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## REFUGEES AND EXPELLEES IN RURAL SAXONY: LIFE AFTER 1945

*“We are the receivers of a terrible legacy. Cities and villages lay waste, industry and agriculture shattered, transportation infrastructure smashed and damaged, the people decimated, the societal health undermined, families torn apart, the people spent – everything in a state of collapse. (...) Want and misery is to be found on every street. Millions wander homelessly through villages and cities reduced to rubble, through deserted fields, without subsistence or a roof over their heads.”*

So drastically did the President of the Saxon State Administration (*Landesverwaltung Sachsen*) Rudolf Friedrichs (SPD) describe the situation after the end of the Second World War in his inaugural speech on 18 July 1945 (Just 1989, p. 145). This plain wording was undoubtedly due to the gravity of the occasion which provoked a certain kind of rhetoric. Nevertheless, it described very accurately the situation in Germany and Saxony at the time. The task of rebuilding, as well as democratizing the society, appeared to be rather overwhelming in the immediate post-war period. The task extended to, and especially included, the rural society in industrial Saxony.

As a consequence of the war unleashed by the National Socialists, approximately 14 million Germans lost their homes in a mass movement of peoples through flight and eviction<sup>1</sup>. About 4.3 million of them wound up in the So-

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<sup>1</sup>Forced migration in European perspective cf.: Piskorski 2013, Halicka 2013.

viet Occupation Zone (SBZ – subsequently the territory of the GDR) – one million of them in Saxony alone.



Figure 1. Emergency shelter: This woman was not able to continue her way because of illness (1945).

Source: Archiv Hanns Tschira, © Wolfgang und P. Christian Tschira.

Core problems such as the provision of food and clothing, livable housing, employment, and the building of schools had to be solved for the new arrivals who were officially designated as “resettlers” (*Umsiedler*). In addition, the plan was that they were to be given a “new homeland” and that they were to be integrated into their new societies. Any support towards a possible return to their previous homes from which they were driven out was to be prevented as far as possible.

The Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD – *Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland*), the Central Administration for German Resettlers (ZVU – *Zentralverwaltung für deutsche Umsiedler*), as well as the respective authorities of the states, districts, and municipalities viewed these tasks not least of all under the standpoint of communist power consolidation. This included the political considerations of the Soviet Union and the neighboring socialist countries. Emerging conflicts between various groups of people were to be suppressed as well as any openly expressed

resentment against the failure of the transformation process in the countryside.

The refugees and expellees were in no way a homogeneous group. For example, there were great differences in the time-point and the conditions of the forced migration west: already in 1944 the flight from the encroaching war front had caused a growing stream of people into the western parts of Germany. The evacuation from the threatened areas often came late and under chaotic conditions. In the first weeks after the end of the war it came to “wild evictions”, especially in the areas of East and West Prussia, Silesia, and the so-called Sudetenland. On the basis of decisions made by the Allies at the Potsdam Conference in July-August 1945, the “planned” evacuation of the remaining Germans in Poland (i.e. Polish administered areas), Czechoslovakia, and Hungary were carried out (Kossert 2008, von Plato, Meinicke 1991, p. 15).

After this phase of flight and eviction, it was also these various backgrounds that assured that no homogeneous identity could be found among the refugees. “Resettlers” was a designation for the refugees and expellees from the former German and German-speaking areas of eastern Europe. This was also meant to include members of the German minorities that had lived in Russia, the Ukraine, Hungary, and Romania. While the state showed no interest in the different fates and needs of the expellees, these various regional differences were of the greatest importance for those concerned in the post-war period.

As the use of such terms as “refugees” (*Flüchtlinge*) and “expellees” (*Vertriebene*) was not very convenient for the communist rulers for political reasons, the more euphemistic term “resettler” (*Umsiedler*) was introduced as early as the beginning of October 1945. This term drew attention to the forced integration while disguising the involuntary change of geographic location and the impossibility of ever returning. Nevertheless, for a long time, there prevailed uncertainty over the use of this designation. Thus the following statement in mid-1947 from the Head Office of Resettlers in the Ministry for Employment and Welfare (*Hauptabteilung Umsiedler im Ministerium für Arbeit und Sozialfürsorge*), the authority responsible for implementing the “evacuee policy” (*Umsiedlerpolitik*) in Saxony:

*“Resettlers” are considered to be all Germans who left their place of residence that was situated after 12 March 1938 beyond the current borders of German. The reason for leaving is of secondary importance. The designation “resettler” can never be taken from these people. The use of the term must be maintained as a mark of identification of a particular section of the population. Nevertheless the term should vanish from public use, no later than*

*after the completion of assimilation* (HStA Dresden Nr. 418).

Here the goal of a quick and complete absorption of the refugees and expellees into the population was clearly expressed. By 1950, the “resettler” term was to have disappeared from official use, since by this point in time the “resettler question” (*Umsiedlerfrage*) should have been resolved. The persons in question were to be referred to as “new citizens” (*Neubürger*) from this point on (Schwartz 2003, p. 87; Wille 2000, p. 207; Schmidt 2006, p. 4). Nevertheless the designation “resettler” found a firm place in official use and even today is, at least to some extent, still used (Schwartz 2000).



Figure 2. Abandoned manors served as provisional accommodation like this building in Wurschen (1945).

*Source:* Lebensgeschichtliches Archiv für Sachsen, ISGV, Teilprojekt 45: Neubauern.

### **The Conflicts over Scarce Resources**

In Saxony, more than 80 percent of the refugees and expellees were settled in rural areas (Friedreich, Spieker 2014, p. 14; Spieker, Bretschneider 2011, p. 8). The new arrivals – who, in general, had brought few belongings and in many cases were completely without means – were distributed throughout the districts and communities in accordance with predetermined quotas. Once in their new location, they received some sort of domicile. The lack of resources that prevailed in the country, along with the forced

quartering of “resettlers”, lead to conflicts in many places that often turned critical (Schrammek 2004, p. 247; Moritz 1995, Satjukow 2007). For example, in Thüringen in 1948, the refugees and expellees only had a mere 7.6 square meters space on average available to them to live in. In Saxony, the native population, depending on district, had, on average, 0.7 to 2.0 square meters more living space per head than the “resettlers” (Leiser 2011, p. 148; HStA Dresden Nr. 2970).

The difficulty of the different groups living together was noted with great concern by the local authorities. The district administrations maintained regular “status reports” (*Stimmungsberichte*), in which the political leadership attempted to offer an overview of the situation in their given areas. One example comes from a report from the District Office (*Kreisrat*) of Meißen at the beginning of October 1947:

*On the question of whether an expansion of the gap between the older and the newer citizens can be determined in the local district, it must be answered that a certain distance exists between these groups. The main reason for this is that most of resettlers arrived with no furniture, no beds, and no household supplies. The necessary supplies had to be taken from the local residents, most of whom had no way of replacing any of these items for themselves.*

*[...] due to the lack of the most essential materials such as building supplies, ovens, oven pipes, etc., it is often not possible, despite the best efforts, to provide adequately heated rooms. Therefore it frequently occurs that the resettlers have to live in rooms without any heat and, on top of that, they are dependent on the native citizens for the use of kitchen facilities. Furthermore, it may be noted that the majority of incoming resettlers are members of the Roman Catholic confession, while the overwhelming majority of the native residents of the local districts are Protestants. All of these reasons taken together obviously make conditions very difficult for the integration (Verschmelzungsprozess) so desired by the Saxon Government (HStA Dresden Nr. 3013).*

The District Council of Döbeln reported that a large number of the native citizens considered the “resettlers” to be unwelcomed guests who should not be given the *slightest concession*. This rejection in turn gave rise to a great bitterness amongst the refugees and expellees who saw themselves as victims of the National Socialist war, and who had by far lost a lot more than the local residents (HStA Dresden Nr. 3024a).

That this tension in the difficult post-war situation sometimes led to violence was duly remarked upon by the authorities with growing concern. In particular, when it came to quartering the “resettlers,” incidents

arose time and again. In Bautzen, the District Housing Commission (*Kreiswohnungsausschuss*) received at least 20 complaints per day from local home owners who felt completely overwhelmed by the housing assignments. The complaints also concerned insults and verbal abuses that were directed not only at the “resettlers” but also at the local authorities in charge (HStA Dresden Nr. 2111).

*“We received the smallest of two rooms to live in. Next to this however was a magnificently large kitchen with running water, drainage, [. . .] with a storage room. This is where the maids were housed – they had it much better. From the first floor (second – Am.), we had to go down into the basement to fetch water. We then had to carry the waste water down into the basement. At the very bottom we had a toilet available to us, even though there was a toilet located half way down the stairs. So one could say, it was pure chicanery. When not even one of the employees, who practically lived next to us, ever came and said: “You can quickly grab a bucket of water” so that you did not have to go all the way down to get it. Eight years (we lived there). (Margarethe Gärtner, \*1936 in Schlesien)<sup>2</sup>.*

Sometimes those who were most critical of taking in refugees and expellees were themselves members of the SED, or Party functionaries in their home towns. In Tautewalde, District Bautzen, it was the chairman of the Association of Mutual Farmer’s Help (*Vereinigung der gegenseitigen Bauernhilfe – VdgB*) who, during a meeting of the SED-Ortsgruppe in April 1947, declared that he would not take in any “resettlers” unless the local council guaranteed him in writing “that they would replace anything that was stolen by the resettlers.” In the face of such rejection, the refugees and expellees complained again and again to higher authorities and the SED about the treatment that was being meted out to them. Four years after the end of the war, an expellee living in Meißen wrote:

*“We still cannot speak of having a new home (Heimat), and there are many of us who do not even want to be buried here – so much suffering have we already endured in Saxony from the local residents. [. . .] Here, the people sit in their beautiful homes, have their wages, their land, gardens, etc. For them, the war is long forgotten. [. . .] The home owners live in peace, and we, we who had to leave behind all our valuables, have to live in a den without any sunshine. (Die Neue Heimat 1949, p. 14).*

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<sup>2</sup>The data has been collected within the context of our research project; the interviews are filed in the “Lebensgeschichtliches Archiv für Sachsen” (Dossier No. 45).



Figure 3. Temporary accomodation in a school (1945).

Source: Archiv Hanns Tschira, © Wolfgang und P. Christian Tschira.

### Home Sickness

Along with the open conflicts between “resettlers” and the native populations, the status reports of the district and state authorities reflected a generally high degree of homesickness and the desire to return. One could hardly speak of a willing and quick “resettlement” (*Neubeheimtung*). Here a selected list of comments from numerous local councils (*Gemeinde*) of the Bautzen District:

- “They all have – without exception – a desire to return to their homeland” (Burkau),
- “Desire for their original homeland” (Neudorf/Spree),
- “All of the resettlers from Bautzen want to return to their homeland” (Stadt Bautzen),
- “a large part of the resettlers are still hanging onto the belief that they can return to their homeland. This fact proves that they cannot come to grips with their fate, and therefore they do not participate in politics” (Auritz),

- “The mood is lousy; all of the resettlers want to go home” (Dubrauke),
- “It is especially the resettlers from Silesia who wallow in the hope that they will be able to return to their home region. The co-existence with the native population is, in part, harmonious, though sometimes complaints can be heard about how the resettlers are treated by the locals. This, however, can be traced back to the lack of understanding and unreasonableness on the part of the resettlers” (Kirschau),
- “The mood amongst the resettlers is for the most part not good. In no way can their desires be met to their satisfaction, be it in reference to ration coupons, or fuel for fires, etc. They are often very indignant” (Steinigtwolmsdorf),
- “The mood is not what it should be, since there is still a lack of so many resources” (Nechern, Wurschen) (HStA Dresden Nr. 889).

Less than half a year later, in October 1947, District Bautzen reported that the wish to return home had “grown in an ever greater mass amongst the new citizens” (HStA Dresden Nr. 893). And, accordingly, it turned out that despite the increasing distance in time from the events of the forced eviction, the old homeland had in no way been forgotten. Certainly, the unfavorable material situation contributed to the miserable mood. In early 1948, the Head Office for Resettlers (*Hauptabteilung Umsiedler*) made the following sobering observation:

*Thanks to the state of crises amongst the resettlers in reference to insufficient housing, the lack of ovens, furniture – especially beds, – household equipment, clothing of all kinds, shoes, fuel for burning, etc., the mood of the resettlers is not the best. Most of the resettlers still live as subtenants and therefore often come into conflict with their landlords.*

*Material help is now only possible through collections of the Volkssolidarität, which itself is not up to the task of dealing with the extreme extent of the current plight. As a result, most resettlers do not have their own bed and are therefore forced to sleep on the floor. The relationship of the resettlers to the local population has still not improved in the slightest. It is demonstrable that the resettlers feel discriminated against and feel forced to always take a back seat. The desire to work can only be found among very few of them.*

*The financial and material means are in no way sufficient enough to allow them to feel satisfied and to give them a new feeling of having a new home* (HStA Dresden Nr. 2750).



And in the year-end report for 1948 of the District Council Bautzen it was noted: *The mood is mixed. A large part (of the resettlers) view the political events as they really are and make an attempt to consciously participate in the rebuilding. There are others however who swim in the channels of a reactionary movement, who, though publicly holding back their true feelings, are secretly raging within* (HStA Dresden Nr. 3024b).

As worrying as the status reports of the districts and villages were, the (Saxon) State Government (*Landesregierung*) saw themselves powerless to do anything to counteract these developments. At best, the question of the general atmosphere was seen as a propaganda problem, so that the negative expressions concerning the situation could be attributed to enemy or “reactionary” elements.

Particularly in the border districts there was cause for concern over the adverse atmosphere, because the resettlers there showed a special dispensation toward viewing their new homes as no more than a provisional solution (HStA Dresden, Nr. 2746a). And if the new home lay only a few kilometers away from the old home – yet remained out of reach – then it was especially difficult for the “resettlers” to come to terms with their new situation. Characteristic are the following examples taken from a Status Report of the Head Office for Resettlers to the Soviet Control Commission in July 1950:

*The CDU-Chairman of the Community Steinbach/District Niesky, New Citizen H., expressed a typical sentiment: ‘We will never forget our homeland, and we will never give up the hope of returning there.’ New Citizen G. from Oybin/District Zittau is of the opinion that it is pointless to settle down in the Republic. He rejected purchasing a bed offered to him from the Community and said: ‘What should I do with the bed? How will I be able to transport it when we cross back over the Neisse?’ In the municipality of Oybin, there are still today beds in storage that were intended as the first delivery of furniture to the New Citizens. 70-year old New Citizen N., from the same village, recently bought herself a hay cart (she has a monthly pension of only 50 DMs) so that she can load up her ‘stuff’ when she returns to her home* (HStA Dresden, Nr. 2746b).

As can be seen here, the evocation of the “old homeland” was not simply sentimental reminiscence, but rather a top theme, ever-present in the everyday life and consciousness of numerous refugees and expellees. Even the short-term improvement of the material situation did little to contribute to extinguishing the desire to return home. In connection with the general desire to return, it was not uncommon to hear rumours in and around the borders of Poland and Czechoslovakia about imminent border revisions

or even the outbreak of a new war. In a report of the Saxon Interior Ministry to the Soviet Control Commission from September 1950 it was noted, for example, that *revisionist, chauvinistic Western propaganda* was being used to spread disharmony among the population (HStA Dresden Nr. 2746a). Rumours were being spread to destabilize the political situation, and news about possible border revisions were providing false hope to the “resettlers” that they could one day return to their homeland. At the beginning of 1948, District Council Bautzen reported to the Interior Ministry that a negative mood had emerged as a result of the breaking off of the London Conference on 15 December of the previous year and as a result of the intensification of the East-West conflict:

*Reactionary forces have noted the growing demoralization of certain groups and thus have developed intense propaganda to the effect that a new war is unavoidable and that those in positions of authority would be hunted down. To what extent this propaganda has made ground amongst the population – especially among the resettlers – can already be seen in the meetings of the De-Nazification Commission. It is rare to find effective witnesses coming forward, as they are afraid that – should the political situation suddenly change – they will be the ones to have to worry about prosecution. It is particularly among the resettlers that the rumour has spread that it will not be much longer until they will be allowed to return to Silesia* (HStA Dresden Nr. 2112). In District Bautzen, as in the great Upper Lusatia (*Oberlausitz*) area in general, conditions were especially favorable for the spreading of rumours, since any possible border revisions would have made a direct impact there.

### **Land Reform, New Farmersteads, and Collectivization**

The difficult co-existence of the various peoples in the rural areas as a result of the revolution of the war years that brought them the challenge of having to survive was a known state of affairs to the authorities in charge. However it was made even more complicated on the SBZ/GDR territories through the land reform that was enacted in the autumn of 1945. Every estate over 100 hectares in size, as well as the property of National Socialists and war criminals, was confiscated, divided up, and distributed for the most part to landless and poor rural population groups (Bauerkämper 1994).

In the SBZ, a total of 3.3 million hectares of land were expropriated: about one-fourth of the estates affected were to be found in Mecklenburg, Brandenburg, and Saxony-Anhalt. Saxony and Thuringia only had a share of 14 percent and 11 percent respectively (Kramer 1957, p. 18); in these states, it was more typical that the smaller and middle-size farms domi-

nated instead of the great estates of other regions. During the implementation of the land reform, refugees and expellees competed with the locals for the new land. However, often the refugees and expellees suffered a handicap due to the fact that the local land commissions were made up of a majority of local people. In addition, it may be that they simply settled in too late. In Saxony, farm parcels were made up of 6-8 hectares of land, allotted out to around 18,000 people, 7,500 of whom were "resettlers."

After the farm assignments, other problems continued to fester: in general there was, beyond the lack of suitable housing and the lack of animal stalls, a wide-ranging scarcity of livestock and draft animals. To compound the problem, there were not enough farming machines to work the land (Seraphim 1954, p. 85). The harvest year 1946 – notable for having low yields – laid bare without question the problems faced by the new farmers, despite being recipients of multiple aid programs. In a report on the land reform at the end of 1946 it was noted:

*While in individual communities (Gemeinden) of the emergency areas Weißwasser, Hoyerswerda, etc. the situation of the new farmers is bad in numerous ways, those in other villages are, on the other hand, often better off than the native farmers. This can, in the main, be attributed to the special assistance that the new farmers have benefitted from, including receiving livestock, farm equipment, etc., at the behest of the government and the SED. So it may be said that the economic situation of the new farmers is more or less determined by the collective economic situation of the rural population in Saxony, meaning that this year the harvest turned out to be particularly bad.*

*Furthermore, it must be considered that the economic situation of the new farmers is likewise strongly dependent on whether one is dealing with native populations, with refugees, or with new settlers unfamiliar with the land. Up until now, these differences have been given very little consideration. These differences also become clear, when it is seen that nearly all the native populations have access to livable housing, and – through the possession of barns or other such building – are able to house their livestock. On the other hand, the resettlers, for the most part, are still housed en masse in the large estates homes expropriated in the land reform (HStA Dresden Nr. 3069).*

The new farmers were then either dependent on help from the Association for the Mutual Help of Farmers, founded for just this purpose, or they were forced to turn to the better-off native farmers in their village. And although the SED was interested in providing the new farmers with the sufficient supplies, they did not show themselves capable of alleviating the general shortage of materials.



Figure 4. New farm house of a “resettler” family in Wurschen (1951).

Source: Lebensgeschichtliches Archiv für Sachsen, ISGV, Teilprojekt 45: Neubauern.

Although the land reform could have meant an easing of the situation, at least for a part of the “resettlers,” the extremely difficult conditions that reigned in the beginning lead to a very low level of motivation for the new arrivals to integrate into their new home regions. State measures, such as Order 209 of the SMAD from September 1947 which ordered the construction of 37,000 new farmer houses (HStA Dresden Nr. 1724), or the “Law for the Continued Improvement of the Situation of the Former Resettlers” (*Gesetz über die weitere Verbesserung der Lage der ehemaligen Umsiedler*) from September 1950, intended, among other things to assist in providing housing, household equipment, and training. However, instead of bringing about any tangible results, they remained more of a mere expression of solidarity.

As the results of the land reform suggest, the transformation of the economic and social relations in the rural areas was a multi-faceted process that affected individuals in different ways, while, in the end, it had an effect on every population group. The political constellation was in great flux at the end of the war, and the consolidation of communist rule had to be established. Therefore, one could speak of an orientation phase and an exploration on the part of both the individual farmers as well as

those in political positions. When the refugees and expellees arrived, they did not encounter a stable rural social order. Rather, they found themselves placed into a “society in flux”, whose structure and form were not yet foreseeable, and in which they would actively participate in many ways. Then, just a few years after the land reform, collectivization was introduced which brought about a further restructuring of the farmers’ social order. And even though this step was clearly rejected in the immediate post-war period, the SED-Politburo decided at the beginning of June 1952, under pressure from Moscow, on doing an about-face concerning their policy of the collectivization of the farms – this, despite the government’s issuing only two months earlier a statement that they would not do this (Piskol 1995, Schöne 2008, p. 101; Bauerkämper 2003, p. 16; Scherstjanoi 1994).

Although the official history of the GDR would later interpret the collectivization as the next logical step after the end of the land reform (Unger 1987, p. 334), this decision arose from the knowledge that numerous new farmsteads were so unprofitable that their self-sufficiency could not be guaranteed in the long-term. Clear symptoms of the problem were the growing number of abandoned new farms and the swelling of the number of refugees going west (Schöne 2005, p. 28). By the beginning of 1950, about 2.600 new farmsteads had been abandoned alone in Saxony. This corresponded to about 12 percent. One in four had belonged to a “resettler” (HStA Dresden Nr. 3166).

Since the lack of equipment, lack of capital, and rising delivery costs threatened the existence of an increasing number of farms, the fluctuation in Saxony rose even further in the following years (HStA Dresden Nr. 197). The founding of the Agricultural Cooperatives<sup>3</sup> in the summer of 1952 was meant to solidify communist rule in rural areas while at the same time solving the economic problems of the farmers.

However this new development was hardly greeted anywhere with anything resembling enthusiasm. The policy even quicker came under fire within the Party. The unprofitability of the Cooperative Farms (*Genossenschaftsbetriebe*), the lack of labor, the deterioration of the food situation, as well as the politically motivated “class war” led the LPGs – and thus the rural society of the GDR – into a crisis that by early 1953 could no longer be ignored. In May of the same year, the founding of further LPGs was put on hold. At the beginning of June, an assurance was given that existing farms would be given better support.

Nevertheless, this policy of the “New Course” could not do anything to

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<sup>3</sup>Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaften (LPG).

eliminate the growing dissatisfaction: as with the larger cities on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 1953, uprisings sprang up in the countryside. There were spontaneous protests, refusals to work, and attacks against authorities (Schöne 2005, p. 146). While the violent suppression of the rebellion restored order on the surface, collectivization from then on could only be advanced haltingly and reluctantly. Finally in 1959-60 forced collectivization was implemented, wherein all farmsteads were turned over to the LPGs. After hundreds of thousands were forced under immense pressure to join a LPG, collectivization was considered to be completed in May of 1960 during the so-called “Socialistic Spring” (*Sozialistischer Frühling*).



Figure 5. Propaganda Poster: Join the LPG (ca. 1960).

Source: Archiv des Hennebergischen Museums Kloster Veßra BI 7a Nr. 53.

## Conclusion

In a time frame of only a few years, the refugees and expellees in Saxony saw themselves subject to thoroughly contradictory treatment from the State. On the one hand, the official “resettler” policy aimed at swift integration into the host communities. On the other hand, resources such as land, livestock, and mechanical equipment were unfairly distributed, often to the advantage of the native farmers. However, while the “resettlers” were to serve as the vanguard for the politicization process in rural areas, the Party (SED) nevertheless always viewed them with suspicion and considered them to be potential ‘revanchists’.

The land reform, that had offered at least a few of the refugees and expellees a chance at self-sufficiency, was later superseded by the collectivization. This then made any sort of self-sufficiency impossible. All of these events only made the new beginning for the refugees and expellees even more difficult in a time of great uncertainty. In addition, making the topic of the expellees a taboo theme, i.e. suppressing the topic as a theme for public discussion (including the official ignorance of what caused the misery), only ensured that they would remain feeling like strangers in their new homes.

Towards their goal of discrediting any idea of return, and of ‘integrating’ the expellees and refugees as quickly as possible – and with that to, if not to solve an acute political and moral problem, at least to hide it away – the SED had to pay a high price in the long-run. Making the theme of flight and eviction taboo in the GDR, and suppressing the “second catastrophe” (Schwartz 2004, p. 9) of the arrival of the refugee in their ‘new homeland’, inhibited in many cases a possible positive identification with the new socialist state. The prospect of finding a new ‘home’ after settling down in a new place of residence remained unfavorable even after the consolidation of the post-war order and the ‘construction of socialism’.

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## REFUGEES AND EXPELLEES IN RURAL SAXONY SINCE 1945

**Keywords:** migration; flight and expulsion, borderlands, rural societies, social and political transformation, World War II.

As a consequence of the Second World War unleashed by Germany, millions of people were forced to stream into the areas that subsequently became the two successor states of the German Reich. The acceptance and integration of the refugees and displaced persons presented the society and the political leadership of the GDR (German Democratic Republic) with an enormous challenge. This article will analyze the contradictory processes of the refugees' arrival that was marked by diverse conflicts, not only at the political level, but also in everyday practice.

As the official files of the years up to 1952 show – and the testimony of eyewitnesses' accounts confirm – it was, in particular, the conflicts over such issues as scarce resources (livable housing, furniture, work materials, etc.), attempts to return to the home territories, as well as the state's intervention (land reform, collectivization) that were the decisive factors in the transformation of rural society. Furthermore, the theme of the 'resettlers' was made officially taboo in the GDR which only rendered the new start under socialist auspices, as well as the public dealings with the neighboring states of Poland and Czechoslovakia, even more difficult.

This article comes out of the research project "Strangers – Homeland – Saxony. Expellees as New Farmers. State Integration Measures and Individual Adaptation Strategies" ("Fremde – Heimat – Sachsen. Vertriebene als Neubauern. Staatliche Integrationsmaßnahmen und individuelle Adaptionsstrategien") lead by the Institut für Sächsische Geschichte und Volkskunde (*Institute for Saxon History and Cultural Anthropology*). Within this project, the collections of several state archives as well as community archives have been analyzed. Furthermore, sixty interviews with contemporary witnesses were conducted and carefully assessed.