whatever must have appeared utterly alien to them, and therefore hostile—the impenetrable forest, the endless horizon, the foreign fauna and flora, the unexpectedly extreme temperatures, the almost complete absence of civilization—had to be overcome as quickly and as best as possible, had to make place for an environment that matched as far as possible what they had grown up with and was therefore considered as friendly: structures for man and cattle, familiar crops from field and garden, a daily, weekly, and annual rhythm that evoked what they viewed as home. It was not a question of settling a new-found frontier, as for the Yankee moving west (and idealized by Frederick Jackson Turner). No, their new abode would be, as closely as possible, a copy of the old home transposed into the New World.

As to our Swiss expatriates, the greatest challenge for them was the topography, one had to learn to live without mountains; for the Holsteiners there was no sea, no tides, no salty air. Compromises had to be made. These concessions occurred on the conceptual level: while the topographical features that in the beginning influenced and shaped culture (see Schama) were no longer at hand, their representations through culture lived on—some artifacts and rituals were exported and redeployed in a new environment; others, especially those tied to trades that could no longer be upheld—such as harvesting peat—could only be memorialized by secondary artifacts, i.e., images or displays of tools no longer used. This is why in New Glarus the settlers hung up pictures of William Tell, their folk hero, and the Swiss mountains, and New Holsteiners draped their walls with views of the North

Sea hammering the dikes.²² In the end, the German emigrants created a new *Heimat* that resembled—but not matched—the old, something that can be referred to as a German *Kulturlandschaft*, a cultural landscape that mimics to the extent possible the *Heimat* left behind.²³ Of course, some differences in the physical landscape between the homeland and the land acquired in Wisconsin turned out to be of advantage: nowhere in the Swiss Alps was the soil as rich and fertile as in southern Wisconsin, and where in Schleswig-Holstein would one have encountered such abundance of wood?

These differences seemed to unleash energies in the settlers that they may not have known existed. Whereas back in the homeland their abilities and skills were of limited use only because there was no land to be had for cultivation, no shop to be inherited, no economic incentive to reach independence, here in Wisconsin the sky was the limit—in both a positive, figurative, but also a negative, literal sense: harsh winters, torrential rains in late spring, blistering heat and oppressive humidity during summer. The sheer prospect of taking fate in your own hands, of having no choice but overcome countless, unforeseen challenges, of having burned the bridges behind you, drove many settlers to feats that would have been unthinkable back home. Just to clear one acre of primeval hardwood forest took efforts that we, living in an era of almost complete mechanization, can't even imagine. And in contrast to many Yankees, who tilled a piece of land until the soil was spent, then moved on (preferably west), the Germans bonded with the land they had purchased. We recall that once the land was improved, once it had become, through toil and labor, part of the farmer's life, there was no way back, the commitment was complete. The land, no matter how different from the fields of Holstein or Glarus, became the anchor of the new *Heimat*, to be endowed, to be sure, with signs and characteristics brought over from Europe but also marked by the features of the new locality—different soil requiring different plowing techniques, different growing seasons, different fence structures, and so forth.

We could say that the emigrants built a new—their own—*Heimat*. However, a process that lasted centuries in Europe took a few decades only in the New World. Still, this meant several generations. It was only the immigrants' grandchildren who could enjoy the full complement of what comprises *Heimat*: a relatively comfortable home, a consistent livelihood, an extended family, and enough free time to enjoy the fruits of one's labors, including social and cultural activities. While for the first generation *Heimat* constituted memory from back home, later generations had fully absorbed and unconsciously memorized their own human and physical environment, endowed as it was with new meanings. Whatever remained from the European experience had been absorbed by and blended with the markings of the emigrant world, including Anglo-Saxon traditions. What for the first

generation had at best been felt latently in the homeland became over time a real *Heimat* abroad.

For many, the most important cultural “import” was religion. The bonding power of religion—whether Old or Reformed Lutheran, Catholic, or Mennonite—was so strong, in fact, that it transcended German tribalism or provincialism: It was in their churches that German immigrants who would not have known, let alone spoken with each other back home, developed good neighborly relationships that resulted not only in social interactions but also mutual support when it came to carving out a new existence; they lent each other their skills and their time. And again, as was the case with German language newspapers, the German churches in Wisconsin and elsewhere in the United States had little connection with the Old World—indeed, they often prided themselves on their newly-won independence from the European ecclesiastical hierarchies, having created their own synod system. Only the Catholic Church would have lost much of its identity without continued ties to the Vatican.

In general, there is no doubt that the act of rebuilding one’s home in a new environment not only crystallizes the cultural values brought along—shaping contours where there had been fog before—but actually reinforces and accentuates these values. This is the reason why many German emigrants, and most emigrants in general, were often seen as unreceptive to the host culture, and thus resented.²⁴ It is easy to understand now that, during World War I, the German settlers’ allegiances were conflicted, to say the least.

While it may be tempting to reject out of hand our initial dismissal of *Heimat* as non-existent, as a myth, after exploring the concept over time and space we have come to realize that *Heimat* can indeed be experienced, but only in idealized (and, as Schama argues, frequently mythologized) hindsight. Memory, raised to consciousness through the process of physical and mental alienation, turns out to be critical when people migrate and attempt to build a new existence elsewhere.²⁵ Precisely because it reflects shelter, security, and particularly consistency over time, *Heimat* can afford to be relegated to the level of subconsciousness unless challenged by displacement or perceived threats from foreign intruders. This is the process that makes *Heimat* so elusive in the former case and so dangerous in the latter. Without *Heimat*, no matter in which form, we lose our footing, our belonging, our identity—in one word, our purpose in life. That does not mean, however, that *Heimat* is a fortress to be shielded from foreign elements, as attempted in Bavaria and other places these days. Instead, *Heimat* is nothing but a *latent* feeling of living a fulfilled life.

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Notes

¹ According to the Report, *Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration*, by the World Bank Group (March, 2018), it is estimated that by 2050 some 140 million people on earth will be displaced by climate change.

² Granting the claim of *Heimat* only to those who were born there is often referred to as “geodeterminism.”

³ Only the state of North-Rhine Westphalia so far followed suit by establishing a state agency for home, communal issues, regional development, and state emancipation (*Ministerium für Heimat, Kommunales, Bau und Gleichstellung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen*). In a further step to meet rightist demands, the Bavarian CSU-led government announced in June 2019 the formation of a state regiment for homeland protection (*Heimatschutz*).

⁴ On the CSU election platform homepage of October, 2018 (<http://csu-grundsatzprogramm.de>) the viewer is regaled with a bucolic Bavarian scene, replete with an idyllic village surrounded by the Alps, a farmer harvesting grain, and a (white) family with young children frolicking in the verdant nature. Above, a police helicopter surveys the scene, supposedly keeping out marauding strangers.

⁵ For simplicity’s sake we will follow the tradition of applying male pronouns to both male and female emigrants. This reflects in no way a preference for one gender over the other.

⁶ To breathe! Oh poem we cannot see!

Pure space exchanged continually
For one’s own being, Counterpoise,
In which I come to be, a rhythm.

(*Sonnets to Orpheus*, Book Two, I.)

⁷ Note the different meanings of “cultivate” here.

⁸ In fact, sound as experienced through the daily rhythm of life—not just music—has been explored by the British singer and soundscape artist Vivienne Corringham who studies the people’s special (aural) relationship with familiar places and how that links to personal history and memory.

⁹ The tradition of handing down the shop from generation to generation, thus ensuring a family-centered—dynastic, one might say—control of the trade, was ensured through the guild system (*Zunft*), going back to the Middle Ages. *Zünfte* were initially established to limit access to the trade in order to protect quality, quantity, and price of traditional craft products, but also to wield influence in city politics. At the same time, the rigor applied to workmanship and work processes tended to prevent innovation and competition. Over the centuries, foreign competition and the organization of journeymen against abusive masters began to erode the guild system. Also, as trade became separated from manufacture and mechanized production methods competed with the old crafts, the guild system fell into obsolescence and was officially abolished with the unification of Germany in 1871. Modern associations for the protection of various trades against internal competition in Germany are called *Innungen* and remain influential in safeguarding specialized craftsman training and licensed trade businesses.

¹⁰ 81ff. Using Kant, Horkheimer and other theorists as references, Blicke distinguishes convincingly between the glorification of the elusive, godlike, idealized yet “dark” feminine (as manifest in the *Heimat* concept) and suppressed sexual desire within German bourgeois society (parallel to the Victorian age in the Anglo-Saxon realm).

¹¹ In similar ways, the Judeo-Christian tradition has always celebrated (and often violently reclaimed) specific topographical features that in the minds of most believers live on as symbols (e.g., Mount Sinai, River Jordan, Lake Gethsemane, the Temple Mount, etc.).

¹² Similarly, the expulsion from paradise, as told in the Old Testament, can be viewed as a loss of *Heimat*.

¹³ See for example, Alexander Mitscherlich's study, *Die Unwirtlichkeit unserer Städte* (the inhospitality of our cities), published as early as 1965.

¹⁴ It is gratifying, however, that more and more neighborhoods are rediscovering the wholesome effect of public spaces, by reviving community parks and creating more and more community gardens, as well as farmers markets. Especially efforts to introduce these public forums in poorer neighborhoods of cities such as New York and Detroit deserve attention. However, the resources for these initiatives tend to come from local taxes or private donations, rarely from the state or federal level.

¹⁵ With the possible exception of the post-World War II years which saw approx. 40 million "displaced persons."

¹⁶ P. 5. Although the editors are critical about the often indiscriminate use of the term diaspora (ibid.), the term is more or less strictly applied throughout the book, not necessarily abiding by the parameters cited here. What does become clear, though, is that it usually was the government of the German homeland in its increasingly nationalist and hegemonial fervor that conferred diasporic properties onto reluctant expatriate settlements. On a different note, we find it curious that none of the authors in this otherwise excellent anthology makes reference to either Schama or Blickle.

¹⁷ As to the German component among the Jews strewn throughout the world—fortunate enough to escape the death camps—they by and large do no longer consider Germany as a destination of return.

¹⁸ Their total number amounted to over three million.

¹⁹ Between 1815 and 1914, it is estimated that at least 5.5 million Germans emigrated to the United States (alone 4 million between 1847 and 1914). Of the one million or so of Germans going to South America, the relative majority—some 86,000—went to Brazil (cf. Blackburn 194ff).

²⁰ 140f. If there is one criticism to be raised about Peter Blickle's study, it concerns his fleeting discussion of the language aspect in *Heimat*, touching on the meaning of "mother tongue" (*Muttersprache*) for expatriates and the alienating experiences of German Jews when faced with their torturers speaking their own language or dialect.

²¹ We must also, however, acknowledge the geographical location of German settlements in the very middle of Europe, a crossroads for tribes moving—sometimes back and forth—in various directions, especially during the Indo-European and Germanic migrations (ca. 3,000 BCE and 400 CE, respectively) with clashes that scattered and mixed them, creating an ethnic whirlpool that slowed over time.

²² This is also why in front yards today we may see an old wheelbarrow planted with flowers or similar vestiges of what might have been perceived as *Heimat*.

²³ It is easy to see how the custom of recreating a *Heimat* abroad has in some cases turned into a tourist industry: The artifacts that initially served the settlers as practical but also emotional and spiritual anchors assumed an aesthetic and ultimately decorative value (often referred to as "kitsch") for others, leading to their limitless reproduction and commercialization. A similar process can be observed in the original *Heimat* regions where culture has undergone a process of commodification. In the end we are witnessing, again, an almost desperate longing for an imagined, not real, *Heimat*.

²⁴ And it also explains why, from the viewpoint of Germans just visiting the United States, German-Americans tend to display more cultural patriotism than Germans in Germany.

²⁵ In coming full circle, we are reminded here that it is not only the Germans who perceive their *Heimat* being challenged by immigrants, but that the immigrants, too, must wonder how they can transplant some of their own memorized *Heimat* culture into a new environment. The inevitable result—as it has been throughout the entire history of migration—is a new *Heimat* for both hosts and immigrants, a cultural and social environment that integrates foreign with local traits. It is therefore not a question of acculturation or assimilation, as conservative

Germans including some politicians demand (*Leitkultur*) but of a gradual blending in, with changes and adaptations on both sides.

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