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Flight and Expulsion in the GDR: A Case of Marginalisation and Taboo?

Bill Niven

Before I begin this talk, a word on my struggles with terminology. I begin with 'Expellees', 'Vertriebene'. There is much to be said for using the term 'expellees' generically as a collective noun to designate those Germans who fled from the advance of the Soviet army in late 1944 and 1945, those who were driven out of the former eastern territories during the so-called 'wild expulsions' at the war's end, and those moved from central eastern Europe following the Potsdam conference of August 1945. I realise using this kind of shorthand is controversial. Scholars such as Hans Henning Hahn criticise those who, as he might see it, indulge with crass historical inaccuracy in such conflation and indeed inflation. Yet where we need shorthand, I do not see what else we are to do. To describe all those Germans who left their homes in central eastern Europe as refugees clearly won't work, as many were expelled, they did not flee. Logically, one could argue the inverse of this: a generic use of the term "expellees" won't work either because not all those who left their homes in the 1944-1948 period were expelled, some of them fled. Yet in a sense all those who left were, by virtue of the impossibility of return, expellees. They might not have been expelled, but they became expellees. Hahn argues that those who fled were actually evacuees, shifting the burden of responsibility onto the German administration – an ironic interpretation in view of the frequent refusal of local Nazi potentates to allow evacuation or their failure to organise it. But such an argument not only ignores Stalin's obvious interest in clearing the area of Germans and the not unnatural desire of Germans to avoid Red Army measures such as rape, murder and plunder, it also, even if correct, cannot undermine the fact that, under whatever circumstances Germans left, they found themselves, wherever they ended up, expelled. So I do tend, often, to say "expellees" in the generic way I describe above. Yet while I would rarely write "refugees and expellees", I often catch myself writing "flight and expulsion"; in other words, when talking of the actual processes which led to the de facto condition of expulsion, I would still recognise two of them. And this would be important, because in the GDR it was, arguably, slightly less difficult to remember the former process than the latter one. What a mess. Terminological suggestions will very much be welcome at the end. Because my paper focuses largely on the GDR, of course, we have another problem: the

words “Umsiedler” and “Umsiedlung”. These terms rather evoke a neatly organised, peaceful and almost consensual population transfer. As if the *Deutsche Ostsiedlung* of medieval and later times was voluntarily unravelling itself as later generations returned not exactly whence they came. Resettlement, of course, emphasises integration in the new settlement; expulsion emphasises a condition of no longer being where one was, without saying anything about where one now is. Resettlers from A to B are part of B; expellees from A to B may belong more to A. This is the ideological minefield we are dealing with when discussing flight and expulsion, and no doubt I will keep treading on mines. If, in my talk, I often just cop out and use the GDR words “Umsiedlung” or “Umsiedler”, forgive me. Easier to just define things the way official East Germany defined things, while of course preserving the right degree of critical distance. Which brings us to the theme of this current conference, and the subject of my talk...

In his book *Kalte Heimat: Die Geschichte der Deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945*, Andreas Kossert features a chapter on East Germany’s political stance towards German expellees from eastern central Europe.¹ For all that East Germany praised itself on integrating the expellees, Kossert makes clear that this integration came at a cost. The figures sound impressive: between 1945 and 1950, some 91,000 expellees – or rather, as they became, “Umsiedler-Neubauern” – received 8 hectares of land and a degree of state financial support. 43% of all new farmers in the eastern zone were expellees, who, overall, acquired 35% of the land distributed to private owners. But this was only half the story. The other half tells of expellees getting the worst land, and of not being compensated in any way for loss of savings or lack of farm buildings. Hermann Ortloff, for instance, a “kriegsvertriebener Umsiedler” as he described himself in a 1946 letter to the *Deutsche Verwaltung für Land- und Forstwirtschaft*, complains of having nowhere to put either his equipment or his animals and having to distribute them over other people’s property: “die Hühner zum Beispiel sogar in einem andern Dorf”. Ortloff, finding that there quite a number of buildings free which he could have used, approached the local mayor, who kindly suggested “ich solle doch die ganze Sache an den Nagel hängen”.² Even the much-vaunted land reform, then – especially when followed up by forced collectivisation – was not necessarily a blessing for the expellees, only 8% of whom, including family members, actually worked on the land. In contrast to the west of Germany, expellees in the GDR were not allowed to form any collective representation as expellees. That is not to say they did not strive to preserve and act out some sense of collective identity, as when large numbers of them met periodically in Halle and Leipzig zoos – very much under Stasi observation. But representation is

¹ Andreas Kossert, *Kalte Heimat: Die Geschichte der deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945* (Siedler: Munich, 2008)

² See Bundesarchiv Berlin, DK1/8885: Letter from Hermann Ortloff to the Deutsche Verwaltung für Land- und Forstwirtschaft, 19 March 1946.

something different, and anyway, as of the mid-1960s even such harmless nostalgic get-togethers became a thing of the past. And it was not possible for expellees to express open criticism of the GDR's recognition of the Oder-Neisse line – when they did, they could end up in Bautzen. The identity of expellees as 'easterners' was to be quickly eroded; they were allowed to retain just enough to bear the brunt of accusations that they had been, in some cases at least, Hitler's Fifth Column. While many Germans from central eastern Europe came to play an important role in East German political and cultural life – one thinks, for instance, of the GDR Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer, or even the novelist Christa Wolf – it was not as representatives of the lost east. Would Hans Modrow, born in Pomerania, ever have been seen chatting over coffee in the GDR's corridors of power with Günter Mittag, born in Stettin, or Werner Krolikowski, from Silesia, or Egon Krenz, from Kolberg, about the good old days when the east was German, or became it once again before losing that status, as it turned out, for good? Unlikely. The east was now the GDR. "Wir haben nie über unsere Herkunft gesprochen", Modrow said in a recent book. „Das war ein Tabu. Auf der Führungsebene”.³ In the GDR, the German east had not been lost, taken, occupied or annexed; it had been "verspielt", gambled away in the bid of Junker-driven imperialism to turn central eastern Europe into a reservoir of slave labour and cheap resources. East Prussia was not, as in the West, viewed as being "unter fremder Verwaltung", but as justifiably Polish and Soviet. Finally freed from the German whip, one under which it had suffered since Konrad made the terrible mistake of inviting the Teutonic knights to crush the Pruzzen in the early 13th century, East Prussia had been returned to a now socialist civilisation. There had, then, been no flight, merely a resettlement; no expulsion, merely a population transfer. A price had had to be paid, and there was no point haggling over it in retrospect, certainly not with socialist neighbours.

The fact that the process of flight and expulsion, or "resettlement" as it was called, represented the – as it was perceived – justified closure of the issue of the German east in the GDR, meant that it was never open to debate, let alone revision. There could be no return, except as socialist tourist. The fact that it was regarded as reversible in the west, however, was taken as evidence in official GDR circles that West Germany was treading in the footsteps of Junker imperialism; the expellees in West Germany were as it were the vanguard of the next eastward drive or 'Drang nach Osten' which the GDR had to resist. East Germany became the Soviet empire's west, rather than Germany's east. Just as east Germans were to be transformed from fascists into antifascists, so the expellees in the GDR were to reinvent themselves as protectors of the rights of those who had taken possession of their land and property. Role reversals abounded. Not surprisingly, many expellees left East Germany.

³ Heinz Drewniok, *Zweite Heimat Sachsen: Lebenswege deutscher Flüchtlinge und Vertriebener* (Edition Sächsische Zeitung: Dresden, 2007), p. 116.

Some have claimed they were effectively expelled a second time. Certainly they *fled*. Up to 1961, about 800-900,000 former expellees had left the GDR – out of a total of 2,7 million GDR citizens who got out before the wall went up. The number of 4,3 million expellees in the GDR dropped to 3,4.⁴ Of course many left for family reasons, professional reasons, financial reasons, or a mixture of these. But behind many of these reasons was a sense of disadvantage. The loss was the GDR's. Half of those expellees who left were under the age of 33. This was a drain on the labour force.⁵ For those who remained, there was no official voice for any sense of loss or grievance and certainly not for any right or even hope of return; that would have fallen under the rubric of 'revisionism'. According to most commentators, it was not until 1989-1990 that former expellees in the GDR could finally mourn. "Das lange vedrängte, verschwiegene und verfemte Erbe der Vertriebenen", as Andreas Kossert puts it, was just waiting for its chance to emerge.⁶

With expellees denied, effectively, rights of freedom of speech and assembly, with the issue of the Oder-Neisse border closed and with the GDR's emphasis as of the mid-1950s on 'Ankunft' and the reduction of worthwhile heritage to that of antifascism, there was little public space for the acting out of memory. Not that there were not occasional attempts. In Oybin, the local parson Heinz Eggert mentioned flight and expulsion in his sermons and even put up a memorial outside his church "für alle Toten des letzten Krieges, die sterben mussten, weil der Hass stärker war als die Liebe". The Stasi duly arrived, and the 'Akte Eggert' began; the memorial was moved into the church. But essentially, memorialisation was not possible. The absence of any public, organisational and ultimately even administrative voice for the expellees has nevertheless not blinded commentators such as Michael Schwartz and Kossert to the fact that the theme of flight and expulsion was present in East German literature. Here, though, despite some more recent and more differentiated studies of individual works, the critical focus tends to fall on a standard canon such as Anna Segher's *Die Umsiedlerin*, Heiner Müller's play of the same name, and Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*. As for film, apart from Arthur Pohl's *Die Brücke* of 1949, and references in Kurt Maetzig's *Schlösser und Katen* of 1956-1957, it is assumed that DEFA films and GDR television steered clear, perforce, of the theme of flight – and certainly that of expulsion. Which brings me back to my introductory remarks. In using the term "expellees", I could be seen to be implicitly discrediting the GDR position, which is that there were resettlers, not expellees. In fact the GDR even tended to avoid the term "Flüchtling" – though Kossert's claim that the term "fugitive" was absent from GDR discourse until Ursula Hönts-

⁴ Torsten W. Müller, *Neue Heimat Eichsfeld* (Mecke Druck und Verlag: Duderstadt, 2010), p. 11.

⁵ Hans Lemberg and K. Erik Franzen, *Die Vertriebenen: Hitlers Letzte Opfer* (Econ Ullstein: Berlin, 2001), pp. 232ff.

⁶ Kossert, p. 228.

Harendts 1985 novel *Wir Flüchtlingskinder* is simply wrong. One just needs to take a glance at one or two of Anna Seghers's *Friedensgeschichten* to see that the term "Flüchtling", while perhaps undesirable, was never taboo. But "Vertreibung" and "Vertriebene" were generally only used in reference to West Germany; they were West German words, dripping with revanchism and other improprieties. And in GDR literature, so it is assumed, the fact that Germans were actually driven out by Poles, Czechs and Soviets after the war's end could not be portrayed because this would have raised awkward questions; the process of flight can be accommodated ideologically – for instance, as the expression of a bad German conscience and a justified fear of punitive measures – whereas expulsion cannot, or at least less easily. Even where flight is portrayed in GDR literature, according to Kossert, Russian crimes could not be depicted: "Verbrechen der Alliierten hatte es nicht gegeben".⁷

While I don't think it could reasonably be denied that the GDR prohibited the organisation of expellees and streamlined what relevant discourse there was, I have more problems with what I see as attempts to play down the actual significance of GDR culture's contribution to portraying the theme of flight, and even, on occasion, expulsion, a theme, for instance, in Hildegard Maria Rauchfuß's novel *Schlesisches Himmelreich* (1968). 'Play down' in two senses: first of all, by suggesting that such contributions were limited in their number, the critical and historical extent of their portrayals, and their effect on public consciousness. And secondly, in the sense that culture, as historians still seem to think, is somehow secondary. This way of thinking is often implicit, rather than explicit. It is palpable in statements such as this by Michael Schwartz: "zwischenzeitlich blieb es der so genannten schönen Literatur vorbehalten, in der kontrollierten Öffentlichkeit der DDR das Tabuthema der Vertreibung und der Vertriebenen wenigstens punktuell immer wieder zur Sprache zu bringen".⁸ As if culture is a kind of sickness that happens when you can't articulate things in what is imagined as the proper way: a symptom of a lack of public sphere, rather than a dimension of it. The same goes, by the way, for the Holocaust. The criticisms raised by Ruth Klüger against the infantilisation of the Holocaust in *Nackt unter Wölfen* or by W.G. Sebald against the "Erinnerungssembargo" he sees in Jurek Becker's *Jakob der Lügner* notwithstanding, critics do by and large tend to acknowledge the GDR's cultural confrontation with the legacy of Nazism – but often in a manner which suggests that such cultural articulations are the poor relations of the memory family, never quite to be taken seriously. My plea, then, is for a non-dismissive approach to assessing GDR culture – I mean by this an approach which does not begin with a phrase such as "at least" or "I suppose" – for one which assesses its true significance, relevance, and capabilities. Christoph Hein

⁷ Kossert, p. 290.

⁸ Michael Schwartz, "Tabu und Erinnerung: Zur Vertriebenen-Problematik in Politik und literarischer Öffentlichkeit der DDR", *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 51 (2003), 85-101.

was right, surely, to call in 1987 for the opening of a truly public sphere where the media could take over the job of openly expressing thoughts and needs whose articulation had long been delegated to that cultural space between the lines of literature. “Literatur kann und soll und darf nicht Ersatz von Publizistik sein”.⁹ But precisely this overburdening of culture, if you like, with the job of somehow capturing the myriad voices of the silent, means it had a role in the GDR whose significance it would be hard to underestimate.

Let me turn first to film. It surely doesn't do justice to DEFA's presentation of the theme of flight and expulsion – or, to use the GDR term, “resettlement” – to suggest that Arthur Pohl's 1949 film *Die Brücke*, which focuses on the tensions between a group of expellees and indigenous villagers in the eastern zone prior to the founding of the GDR, remains an exception. Even earlier than Pohl's film, Milo Harbich's film *Freies Land* from 1946 depicted the fate of refugees from the east. The images of endless fugitive treks so well known from documentary films and feature films in the West are shown here, too, as indeed they are in the successful GDR television series *Wege übers Land* (1968) and *Märkische Chronik* (1983). Certainly most DEFA films which feature “Umsiedler” date from the 1980s. Jürgen Brauer's *Pugawitza*, for instance, in which the young, parentless Heinrich joins up with a trek of refugees to which he later loses contact, dates from 1981. In Egon Schlegel's 1982 film *Die Schüsse der Arche Noah*, the young Claus sets off alone for the west from a care home in East Prussia as the Russians approach. In Rainer Simon's film *Jadup und Boel* – made in 1980 but not shown until 1988 – the discovery of a book under a collapsed house leads to an investigation into the past and into the post-war relationship between “Umsiedlerkind” Boel, of whom it is rumoured she was raped by a Russian, and Jadup, now mayor in Wickenhausen. Then there is Hans Kratzert's 1987 film *Der Schwur von Rabenhorst* which takes us back to 1949. The “Umsiedlerkinder” Thomas and Renate are among those who found the “League of the Just”, the “Bund der Gerechten”, in a village in Brandenburg, taking Stoertebeker as their role-model. Herbert Ballmann's *Tinko* from 1987, based on the Strittmatter novel, features the “Umsiedlerin” Clary; and in Joachim Hasler's *Der Mann mit dem Ring im Ohr* (1984), the carpenter Tillmann Rutenschneider returns from a concentration camp to a village in Brandenburg to found a collective together with a group of “Umsiedler”. There are some earlier films of relevance, though, from the 1970s, such as Erwin Stranka's 1974 film *Die Moral der Banditen*, about a group of lawless children terrorising a village with indigenous and resettler population.

⁹ Christoph Hein, “Die Zensur ust überlebt, nutzlos, paradox, menschen- und volksfeindlich, ungesetzlich und strafbar: Rede auf dem X. Schriftstellerkongreß der DDR”, in Christoph Hein, *Die fünfte Grundrechenart: Aufsätze und Reden* (Luchterhand Literaturverlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1990), pp. 104-27, here p. 124.

It is striking that many of these films are films for children, and most of them are certainly about children – a focus which of course reflects the historical reality, but whose significance, I feel, goes beyond this. The same goes for many literary depictions such as Annemarie Reinhard's 1949 novel *Treibgut* – by 1958, some 75,000 copies had been sold in the GDR – which depicts the fate of the two children Ralf and Rosemarie who flee with their mother from Greiffenberg in Silesia to Dresden, where their mother dies in the bombing in February 1945. A not uncommon motif, this; in Helga Schütz's novel *In Annas Namen* from 1986, two children are found in a pram under a bridge following the bombing of Dresden; they are wrapped in blankets from a hospital in Breslau. Dresden, memory of the bombing of which was officially encouraged in the GDR because it fostered anti-western sentiment, becomes the switching station which indirectly routes the more controversial memory of the suffering endured through flight and expulsion into a politically acceptable memory network. To empathise with children, moreover, is not to close our eyes to the issue of cause and effect, for very young children bear no blame for the German racial and racist war against the east. Several of the films above show expellee children as seeking orientation in the post-war east Germany; they find it through the Young Pioneers, or are assimilated in other ways. But they are also shown as idealistic, if susceptible. GDR cinema could be very critical of expellees, but then usually in connection with the West of Germany. In Claus Dobberke's 1971 film *Verspielte Heimat*, for instance, an SPD journalist recognises a former leader of the Henlein movement at a meeting of the Sudeten German Homeland Society in West Germany. He tries, unsuccessfully, to bring him to justice. No doubt then, that the GDR regarded the eastern territories as irredeemably forfeited, and those who wanted them back as former or future Nazis. But there was still space for an empathetic memory of the fate of expellees.

The first inaccuracy, then, is that the GDR only occasionally addressed the issue of flight and “resettlement” in its films or TV series. It is more than occasional. And it is also time, I think, to acknowledge the quality of some of these portrayals, and how they are different to the portrayals in the West. I want to take one example, the GDR TV series *Wege übers Land* from 1968. In short, this six-part series tells the story of Gertrud Habersaat, who moves from Mecklenburg to Poland with her husband Emil Kalluweit following the Nazi occupation of that country. Kalluweit is allocated a farm in the course of the Germanisation of Polish land. The series depicts the eviction of Polish villagers and their deportation by train; Gertrud, her conscience activated by witnessing this eviction and deportation, takes in a young Polish child, whom she later discovers to be Jewish. Following her efforts to acquire official papers for the child, she finds herself in somewhat underexplained circumstances acquiring a second, Polish child. The third part of the series begins with a long,

impressively windswept, snow-peppered shot of refugees making their snail's pace way westwards – while on the road nearby the *Wehrmacht* sweeps past, oblivious to their fate. Gertrud eventually is helped onwards by a *Wehrmacht* van, and takes refuge with the two children in a church. Here, a kind-hearted Russian deposits a third child upon her, a baby, before himself being shot. Finally Gertrud reaches her home village to the peal of church bells. It would be easy to pick fault with the film for what appears to be a peculiarly atypical, even bizarre encasing of the narrative of flight: in a way, Gertrud is fleeing as much from Nazi suspicions about the child as she is from the approaching Russians; her children are not her own, in a sense she is simply making off with them, while simultaneously protecting them, and indeed later in the series claims are made on one of the children from Poland. Gertrud is not a German from a family long established in the east, but one from Mecklenburg who – and it is this that animates her conscience – benefits from the process of depolonisation that accompanies German colonisation when her husband acquires a farm that used to belong to Poles. It is as if the series is bending over backwards to negate that flight was flight, rather than a retreat from a series of Nazi injustices.

Yet doesn't my criticism betray the influence on me of watching too many West German documentations on flight and expulsion? Beyond all its oddities, the series makes clear what we often forget, namely that many Germans on the trek west were "Zugereiste", to use a Munich word, they were indeed returning home, and not infrequently from a property they had stolen from Poles. *Wege übers Land* provides the most graphic depiction of the planning of the mass murder of Poles and Jews I have ever seen on television. The scenes featuring Hans Frank and Higher SS and Police Leader Wilhelm Krüger enjoying lunch in Cracow Castle while talking murder far transcend the sometimes cardboard cut-out approach of DEFA to Nazis, while Nazi and *Wehrmacht* officials in the series generally couple conviviality and natural friendliness with casual disdain for Poles and Jews. *Wege übers Land*, in other words, contextualises its images of German flight within a prehistory of German invasion, eviction, possession, theft, repression, deportation, racial "reorganisation", exploitation, murder and general inhumanity – a prehistory one would not find as richly plotted in West German representations. Germans such as Gertrud, Kallweit and Gertrud's former lover Lesstorff are opportunists who, with the exception of Gertrud, shrink back without moral insight from the consequences of their actions. The series, true to its title, plots the German path across the land in 1945 against the background of Polish and Jewish paths away from their homes and the path of German incursion into land not their own, as well as of the paths into incarceration of communists and Polish intellectuals. It is a critical cartography of memory, yet for all that it is not without moments of genuine empathy for the German refugees. The legs of a dead child showing beneath a

blanket by the wayside as Gertrud and the children take the empty pram to carry what few possessions they still have is one such moment. And as Gertrud and the children sit on the tailgate of the truck which has picked them up, we look over their shoulders as they watch the tree-lined alleyway recede, its vanishing-point an imaginary node of projection, perhaps, for the viewer's memories of the lost German east. To object, then, to what is often perceived as the "ideological correctness" of GDR portrayals of flight is to dismiss them too lightly, I feel. The term "ideological correctness" suggests cleaving slavishly to a line of interpretation shaped entirely by present-day considerations independent of actual historical truth; this, in turn, rather disingenuously implies that the omission of the terrible facts of Soviet murder, rape and plunder of Germans – however one might explain or assess this omission – somehow invalidates the portrayal of German crime. To declare that the topic was "taboo" in the GDR is perhaps also "ideologically correct", because it effectively consigns critical portrayals of German crime such as those in *Wege übers Land* to invisibility. The "Germans as victims" discourse can circulate unperturbed. Good that the new DVD speaks out against such taboo claims, and do we need to rediscover the GDR to work against the current trends towards historical self-pity in Germany?

Finally, before I run out of time, a far too short word on GDR literature. First, a short and incomplete list. The theme of flight and/or „Umsiedler“ occurs, to name but some, in Anna Seghers's *Die Umsiedlerin* and Müller's famous play *Die Umsiedlerin oder das Leben auf dem Lande* (first published 1975), Reinhard's *Treibgut* (1949), Kurt Türke's *Tor der Hoffnung* (1949), Gustel Langensteins *Aus der Mauerstraße an die Warnow* (1950), Maria Langner's *Stahl* (1952), Karl Mundstock's *Helle Nächte* (1952), Erwin Strittmatter's *Tinko* (1954), Max Zimmering's *Phosphor und Flieder* (1954), Hans Marchwitza's *Roheisen* (1955), Fritz Selbmann's *Die Heimkehr des Joachim Ott* (1963), Hildegard Maria Rauchfuß's *Schlesisches Himmelreich* (1968), Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* (1976), Eberhard Panitz's *Meines Vaters Straßenbahn* (1979), Elisabeth Schulz-Semrau's *Suche nach Karalautschi* (1984) – which, incidentally, on the subject of another alleged GDR taboo, at least mentions the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, while Wolfgang Licht's *Die Gussmanns* (1986) certainly features the ship's 'Kraft durch Freude' days – Helga Schütz's *In Annas Namen* (1986), and Ursula Höntsch-Harendt's *Wir Flüchtlingskinder* (1986), in which the theme certainly takes centre-stage in a way not the case before. Interestingly, this parallels developments in West German literature, which, for all its greater preoccupation with flight and expulsion and the facts of Soviet crimes against Germans, largely steered clear of extensive portrayals – and I stress the adjective "extensive" – of the issue much before Gudrun Pausewang's childrens' novel *Fern von der Rosinkawiese. Die Geschichte einer Flucht* of 1989.

Some of the works mentioned above – and this list is not exhaustive - may be called “Trivialromane”, especially those from the 1940s and 1950s. They sometimes emphasise integration into the agriculturally and industrially reorganised and collectivised East Germany. In fact, they appear in some cases to accompany and culturally reinforce this process in a manner we might consider politically correct. Take the case of Paul Körner-Schrader’s “Erzählung” *Die Hungerbauern* from 1948, in which the process of land reform is described in glowing terms as a justified act whereby peasants colonise Junkerland – “hier ist unser Kolonialland”.¹⁰ German’s problem was not one of “Volk ohne Raum”, we read, but “Raum ohne Volk”; the “Umsiedler” in Körner-Schrader’s story therefore have not so much been the victims of losing their home, as the benefactors in gaining one; they are not the victims of decolonisation, but profit from colonisation. Some of the baddies in this literature are “Umsiedler”, such as the anti-socialist Upper Silesian character Hans Leschek in *Die Heimkehr von Joachim Ott*, of whom we read: “Hans Leschek war Umsiedler, einer unter Millionen, und er kam von seinem Flüchtlingsschicksal nicht los. Hans Leschek hatte in Oberschlesien nicht viel an Heimat zu verlieren gehabt. Er besaß nicht mal eine eigene Wohnung”.¹¹ Dynamic resettlers are usually female characters, such as the East Prussian Karla in Rauchfuß’s *Wem die Steine Antwort geben* of 1953, or Gerda Hellstedt in Benno Voelkner’s *Die Liebe der Gerda Hellstedt* (1958), or the West Prussian Lisa in Selbmann’s *Die Heimkehr von Joachim Ott*. They roll up their sleeves and not only resettle themselves, but help to resettle those, often male figures whose war experience or scepticism has rendered them uncertain of the future. The integrated become the integrators, doing what women, of course, do best – leading men to their true destination in life. This kitsch is particularly unbearable in *Wem die Steine Antwort geben*.

Again, though, it is important to emphasise that there are more works of GDR literature which address the theme of flight and, in the case of Rauchfuß and Selbmann, expulsion, too, than is commonly acknowledged. And it needs to be stressed that they go beyond simply affirming the state policy of integration. That flight was painful is not denied. *Treibgut* begins with the description of a stream of refugees „mit Pferd und Wagen oder Ochsen gespannen, mit Handkarren oder zusammengebündelten Lasten auf den Rücken“, eine „Menschenschlange“, die sich „langsam [weiterquält]“.¹² Kurt Türke’s novel *Das Tor der Hoffnung* likewise begins with the description of a trek, in this case from Lower Silesia. Selbmann’s novel is a further example of a novel which begins with the depiction of flight. More than Rauchfuß, Reinhard or Türke, Selbmann carefully

¹⁰ Paul Körner-Schrader, *Die Hungerbauern* (F. Mitzlaff: Rudolstadt, 1948), S. 37.

¹¹ Fritz Selbmann, *Die Heimkehr des Joachim Ott* (Mitteldeutscher Verlag: Halle, 1963), p. 297.

¹² Annemarie Reinhard, *Treibgut* (Mitteldeutscher Verlag: Halle, 1954), p. 5.

contextualises this depiction, but this does not rob it of empathy: “Aber diesmal waren es die Menschen des eigenen Landes [...] Jahrelang war auf den Straßen der Flucht in allen Sprachen der Welt geweint, geklagt, gejammert, gestöhnt und geseufzt worden. Jetzt waren die Fluchtwege erfüllt vom Wehklagen, Fluchen und Jammern in deutscher Sprache. Im Osten Europas begann der zweite Teil der gewaltigen Völkerwanderung”.¹³ One paragraph of Selbmann’s novel refers to the “Schreien und Drängen”, and the panic-filled terror “wenn verirrte Granaten irgendwo auf dem Feld oder auch mitten im Gewimmel der Flüchtenden krepitierten, Flugzeuge, die nicht das Hakenkreuz trugen, im Tiefflug das Chaos überflogen oder Kübelwagen der Wehrmacht sich gewaltsam und rücksichtslos einen Weg durch das Meer der angstvoll Gehetzten bahnten”. The recklessness of the German army is explicitly thematised, and what are the planes not bearing the swastika if not Russian planes? American planes would have been called American planes.¹⁴ Empathy is paired with an at least implicit indictment of the Soviets, disguised somewhat.

In her novel *Schlesisches Himmelreich*, Rauchfuß depicts the eviction of Germans from Hirschberg following the arrival of Poles. One of the evicted, Carlotta, makes no complaints, pointing out to her disgruntled family that they should review how the Germans treated Poles before objecting to Polish treatment of Germans. But Rauchfuß does not spare us a drastic depiction of Germans having their bags plundered by Polish officials before being herded into cattle waggons. Rape remains a harder theme for GDR authors to confront, but they do so suggestively, inviting readers to decode. In Rauchfuß’s novel, references to rape remain unclarified: did this really happen, or is it but a fantasy of Germans infected by “Führerpropaganda”? Is it an exaggeration?¹⁵ And as one of the Fähnrich family says, “ich möchte nicht wissen, was die SS mit den Russenfrauen angestellt hat”. In Voelkner’s *Die Liebe der Gerda Hellstedt*, mysterious allusions to Gerda’s past and her psychological frailty leave the reader surmising an experience of rape. In Fritz Selbmann’s *Die Heimkehr des Joachim Ott*, rape is a rumour, never substantiated, but never fully disproven either. The same goes for Russian “Schweigelager” in which Germans have allegedly been incarcerated. Mentioning events such as rape only to then to cast doubt on their reality can be seen to dissolve that reality; as, in effect, a denial of history. But doubt is not really denial. It leaves the issue open.

I will finish with some comments on what, I think, we still need to know much more about. There are so many GDR authors who hail from former eastern German lands, enclaves or populations: Siegfried Pitschmann (born 1930, Grünberg, Silesia), Christa Wolf (born 1929, Landsberg, East

¹³ Selbmann, p. 5.

¹⁴ Selbmann, p. 7.

¹⁵ Hildegard Maria Rauchfuß, *Schlesisches Himmelreich* (1968), pp. 609-610.

Brandenburg), Johannes Bobrowski (born 1919, Tilsit, East Prussia), Helga Schütz (born 1937, Falkenheim, Silesia), Christoph Hein (born 1944, Heinzendorf, Silesia), Armin Mueller (born 1930, Schweidnitz, Silesia), Hildegard Maria Rauchfuss (born 1918, Breslau), Benno Voelkner (born 1900, Danzig), Werner Steinberg (born 1913, Neurode, Schlesien), Karl-Heinz Jakobs (born 1929, Kiauken, East Prussia), Harry Thürk (born 1927, Zülz, Upper Silesia), Peter Hacks (born 1928, Breslau, Silesia), Helmut Baierl (born 1926, Rumburg, Czechoslovakia), Horst Bastian (born 1939, Exin, Posen), Hanns Cibulka (born 1920, Jägerndorf, Czechoslovakia), Louis Fürnberg (born 1909, Iglau, Bohemia), Heinar Kipphardt (born 1922, Heidersdorf, Silesia), Jan Koplowitz (born 1909, Kudowa, Silesia), Erich Köhler (born 1928, Taschwitz, Karlsbad), Alfred Kurella (born 1895, Brieg, Silesia), Hans Marchwitza (born 1890, Scharley, Beuthen), Paul Wiens (born 1922, Königsberg, East Prussia). April Eisman, if she is sitting here, will no doubt point out – absolutely correctly – that I haven't even mentioned GDR artists who came from one of these areas, such as Bernhard Heisig, indeed, born 1925 in Breslau. In assessing or reassessing such authors, I think, we need to look not just for the explicit marks their former homelands left on them. To what extent, I wonder, can psychological motifs, characterisation, and modes of perception have been shaped either by the experience of a former homeland, or by the loss of it? Lost identities, shed selves, or indeed the echoes and continued articulations of these selves can impact on expression in a manner more elusive and metaphorical than notions of the explicit – upon which taboo claims are based – allow. We need to know more about this. We also need to know more about the evolution of GDR literature's perspective on flight and expulsion. Later works such as Elisabeth Schulz-Semrau's *Suche nach Karalautschi* (1984), Rolf Schneider's *Die Reise nach Jaroslaw* (1978), Armin Müller's *Der Puppenkönig und Ich* (1986) and Ursula Höntsch-Harendt's *Wir Flüchtlingskinder* (1985)? engage the perspective much more of the second generation of fugitives; they are often marked by a less realistic, more subjective approach, embracing elements of the fantastic; they portray psychological disarray and disorientation to a greater degree than the earlier novels; their positive focus is more on conciliation than on reconstruction; they express an urge, however explained, to seek out the past, rather than emphasising becoming part of the new *Heimat*. While I was wary of classifying the earlier novels as merely ideological, it is clear that the later novels are less bound by aesthetic or political convention. Finally, we need to look at German literature as more of a whole. The massively positive reception of Grass's *Im Krebsgang* often overlooked the rich intertextuality of the novella, which, it seems to me, refers back to Lenz's *Heimatmuseum* - what is the connection between Conny Karrasch in *Heimatmuseum* and Konny Pokriefke in *Im Krebsgang*? – and Christa Wolf's own *Im Krebsgang*, *Kindheitsmuster*? Where the narrator tells us that her earlier attempts to recount Nelly's story began as an attempt "die Arbeit des Gedächtnisses zu beschreiben, als Krebsgang, als rückwärtsgerichtete

Bewegung“? *Kindheitsmuster*, it seems to me, is characterised by a gingerly approach to the past, by a struggle with perspective and with finding a place for the past in the present that anticipates Grass’s work – as does Wolf’s awareness of generational issues. While not denying, then, that the theme of flight and expulsion was, in the GDR, a politically undesirable theme which was banished from the corridors of power, and one which even GDR authors – as Wolf herself experienced – had to be careful when addressing, I do think we need to look more carefully at the term ‘taboo’ to find out those grey areas between the suppressed and the articulated, and we also need to ask whether the articulations that do occur on the explicit level are necessarily simply ‘politically correct’. Those who deploy the term “politically correct” in their criticism often mean “historically incorrect”, yet historical accuracy is not a given. It can be as much an ideological construction as the perspective it purports to define.