

Relocated: foreword

Andreas Kossert

Refugee was the “Word of the Year” in 2015. No day went by without headlines on the great exodus: Balkan route, Lampedusa, Syria. Topical images that evoke memories of the history of the mid-twentieth century. Once again, refugees are on the road traversing Europe without knowing exactly where they are going. We are confronted here with age-old pictures of humanity. In the Old Testament we already can read about losing one’s homeland and being expelled, and there is still no end in sight. “The person who has to leave his home town gives up a significant part of him or herself, and suffers a brutal amputation. Phantom pains will torment him throughout his life.” (1) This was written by the author Olga Tokarczuk, whose family left the Kresy, the “Eastern Borderlands”, as exiles after 1945 and were resettled in what became Polish Lower Silesia.

Phantom pains, real grief, homesickness. And that difficult term “home” or “home country” – universal and always controversial – is often directly connected to the cipher of forced displacement as a result of tyranny, flight and expulsion. Anyone who was secure in their own country never needed to question their identity and roots. But after being displaced, people ask themselves such questions all the time. So home country is an important term of reference, often misused or caricatured in its specifically German interpretation, and yet it is hard to replace it with a new German expression. Everywhere in an increasingly globalized world this resort to the known can be observed. People want to know where they came from in order to be able to accept the challenge of where they might be going to.

The editors of this volume, Rosemarie Zens and Roswitha Schieb, both explore these questions. The title *Relocated* addresses the extent to which the experience of loss of a home country is felt by the second generation and the impacts on the ancestral memories of German and Polish families. *Relocated* can mean something different for each person: a search for identity, alienation, upheaval, distortion and nostalgia. The title has many implications, and every author retraces his or her tracks in their own way, plumbing the depths of these experiences. Forced loss of one’s home, through being driven out and put to flight, disrupts people’s certainty about safe places: their parents’ home, the dialect of their childhood, that feeling of belonging. These things also matters to their families and their descendants, as this book shows.

Rosemarie Zens and Roswitha Schieb have explored this difficult theme in a most sensitive manner, investigating what forced displacement does to people. This volume represents a chapter of twentieth-century European history written by the children of refugees and displaced persons. Unfortunately, a further chapter on the twenty-first century will have to be written.

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(1) Olga Tokarczuk: "Eine Freske menschlicher Schicksale." Preface, in: Helga Hirsch: *Schweres Gepäck. Flucht und Vertreibung als Lebensthema*. Hamburg 2004, pp.7-10, here p. 9.