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The Politics of Memory: Flight and Expulsion of German Populations after the Second World War and German Collective Memory

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The mass flight and expulsion of German populations from their traditional homelands in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe after the Second World War was an act on an unprecedented scale; more than 13 million Germans were affected by this forced migration. Their integration into the two postwar German states is today widely regarded as a great success story. However, this came at a cost: the refugees and expellees had to integrate into the postwar polity, economy and society without their memories and experiences receiving due recognition in a common narrative of the receiving areas. With the unification of the two German states, flight and expulsion have begun to be linked into an overall German collective memory. However, the remembrance of individual pain suffered by Germans must not be allowed to blur the German responsibility for the crimes committed during the Nazi period, and the jury is still out on whether the difficult task of combining the two will be mastered successfully or whether old prejudices and fears will resurface instead.

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The end of the Second World War and the collapse of Nazi Germany led to millions of Germans losing their homes in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe. They either fled from the Red Army alongside retreating German troops at the onset of the Soviet offensive in the winter of 1944–1945, or, if they stayed behind, were expelled after the war and forcibly transferred to Potsdam Germany (the four zones of occupation). It is estimated that between 12 to 14 million Germans were affected by

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this compulsory transfer of population from east to west. By the end of 1950, when the expulsion measures had all but finished, approximately 16.5 per cent (or 1 in 6) of the population of the Federal Republic of Germany (the three western zones) and almost 25 per cent (or 1 in 4) of the population of the German Democratic Republic (the Soviet zone) were either refugees or expellees from outside the borders of Potsdam Germany.

Many of them, especially those who left their homes before the end of the war, were convinced that they would be able to return in a short while, whether or not Germany lost the war. Any other scenario was unimaginable for them, as even after the Versailles peace settlements of 1919–1920, those Germans who lived in territories that had become part of the newly established state of Poland were allowed to stay if they wished. However, after the Second World War, the loss of home was to be permanent for all Germans who lived east of the Oder-Neiße line. They were forced to settle in what remained of Germany without the possibility of visiting their former homes for more than a generation.

The flight and expulsion of the German populations have been extensively documented. Equally well researched are the problems of the integration of the refugees and expellees into the polity, economy and society of postwar Germany, both west and east. Contrary to grave predictions, the newcomers were absorbed into the two German states relatively quickly without causing much, if any, radical upheaval in the medium and longer term, and this fact is generally regarded as one of the great success stories of Germany's postwar history. However, until very recently, it has been largely overlooked that in the process the specific memories and experiences of the refugees and expellees remained virtually excluded from a comprehensive common collective memory in both German states.

Memories of Flight and Expulsion in West and East Germany up to 1989

Two personal recollections illustrate how German collective memory of flight and expulsion was shaped in the postwar period. Annerose Rosan was born in 1928 in the small village of Gilgenau (today Elgnówko) in East Prussia. In January 1945, she fled westward with her parents to escape from the advancing Red Army, and the family initially settled in the village of Morsum near Bremen in north-west Germany. She recalls that the local school teacher tried to bring native and refugee children together by staging plays in the local pub, many of which he wrote himself:

> They all followed—with little variation—the same plot: a refugee girl—hard-working, very neat, very pretty—works for a peasant on his farm. The son of the peasant falls in love with her. Against the wishes of his mother, and with the support of the grandfather, they actually get married. In her anger, the mother trips up and sprains her ankle. The young daughter-in-law nurses her in a self-sacrificing way, runs the whole household at the same time and thus wins the heart of her mother-in-law. All are happy. (Rosan, 2000, pp. 117–118)

Petra Reski was born in 1958 in the West German Ruhr district. Both of her parents were refugees—her father from Reußen (today Ruś) in East Prussia, her mother from Neisse (today Nysa) in Silesia—but for a long time Petra was never quite sure whether these almost mythical homes that her family sentimentally reminisced about at their get-togethers really existed at all:

> In my school books there was only something about the Soester Börde [a range of hills north of the actual Ruhr district] and about seams of hard coal and how they were mined, and nothing about East Prussia and Silesia. . . . Nowhere could I find a trace of East Prussia. When I was ten, I attended the *Gymnasium* and got a *Diercke* school atlas. There I finally found East Prussia and Silesia. (Reski, 2000, pp. 28–29)

She was baffled, however, by the fact that in this atlas both areas were still shown as part of 'Germany' and only at the moment under Polish or Soviet administration: 'I regarded the term at the moment as very vague. . . . Perhaps from half past nine to one under Polish and Soviet administration, and from three to six under Finnish and Hungarian? And maybe on some days not administered at all?' (Reski, 2000, pp. 30–31). Later she corrected even her grandmother when she spoke of Danzig rather than Gdánsk:

> This was part of my battle against the revanchists: I regarded everyone who said Danzig as a clandestine *Heim-ins-Reich* German, everyone who forgot to include the word 'former' in front of East Prussia was an incorrigible *Deutschland-Deutschland-über-alles* German for me. After all, they had started the war, and so it seemed only just that they had to leave their homes. (Reski, 2000, pp. 23–24)

The native school teacher in the little village of Morsum most definitely meant well and intended to give the refugees and expellees hope for the future by showing in his plays that they could be integrated into the host society soon—as indeed they would be. However, at the same time, his plays denied the newcomers their own personal histories and specific memories because they assumed and almost expected that in the course of their successful settling into postwar Germany the refugees and expellees would lose, or 'shed', not only their old collective identities and mentalities, but also the specific experiences and individual memories they had brought with them from the east and would thus become like the natives.

In the former German Democratic Republic, this was much more obvious than in Western Germany. Here, the refugees and expellees were officially referred to first as '*Umsiedler*'('resettlers') and then as '*Neubürger*' ('new citizens'), and from 1950 the category disappeared altogether from all official statistics. The East German government pursued a policy that made it clear their loss of home was permanent. The state doctrine of anti-fascism, which was imposed from above to define the 'new' society of the 'socialist nation' after 1945, and the notion of a specific GDR citizenship left no room for the memories and experiences of the refugees and expellees from the east. The experience of flight and expulsion and everything that

was related to it was excluded from the official discourse and remained so until the last days of the East German state.

The case is nothing like as clear-cut in Western Germany, but ultimately the refugees and expellees did not fare much better here, even though themes of flight and expulsion were taken up both in the political discourse and in popular culture in the 1950s and well into the 1960s. Refugees and expellees were officially referred to as '*Heimatvertriebene*' ('expellees from their homes') and maps, including those used in schools, continued to show Germany with the borders of 31 December 1937 and labelled the territories east of the Oder-Neiße line as 'temporarily under Polish administration' (or Soviet administration, in the case of the northern part of East Prussia). From 1947–1948 onwards, the displaced were allowed to form their own cultural and political organisations, which became powerful interest groups in the first decade of the Federal Republic, and their meetings and rallies were attended by leading politicians. In their manifestos and official speeches, they propagated the right of the refugees and expellees to return to their homes in the east (*Recht auf Heimat*) and, with the exception of the Communists, all the main political parties and pressure groups officially supported this view. However, all these manifestations of flight and expulsion in the public and the popular discourse of Western Germany in the 1950s and 1960s (and beyond), did not mean a true acknowledgement of the pasts of the refugees and expellees by the West German polity and society. Instead, it was a highly selective acknowledgement and thus a highly selective remembering: only those aspects of the individual past of the newcomers were incorporated into the political and popular discourse that served a broader function in postwar Western Germany. This was to stabilise a society that had become unravelled in the course of war and defeat and to give the new West German state some form of legitimacy and an acceptable form of dealing with the past.

In the political context of the Cold War, the refugees and expellees were useful pawns. Their sufferings could be—and were—exploited in the propaganda battle against the Soviet Union and communism in general. Both the Western powers and the West German government found it opportune to keep the hopes of many refugees and expellees alive that a return to their former homes would be possible by emphasising that it required an official peace treaty for the definite settlement of Germany's postwar borders, and that until such a peace treaty was concluded, the future of the territories east of the Oder-Neiße line had to be regarded as open under international law. Flight and expulsion were equally useful to establish that Germans, too, were victims of the Second World War and had suffered injustice and hardship, and to suggest that the crimes committed against Germans were perhaps comparable to the crimes committed by Nazi Germany against the Jews, by implicitly or even explicitly equating both as 'victims driven from their historic homelands because of their "ethnicity" (*Volkszugehörigkeit*)' (Moeller, 1997, p. 1019). This highly selective public acknowledgement of flight and expulsion in the political discourse was mirrored by an equally selective representation in popular culture. Here, flight and expulsion were trivialised into a soap opera with a happy ending.[1]

Thus, the life histories of the refugees and expellees were basically reduced to two aspects in postwar West German collective memory: victims of tragedy and crime in the course of German defeat, on the one hand, and resilient individuals who bounced back against all the odds with their successful integration into the postwar economy and society, on the other. All regional characteristics that were more than picturesque folklore, as well as their personal and group histories before their displacement, were widely disregarded. The overall result, therefore, was ultimately similar in both Western and Eastern Germany. The refugees and expellees had to integrate into the postwar polity, economy and society without their memories and experiences getting a proper place in a common narrative of the areas that received them.

The collective memory in both German states was the collective memory as defined by the natives. In the GDR, refugees and expellees were not permitted to develop a collective identity based on their common experience of forced displacement from their homelands, and their specific experiences and memories were suppressed. In Western Germany, the creation of such a collective identity was encouraged and at times even actively supported, but the refugees and expellees were individualised and socially marginalised, shunted off into a special niche only to become museum pieces. The commitment of the West German state to the cause of the refugees and expellees remained superficial and only just formal. At best, it helped the refugees and expellees to keep and foster their specific group identity, while at the same time it gave the native society the comforting feeling that it was fulfilling its obligations in acknowledging the past of the refugees and expellees. The memories and experiences were instrumentalised, or functionalised, and were used, or exploited. No shared past of native and refugee populations and no shared collective memory emerged.

The 1960s saw a change in public discourse in Western Germany toward a more (self-)critical assessment of the Nazi period. Willy Brandt, the new Chancellor, a Social Democrat who had fled Nazi Germany and returned after the war in a Norwegian uniform, embarked on a foreign policy of rapprochement with the East (*Ostpolitik*) and declared that the treaties that his government was concluding with the Soviet Union and Poland gave nothing away that had not been lost long ago. Brandt dated the origin of this loss not to 1945, but all the way back to 1933 or even before. The refugees and expellees were more and more regarded as a relic of the past, whose continued insistence that their loss and pain had to be acknowledged seemed to threaten the newly established dialogue with the eastern European countries. A further sign of how irrelevant a social group they appeared to be was the fact that the wave of *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life) which had arrived in the 1970s passed over and omitted their historical experience—quite in contrast to the historical experiences of other social groups such as women or workers that were reconstructed and given a proper place in public consciousness. The memories of the refugees and expellees continued to be denied a place in a comprehensive and shared collective memory due to political considerations. As a result, they were all but obliterated from public consciousness and their concerns became more and more an easy prey for the political far right.

After the Christian Democrats returned to power in West Germany under Chancellor Kohl in the early 1980s, it seemed for a moment that the refugees and expellees could become more connected again to the main political discourse. However, the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War made clear that West German society as a whole had come to see the 8 May primarily as a day of liberation, whereas for most refugees and expellees it still represented unacknowledged loss and suffering: the beginning of their displacement from their homes. The sense that their specific memories and experiences were more than ever excluded from the prevailing discourse again became very acute, and almost as if protesting against the general mood, the *Schlesische Landsmannschaft*, the interest group of those Germans whose homeland had been Silesia, planned to hold their annual meeting in 1985 in Hannover under the slogan: '40 Years of Expulsion—Silesia Remains Ours' (*Schlesien bleibt unser*).[2] It was easy to dismiss this as nationalist rhetoric and just another sign of the continued existence of revisionism and revanchism among the refugees and expellees, but it could also be argued that for the large majority of the members it was an almost desperate appeal to society at large to acknowledge their life biographies and group memories in a way that did not simply exploit them for political and other purposes.

The Memories of the German Refugees and Expellees

How does this process look from the perspective of those who endured the fate of flight and expulsion? Despite very difficult beginnings, the large majority of refugees and expellees were, from today's standpoint, reasonably successful in their 'new' lives in the west. Without doubt, they found a new place (*Verortung*) in postwar Germany. However, narrative interviews conducted with more than 60 refugees and expellees since 1997 show many feel that even more than fifty years after flight and expulsion, it is still relevant for them that they were not born in the region where they live now. There is still a lingering feeling that they have retained some of the qualities of a stranger, of an outsider, and do not totally 'belong'.[3] Ingeborg W., who came from the vicinity of Danzig (today Gdánsk), stated:

> We have a nice circle of acquaintances here, also our neighbours here, and we are invited for coffee now and again, but the real group is made up of natives only. . . . [T]hey went to confirmation classes together, they went to school together, and accordingly they stick together, so we don't really get into it. . . . One does not really make full contact with the natives, let's put it this way. No, one doesn't.

When asked what they consider their 'home', many simply avoided the issue like Arnold N., who was born in 1930 in Steinau/Oder (today Scinawa) in Silesia and has become a respected local historian of Celle (near Hannover) where he now lives. He called himself 'a Lower Saxon who was born in Silesia—a true European'. Others used words such as '*Rucksack-Deutsche*', referring to the fact that they arrived in what is now Germany with little more than a backpack or a suitcase, or '*Beute-Deutsche*',

describing themselves as (Western) Germany's war booty, to explain their sense of identity. More than half of the refugees and expellees interviewed still considered their true home (*Heimat*) the place where they were born. Valentin I., for example, who was born in 1928 in Brigidau, Galicia, declared without hesitation:

> I am a Galician. . . . For me, there is only one home, and that is Galicia. . . . One has grown old here [in *Landkreis* Celle]; the children were born here; one has built up something for the children here, but somehow one is still very attached to it [Galicia]. One simply cannot give it up so easily. . . . It is similar to birds of passage; they, too, always return to their place of origin.

All have detailed memories of their former homes, including those who were still children when they left. Hermann M. explained: 'It is part of one's self. One does not have to "preserve" it—it is simply there. It does not require any effort.' Most if not all believe that the region where they were born has left some form of an impression upon them, and that they have until the present day kept certain qualities or peculiarities from their region of origin. For all, even for those who stated that they had found new roots and a new home in the west, the old home in the east still played an important part in their lives, and this is regardless of social class or gender. The difference is the impact that it had on their lives, how much it overshadowed their new lives in the west, and how 'unwieldy' and 'complicated' their lives became because of this. For some, the memories of their old home are not much more than normal memories of childhood and youth that come back to them and about which they tend to speak more often now that they have reached old age, but which do not necessarily haunt them. For others, however, they represent an element of pain in their lives to this day.

Flight and expulsion also meant that for most of them their old village communities and neighbourhoods were torn apart and scattered all over the four zones of occupation in a way that hardly any native experienced. Many mentioned that they were always envious of the fact that for most of their native neighbours the social networks in which they grew up remained mostly intact for all of those years and not only provided social and emotional support, but were often also important in terms of connections and influence. Almost all refugees and expellees still remembered in great detail how difficult it was to settle into their new home. In their first encounters with the natives most had the experience of being regarded as different and therefore inferior, and they never forgot the discrimination they felt. Erna C., who was born in 1922 in Neusalz/Oder (today Nowa Sól) summed this up when she concluded: 'We were strangers, and they did not accept us.' As a first step toward overcoming their feelings of being uprooted, the newcomers were determined to improve their material situation as quickly as possible, or in the words of Erna C.: '[T]o roll up our sleeves, work and make sure that we get out of this desperate situation again, and quickly.' However, no matter how successful they were in this endeavour, there was a price to pay that natives in a similar position of economic hardship did not have to pay. 'We had to adapt,' said Gertrud F. 'I simply gave up

[many of my habits and customs]. When I have got to live here, I just have to conform to the people here.'

Home, identity and memory are inextricably intertwined. In order to regard a place as home and become a member of the community and experience the emotional security that this entails it is necessary that all people can link their individual memories and experiences to the prevailing narrative. They need to be able to tell and share stories about themselves and their past, and the individual stories have to be accepted and become part of a comprehensive and cohesive narrative or collective historical consciousness. Most refugees and expellees tried to tell their stories after they arrived in their new homes in the west, but especially in the rural regions most encountered the experience that the natives were not interested and did not want to know. Brigitte A. from Königsberg (today Kaliningrad) said: 'They cannot put themselves into our position, and then I stop talking, I don't tell anything.' Josephina V. from Groß Volz in Pomerania (today Wołcza Wielka) came to the conclusion: 'To whom was one to tell this? Who wanted to listen to this?... Yes, this was my problem.' She did not even tell her husband everything that happened to her during her 16 months of forced labour in Polish-ruled Pomerania, and almost resignedly she reported that even her own granddaughter once said to her: 'Oh, Gran, you're from Poland, aren't you?' Like so many she felt that 'it has not been talked about sufficiently.' Dieter R.'s request that the receiving areas have to accept the historical-cultural heritage the refugees and expellees brought with them as being of equal importance as their own, therefore, has remained an issue up until today: '[T]o be more open, . . . to take the other cultural regions to heart as well. . . . One is as enrichening as the other.' Johann P., too, stressed that he found it important 'that one keeps alive the memory, that one makes people aware of how it was', and he regretted the fact that 'schools do not teach any more that there once was a Königsberg or whatever—in my opinion that is taking away history, and that is bad, that must not happen'. He added it distressed him 'that it is automatically assumed that one has a desire for revenge or something like that—that is absolutely not true!'

However, the reality was, in both German states, that the memory of displacement by flight or expulsion and of the new beginning in the west was only handed down within the affected families, and often not even there. Throughout the period from the end of the Second World War until the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe (and perhaps until today) the refugees and expellees had to come to terms with the trauma and the grief over the loss of their former homes and with their memories of the Second World War and the period preceding it on their own, outside the public domain, since postwar German society did not offer any collective patterns or 'cushions' for dealing with them.

Most histories of individual German communities and districts, even those written in the last ten or twenty years, make only passing references to the thousands of refugees and expellees from the east who were taken in after the Second World War. If

they feature at all, it is basically as a sudden influx of people that caused tremendous problems for the receiving regions: problems of housing, feeding, employment. One very illuminating example is the chronicle of Duderstadt, a rural district in the south-eastern corner of Lower Saxony. Under the date of 27 February 1946, it records:

> The local museum (*Heimatmuseum*[4]) in the former home of the adult education institute has to be vacated by the order of the council to make room for refugee families. The exhibits are put into boxes and stored in the attic. When the attic is burgled by refugees in the autumn, some of these boxes are brought to the new Adult Education Institute. (Lerch, 1979, p. 198)

Unwittingly, the author of this chronicle put the conflict between natives and newcomers into a fitting parable: The *Heimatmuseum* is occupied by refugees and expellees, and the exhibits that document the past prior to their influx are allegedly burgled by these newcomers. It is almost as if the natives fear that the refugees try to become part of the past of the natives by getting into those boxes—unsuccessfully, however, as this past is evacuated into a different building and, one might assume, thus preserved untainted by the influx of 'strangers'. There are hardly any places of public commemoration of the particular experiences and contributions of the refugees and expellees, and where they do exist, they are more often than not in obscure places.

Most refugees and expellees, especially those who had settled in rural areas, saw with feelings of sadness and helplessness that their specific past with the stories they had to tell were more and more regarded as irrelevant by society at large, while for them it had remained a burning issue and for many became even more so as they got older for many. However, they found it impossible to share their stories with the natives. Instrumentalisation of their experiences was followed by collective forgetting and suppression. As a result the refugees and expellees have continued to feel, even today, to a larger or lesser degree emotionally somewhere in-between their 'old' home, which now only exists in memory, perhaps in some family traditions and in a distant country, and their 'new' home, which even after fifty years still shows a trace of strangeness and of unfamiliarity. This marks the complex duality of past and present which is so typical for many refugees and expellees and which they sum up by referring to the place where they were born and grew up as their *Heimat*, and their home in the west where they have lived for more than 50 years, as their *Zuhause*. Hildegard L., who was born in 1936 in Mohrungen (today Morag), is far from alone when she voiced her feelings:

> Mohrungen, East Prussia—my home. I am in every tree, in every leaf, in every drop of the many lakes. I am in the air and in all roots. My ancestors lived and died there. Is it possible to say that nine years are more important than 54? Yes!!! Lower Saxony gave me a new home, became familiar and something that I could understand. My old home became more distant and veiled. People with a different language and

> different histories live there now. But where do I belong? Am I a wanderer between two worlds?

Re-sitings of Memory since 1989–1990

With the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe and the unification of the two German states in 1989–1990, a chance opened up for a re-siting of memory and a new cohesive and inclusive narrative. After forty years of separation, West Germans and East Germans had few common experiences and memories left apart from National Socialism, the Second World War and the uprootedness many suffered as a consequence of these. This meant that the flight and expulsion of large numbers of Germans from the east became a focus of public attention and discussion again (Hirsch, 2003). In the western part of Germany, this new interest in these events at the end of the war was helped by the fact that, with the collapse of communism, it became much easier to travel to the former homelands of the German refugees and expellees. Such visits had already taken place earlier, from West Germany since the 1970s, following the *Ostpolitik*, but it had been almost exclusively refugees and expellees who had made these journeys. They had often been ridiculed as 'homesickness tourism' (*Heimwehtourismus*), or 'pilgrimages to the old homelands' (*Pilgerfahrten in die alte Heimat*), but they had the important function of helping the refugees and expellees come to terms with the dramatic turn their lives took after the Second World War and to understand what Margot H., who was born in Hartfeld (today Patniwi), expressed with the words: 'The memory is German, but the reality is Polish.' From 1989–1990, increasing numbers of people who had no family connections travelled to these regions, and they discovered similarities between the expelled Germans and those people who live in these regions today, many of them refugees and expellees themselves with similar experiences of displacement.

Writers, novelists, professional historians, the media and even the politicians (especially following events in former Yugoslavia) re-discovered the theme of flight and expulsion, raising public consciousness and instigating a public debate on a level not seen since the end of the Second World War. A powerful expression of this new approach to the past was Günter Grass' novella *Im Krebsgang*, published in February 2002 (English translation: *Crabwalk*) and regarded as the first attempt by a major German author to deal in a work of literature with the mass flight and expulsion of German populations from Central and Eastern Europe. It was received with great acclaim by both the German and the international media and became an instant bestseller. Grass clearly hit a nerve with the critics and the general public alike, regardless of their political persuasion. Indeed, it was in particular the left and centre-left who showed almost a sense of relief that it was someone like Günter Grass who had taken up this topic as he was a Nobel Prize winner and intellectual of the left who could not be suspected of being a German nationalist.

With his novella *Im Krebsgang*, Grass tapped into an already simmering debate of what constitutes German historical consciousness and collective memory. Grass himself had been thinking about how to deal with this topic in a work of literature for a long time. In his most famous book, *Die Blechtrommel* (English translation: *The Tin Drum*), he mentioned the deportation of Germans from Danzig in early 1945, but mentioning it was as much as Grass found himself able to do at the time. Forty years later, in *Mein Jahrhundert* (English translation: *My Century*), he noted:

> [I] could not put pen to paper even though all sorts of people—the peasant woman from Masuren who had lost her children, a venerable couple who had made their way here [from Frauenburg, today Frombork, in East Prussia] with great difficulty, a Polish professor who was one of the few survivors of the camp—poured out their misery to me. Describing misery was something I hadn't been trained to do. I lacked the words. So I learned silence. (Grass, 1999b, p. 115; German original: Grass, 1999a, p. 163)

In October 2000, in a speech in Vilnius, Lithuania, he publicly declared that he found it 'strange and disturbing to hear it said that it is only ever late in the day and with much hesitation that the sufferings inflicted on the Germans during the war are recalled.' (Grass, 2001b, p. 66; German original: Grass, 2001a, pp. 32–33).

Im Krebsgang moved beyond the selective remembrance of flight and expulsion and linked the events at the end of the Second World War with its origins in 1933 and earlier, on the one hand, and its legacy for the present time on the other. Grass himself, in the guise of 'Der Alte' (the old man), pointedly acknowledged in the novella that it was up to his generation to put into words the horrors experienced by the German refugees and expellees:

> [His generation] should have found words for the hardships endured by the Germans fleeing East Prussia. . . . Never . . . should his generation have kept silent about such misery, merely because its own sense of guilt was so overwhelming, merely because for years the need to accept responsibility and show remorse took precedence, with the result that they abandoned the topic to the right wing. This failure . . . was staggering. (Grass, 2003, p. 103; German original: Grass, 2002, p. 99)

With this, Grass repeated what some politicians and historians had already noted earlier: that it was out of a perhaps well-meant, but ultimately wrong, understanding of political correctness that in particular those who thought of themselves as being on the left or centre-left avoided acknowledging the specific memories and experiences of the refugees and expellees. The result of this neglect was, and this is the main theme of Grass' novella, that flight and expulsion became an issue of nationalist-conservative propaganda.

A number of other novels took up this theme as well. Jörg Bernig's *Niemandszeit* (2002) deals with the expulsion of Germans from the Czech Sudentenland; Reinhard Jirgl's *Die Unvollendeten* (2003), Tanja Dückers' *Himmelskörper* (2003), Olaf Müller's *Schlesisches Wetter* (2003) and Michael Zellner's *Die Reise nach Samosch* (2003) incorporate flight and expulsion into family stories

and attempts of the contemporary generation to find answers as to where they came from and what comprises their identity. In all these novels, including the one by Grass, the main topic is one of never quite arriving and of a home that has never fully become a home. The novels are about the experience of loss and the consequences of this loss not only for the people who suffered it, but also for the second and third generation as well. They aim to overcome the silence about the pain their grandparents' generation suffered and the guilt some family members brought upon themselves during the Nazi period. The metaphors used are often a bit trivial, but the issue here is not the literary value of these novels, but their genuine attempt to link flight and expulsion to a comprehensive narrative that does not omit German atrocities and does not regard everyone just as victims.

The reason why the mass flight and expulsion of German populations from Central and Eastern Europe after the Second World War has remained such a controversial and highly politicised issue and why the complicated duality between *Heimat* and *Zuhause* has persisted practically until the present day is that it has never been properly resolved. Remembering the victims of the consequences of National Socialism does not exclude remembering the victims of National Socialism—indeed one might even argue that one necessitates the other. Recognising the pain experienced by individuals does not mean negating collective responsibility or guilt. As early as 1955, Hans Rothfels had pointed out that the past had to be remembered 'in its horrifying totality' (Rothfels, 1955, p. 234).[5] Rightly understood, this has nothing to do with revanchism or a balancing of guilt, but is part of recognising, and accepting, the results of war and defeat in all their dimensions. It does not just mean remembering Germans as both perpetrators and victims; it means remembering more than just the year 1945, it means remembering what happened before and what came after and why.

Flight and expulsion are intrinsically linked to the Nazi racial and extermination policies and Germany's war of aggression on the Eastern Front. The then West German President Richard von Weizsäcker highlighted this linkage in his speech in the German *Bundestag* on 8 May 1985 when he insisted: '[W]e must not regard the end of the war as the cause of flight, expulsion and deprivation of freedom. The cause goes back to the start of the tyranny that brought about war' (Weizsäcker, 1985, p. 59). The German historian Hartmut Boockmann, who was born in 1934 in Marienburg (today Malbork) in West Prussia and became one of the leading historians of German history in Eastern Europe, made a similar link between the beginning and the end of the Nazi rule of terror over much of Europe and argued that this linkage is lost or forgotten when one part is banned from the collective memory:

> When we forget that in 1945 Germany was reduced by a significant part of its territory and that an equally significant proportion of Germans was expelled from their homelands, then we also easily forget why this happened. ... If we Germans

> do not know what happened to us in 1945, we will also not remember what we had done since 1933. (Boockmann, 1994, p. 12)

Individual Memories and Collective Memory

The biography of Hilma E. and her attempts to come to terms with her experience of being uprooted in her youth illustrates how important it is to have a comprehensive and inclusive collective memory.[6] Hilma E. was possibly more scarred than others by her displacement, but she is by no means alone with her search to 'belong'. She was born in 1934 in Bartenstein (today Bartoszyce), East Prussia. When the front was drawing closer in the autumn of 1944, the family re-located to Harsleben (near Halberstadt) in the Harz Mountains where they had relatives. Hilma grew up in the GDR, but fled for West Germany when she was told that she would not be allowed to study at a university because her father was the choirmaster at the local Protestant church. This was her second loss of home. She became a musician and played in a number of orchestras until she settled in Celle (north of Hannover) in 1968 where she taught at the local music school until her retirement. Despite a successful professional career, Hilma was in search of 'home' for most of her adult life because she felt something was missing in her life: 'Material possessions were there, that's what I had worked hard for—but [for a long time] I wasn't really able to relate to them.' Her main feeling was one of 'not belonging':

> We were always the refugees. . . . No one understood us . . . and therefore, we were excluded.—It's true I was there—but I was not really part of it—and therefore could not develop any relations or friendships. . . . Because of the flight I was uprooted. I came to a region where I could not develop roots, and this was made worse because I was still a child.

She is sure that many of her anxieties in her adult life go back to her early teens when she was ridiculed because of her East Prussian accent. This led to 'feelings of mortal terror of being excluded, . . . and later to inappropriate reactions to insignificant incidents as well'. This only began to change when she was able to speak 'freer (more liberated)' about her old home. It took until 1990 until she felt ready to go back to Bartenstein/Bartoszyce for a visit, and in the old Lutheran church where her father had been the choirmaster she immediately connected. It was only then that she all of a sudden discovered that she had roots: 'It did not matter to me that this was now Poland or whatever, it was simply my home. Other people live there now who speak a different language; it is a different country, but it remains my home, my emotional home.' After a second visit to Bartenstein/Bartoszyce a year later, she felt she could gradually open up in her new home in Celle and began to tell her story. For her, it was important that someone simply listened to her life story. In a next step she joined a group of fellow refugees and expellees who recounted and discussed their experiences for an exhibition in the local museum: 'Because of this I gradually felt increasingly "at home" in Celle.'

After a process of several years Hilma can now say:

> On the basis of my childhood home I am now regarding more and more my *Zuhause* here in Celle as a piece of *Heimat* as well . . . , so that the feelings of *Heimat* and *Zuhause*—old and new—which I had experienced until now as something separate are now beginning to blend more and more. [And I feel] how my roots here in Celle grow and become stronger.

A year ago or so she wrote: 'I noticed that I caught myself thinking: I live now and *with* the past. When I noticed this, I thought about how it was before. Then I had lived now and *in* the past.' Yet it was only very recently that she was able to say that if she returned to the town where she was born and spent her childhood for another visit, it would be a visit to Bartoszyce and not to Bartenstein.

Historical consciousness, public memory, collective identity and politics are closely linked. In the case of flight or expulsion it is further complicated by the fact that it not only affects Germany, but also Poland, the Czech Republic and the other countries from where German populations were forcibly removed after the Second World War. All nations involved have to confront and accept their common history in its entirety and not only those fragments that seem politically acceptable. This requires an open and honest dialogue, which was for political reasons all but impossible up to 1989–1990. Such a dialogue is now emerging, proving painful and difficult for all sides, because it means dismantling firmly implanted taboos and prejudices and giving up long-held views (Bingen, Borodziej & Troebst, 2003).

The Polish writer Stefan Chwin suspects that 'the chance of a normal life and normal feelings' will only come when the generation of victims and witnesses has died, or has at least grown old (Chwin, 1999). I would argue that we need to do better than that. Historians have the task of constructing a narrative that is critical, complex and comprehensive so that all groups of society can link their individual experiences and memories to it. At the same time, it is their task to make sure that remembering does not turn into revisionism or revanchism or a balancing of the pain suffered by one side against that suffered by the other.

Notes

[1] One of the best examples of the stereotypical way in which refugees and expellees and their situation were represented in popular culture is the film *Grün ist die Heide* (*The Heath is Green*), which was released in 1951 and was extremely successful at the box office, attracting almost 20 million viewers up to 1960 perhaps because it had little to do with the historical reality. The only film that tried to present a more realistic picture of the difficulties refugees faced in the west was *Mamitschka* (1955); it was commercially unsuccessful (Wilharm, 1998; Stettner, 2001).

[2] This motto was only changed to 'Silesia Remains Ours in the Europe of Free Peoples' when Chancellor Kohl intervened and threatened not to attend the meeting.

[3] The following quotes are from these narrative interviews of refugees and expellees. All of those interviewed were born east of the Oder-Neiße line, were forced to leave their homes—either by flight or expulsion—at the end of the Second Word War, and eventually settled in

Landkreis Celle. Since they are still alive, no one over the age of 40 at the time of flight and expulsion is included; the oldest was born in 1906, the youngest in 1940. In order to protect their anonymity, the names of the refugees and expellees whose testimonies are quoted here have been replaced by letters. These letters correlate with those used in my earlier publications (see Schulze 1997, 2001, 2002a,b, 2003). The interviews form part of the Collection Rainer Schulze.

[4] The German term for local museum, '*Heimatmuseum*', includes the profoundly German concept of 'home'.

[5] Hans Rothfels taught at the University of Königsberg in East Prussia until 1934, when he lost his teaching licence because of his Jewish origin. He managed to flee from Germany in 1939—first to Britain, then to the United States. He returned to (West) Germany in 1951 to take a chair at the University of Tübingen.

[6] The following quotes are from interviews with and letters by Hilma E. from the years 1997 to 2004, Collection Rainer Schulze.

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