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## Chronotopes of Flight from the Red Army in East and West German Feature Film (1950–1970)

### Abstract

This article investigates the representation of flight from the Red Army (1944/45) in East and West German feature film prior to 1970. Even while refugee figures may abound, the representation of flight appears infrequently in feature film during this period. In order to understand why this is the case as well as how and why flight is actually depicted when it is, I turn to Wolfgang Schleif's *Preis der Nationen/Das Mädchen Marion* (Prize of the Nations/The Girl Marion, FRG; 1956) and Martin Eckermann's television film *Wege übers Land* (Ways Across the Land, GDR; 1968) and their representations of refugee treks—which, like the other films in this corpus, draw on archival footage and photographs for their own compositions. I consider the refugee trek as a specific subset of what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the “chronotope of the road” and analyze the intersection of the chronotope of the road (of flight) with the photographic index. It is at this intersection that the films negotiate between the competing myths, politics, and collective memories that saturated the socially and politically volatile issue of flight and the ‘lost German East’. What my analysis shows is that cinematic stagings of flight from the Red Army such as those in *Preis der Nationen* and *Wege übers Land* challenge, re-frame, or re-purpose the icons of flight in order to diffuse irredentist political messages and to demonstrate the successful integration of *Flüchtlinge/Vertriebene* ‘refugees/expellees’ and *Umsiedler* ‘resettlers’ into West and East Germany, according to each state’s respective foundational narrative.

### Keywords

flight and expulsion, German film, chronotope, refugees

Chronotopes of Flight from the Red Army in East and West German Feature Film  
(1950–1970)

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At the close of World War II, an estimated twelve million Germans had either been evacuated, had fled from the Red Army, or had been expelled as a result of the Allies' decision to shift Poland's borders to the west. These events acquired a special place in the cultural imagination of divided Germany. The very terms that came to refer to the forced migrations of ethnic Germans were quite loaded politically and ideologically. While the phrase *Flucht und Vertreibung* 'flight and expulsion' prevailed in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), with its implications of injustice and biblical precedents, the term *Umsiedlung* 'resettlement,' which obfuscated the use of force, dominated in the German Democratic Republic (GDR).<sup>1</sup> In the FRG, political expellee organizations such as the *Bund der Vertriebenen* (BdV) 'League of Expellees' exploited such connotations and transformed them into a revanchist political platform—one that still occasionally stirs discomfiture between Poland and a reunited Germany. The GDR, however, adopted a narrative that would fortify its attempts at solidarity with its new Socialist sister states and the USSR.

Regardless of rhetoric, the forced migration of Germans in the East at the close of the war followed and was contemporaneous with the forced migration, deportation, and genocide of millions of other people in Europe, whether due to border changes, the war, or National Socialist genocidal and imperialist politics. This context is important to bear in mind when considering the way that the flight of Germans from the Red Army has been memorialized since the end of the war—for irredentist politics have been and continue to be attuned to narratives that omit this context and proffer instead a sanitary narrative of German victimhood. The territories affected by the changes to Poland's borders alone were traversed by forced laborers and concentration camp inmates returning home from Germany, by Germans fleeing or being forcibly relocated to the West, by Poles being forcibly resettled from Poland's own forfeited eastern territories, by Ukrainians and Lemkos being uprooted from their communities in southeastern Poland and subsequently "dispersed" throughout Poland's northern and northwestern regions as part of Operation Vistula, by Jews establishing settlements in Lower Silesia or emigrating, and so on. Even the forced migration of ethnic Germans in 1944/45 was preceded by the (forced or voluntary) migration of ethnic Germans either as part of Hitler's *Heim ins Reich* 'homewards into the Reich' program or the state's encouragement of *Ostsiedler* 'East settlers,' who were to "spread German culture" in occupied territories.<sup>2</sup>

And yet, despite the social, cultural, and especially political importance of these forced migrations in the early postwar period (defined here as 1945 to 1970, the year in which West Germany finally officially acknowledged the Oder-Neisse Line as Poland's western border), the experience of flight from the Red Army is nevertheless rarely made visually explicit in East and West German feature films—the subject of this article.<sup>3</sup> Because depictions of those long winter treks are so few in feature films of the period, scholarship has largely neglected to consider the films I analyze as a source of such representations. Johannes von Moltke and Robert Moeller have made significant contributions to the topic in film, but focus primarily on the expellees as a group and on their integration into the new *Heimat* 'homeland.'<sup>4</sup> Notable exceptions include Bill Niven's work on flight and expulsion in East Germany and on the sinking of the *Gustloff* as well as Maren Röger's research on representations of flight and expulsion.<sup>5</sup>

In order to understand why the visual representation of flight in feature film appears so infrequently in this period as well as how and why flight from the Red Army is actually depicted when it is, I will turn to one West German and one East German film in this small corpus, namely, Wolfgang Schleif's *Preis der Nationen/Das Mädchen Marion* ('Prize of the Nations'/'The Girl Marion,' FRG; 1956) and Martin Eckermann's television film *Wege übers Land* ('Ways Across the Land,' GDR; 1968).<sup>6</sup> The first film involves the story of a mother and daughter and their East Prussian Trakehner horse; all three are refugees from East Prussia who are able to integrate successfully into their new home in the West. Eckermann's television film, based on the *Fernsehroman* 'TV novel' by Helmut Sakowski, is a Socialist *Entwicklungsroman* 'novel of development' that tracks Gertrud Habersaat's transformation from property-obsessed servant to collectively-minded Socialist. Her own flight from the East constitutes the climax of her character development. Both films devote ample time to representations of winter refugee treks. In fact, *Preis der Nationen* and *Wege übers Land*, like other films in the corpus, draw specifically from the same rare footage of the flight over the frozen Vistula Lagoon—namely, the sequence embedded in the Nazi German newsreel *Deutsche Wochenschau* 754 (16 March 1945).<sup>7</sup> Laden with the narratives, myths, and *topoi* particular to the socio-political and historical contexts of their re-use, these images have become what Vicky Goldberg calls "secular icons" in the German national *soziales Bildgedächtnis* 'social image memory' (Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung* 9).<sup>8</sup>

We may consider representations of the refugee trek as specific subsets of what Mikhail Bakhtin has identified as the "chronotope of the road." The term chronotope describes "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (84)—and, as other scholars have shown as well, in film.<sup>9</sup> According to Nele Bemong and Pieter Borghart, the chronotope can function on several levels; for our purposes, however,

we will focus on what Jay Ladin refers to as “major” (characteristic) and “local” (minor or motivic) chronotopes.<sup>10</sup> The major/characteristic chronotope operates at the general level of the work and unifies the many different motivic chronotopes that may be present in a text. In *Wege übers Land*, the chronotope of the road describes both a motif and the film’s overall organizational structure. *Preis der Nationen* demonstrates, however, that the film’s characteristic relationship to time and space (i.e., its major chronotope) does not always harmonize its motivic chronotopes. In order to understand the representation of flight in East and West German film more adequately, I firstly examine the relationship between the major chronotope and the motivic chronotope of the road (of flight). Once this relationship is clear, I can articulate the consequences of the intersection of the generalized motivic chronotope of the road (of flight) and the representation of a specific historical instance of flight (one tied to a specific set of regions and to real roads and treks).

In all of the feature films that depict refugee treks, we encounter a palimpsest of the text-internal chronotope of the road and the text-external (that is, the real-existing) chronotope. The text-external chronotope may be either an inserted indexical image (e.g., a photograph or newsreel footage) or an allusion to such an indexical image. East and West German films depicting flight either insert the newsreel footage (as in the catastrophe film *Nacht fiel über Gotenhafen* [FRG; 1959] or the semi-documentary *Freies Land* [Soviet Occupation Zone; 1946]), re-stage archival footage or images (as in *Preis der Nationen* or *Wege übers Land*), or otherwise engage little with clearly identifiable documentary images, producing iconic tropes of the treks instead (as in the Heimatfilm *Waldwinter* [FRG; 1956]).<sup>11</sup> Once the archival images have been re-staged in fictional feature film, the index of that footage merely exists as a trace of a trace, leaving the audience with a reproduced rendering of an allusion. The fact of the indexicality of the photo—even if at several removes—complicates Bakhtin’s division between real-life chronotope (the roads that exist in the world) and the narrative chronotope (road as motif). Even in its attenuated, generalized state, the real-world, historical, and spatial referent is present enough to merit either tempering its political potential (as in *Preis der Nationen*) or harnessing it (as in *Wege übers Land*).

In order to better understand the (general lack of) representations of flight from the Red Army in East and West German film before 1970, I argue that we need to identify not only what is shown but how and with what—firstly, how the motivic chronotope of the road of flight relates to the characteristic chronotope of the world of the film and, secondly, with which myths, discourses, and symbols these images are connected. Only then can we understand how the films negotiate the potential consequences of engaging with a historical event that has real consequences in the world of its viewers—and why other films may not have included such scenes.

West Germany: *Preis der Nationen* / *Das Mädchen Marion*

In Wolfgang Schleif's *Preis der Nationen*, the motivic chronotope of the road of forced migration with its allusion to the icon of flight creates a rift in the film. *Preis der Nationen* rewrites these images by displacing the trauma of flight and the loss of *Heimat*. Instead of focusing on the plight of fleeing Germans, the film encourages identification with the colt that accompanies them. This transference of trauma to the horse Prusso safely masks recalcitrant notions of *Blut und Boden* 'blood-and-soil' ideology present in the film and deflects discourses of (lost) *Heimat*—topics that still evoked irredentist rhetoric among West German expellee organizations in the mid-1950s.

The film opens on a bleak, blustery East Prussian landscape during the winter of 1944/45. A team of ragged men guides prized Trakehner horses through the snow until they take temporary refuge in the home of Vera von Hoff, the wife of a fallen *Wehrmacht* soldier, and her daughter Marion. An old man, Kalweit, slips away to take care of the colt Prusso in the stall. Before he dies of exhaustion, he bequeaths Prusso to the young Marion and entrusts her with the magic spell that spurred on Prusso's own prize-winning father Wotan to perform as a champion jumper: "Zeig dein Mut, Trakehnerblut!" 'Show your courage, Trakehner blood!' This encounter motivates Vera to head west together with Prusso and Marion in a covered wagon drawn by two horses. In the spring, the trio arrives in civilization penniless on foot. At last, they find work and humble lodgings—and a common love interest in veterinarian Dr. Peter Meining. While Vera does not want to practice tough love by explaining that Dr. Meining is in love with her, not Marion, it turns out that Marion is no more willing to exercise sternness in training her prize horse to jump. Dr. Meining and Günter Legler (Marion's young trainer-turned-love-interest) must exercise "masculine" discipline in order to raise a family and a prize-winning horse. In the end, familial order has been restored, and Prusso, the orphaned, victimized horse, overcomes his hardships and wins the *Preis der Nationen*.

Given the film's two titles, *Preis der Nationen* and *Das Mädchen Marion*, we have to ask: is it a story about the horse jumping competition, or is it Marion's coming-of-age story? One of the main causes of this split derives from the scenes depicting flight from the front. The film devotes its opening scenes to the flight, and yet, it resists contributing explicitly to the discourse on German suffering and loss of *Heimat*, unlike contemporary Heimatfilms such as *Waldwinter* (1956) or *Grün ist die Heide* (1951).<sup>12</sup> In contrast, *Preis der Nationen* redirects the focus of the audience's empathy from the Germans to the "unseen" though present figures in the iconic images of flight—the horses. The power of the icon and its human referent provoke discomfort and confusion since they have been reformulated to address the victimization of a horse, rather than the tribulations of Germans.

After all, there are clear compositional similarities between the flight scenes in *Preis der Nationen* and in other footage and photographs. In fact, the composition of the trek in Schleif's film closely resembles Vivenz Engels's widely reproduced photograph of an East Prussian trek: the treks are central, the horses (and their cargo) are propelled obliquely towards the camera (see Figure 1). Despite these compositional similarities suggestive of order and propulsion, the two instances of flight depicted in the film depart from the iconic images in two ways. In the first scene, a group of plainclothes men (not women or particularly elderly men) struggles to lead the famed East Prussian Trakehner horses to safety away from the front. While the presence of all-male, civilian refugees is already unexpected, these men are not transporting household objects or supplies but animals. Even while the solitary flight of Vera and Marion appears to be more consistent with the iconography, the colt occupies the center of the frame (see Figure 2). By "de-peopling" the focus of such iconic images, the film therefore de-politicizes and de-historicizes their contents.

Significant in this regard is the absence of a scene found in the screenplay in which the horse trek crosses paths with a refugee trek and camp. The horse trek provokes astonishment and disbelief in the adults ("nur Pferde?" 'just horses?') [Lützkendorf 6]) and rapture in the children. In light of the rest of the screenplay, this scene serves to underscore that the horses are symbolic of the East Prussian *Heimat* and that the fleeing East Prussians maintain a strong connection to their *Heimat*. The soundtrack, "East Prussian Song," unifies these strands. Furthermore, this scene provides much of the overt historical context that is otherwise merely implicit. Had this scene been included, the audience would have been able to witness the deprivations of the refugees and been permitted a glimpse into the refugee camps. The omission of this scene in the final version of the film highlights the extent to which the film decontextualizes flight from the Red Army.



Figure 1: Still from Wolfgang Schleif's *Preis der Nationen* (1956)



Figure 2: Still from Wolfgang Schleif's *Preis der Nationen* (1956)

With the focus of the flight redirected toward the horse(s), the film avoids thematizing nostalgia, loss of *Heimat*, trauma, and victimhood precisely because the rescued horse-victim cannot speak. As if to remedy this, the press material for the film gives Prusso the chance to do so. Calling those final days of the war “the dark sides,” he lists the tribulations he endured, including “our bitterly cold flight from East Prussia in the final days of the war (during which you two-legs really behaved shamefully again), the death of my dear mother Prensa, the end of our good, old father on the stud farm, Kalweit, and the many agonizing worries about the daily oat ration” (“Mit ergebenstem Hufschlag” 17). Apart from this admonishing advertisement, however, the horse cannot make any claims on its status. The film provides a politically safe, displaced success story of “refugee” integration: from suffering and victimhood to (re)training, hard work, and discipline—to success in postwar society.

Prusso, however, performs many functions. He stands in not only for the refugee but for *Heimat* as well. The film attempts to resolve the issue of the loss of *Heimat* before it is even lost. To the horse trainers, Vera declares, still at the hearth in her East Prussian home: “Wenn man einmal aufgibt, dann gibt man alles auf, nicht einmal die Heimat, sondern auch das Recht auf die Heimat” ‘If you give up once, then you give up everything, not just *Heimat* but the right to *Heimat*.’ This statement checks any revanchist sentiment and abruptly curtails nostalgia for East Prussia. In fleeing, Vera forbids Marion to look back in the manner of Lot’s wife, indicating that East Prussia as a space must be disavowed. Beyond this scene, there is no explicit discourse of *Heimat* present in the film.

East Prussia as *Heimat* is not absent, however. It has been condensed into the traditions of weaving and horse training. The baroness Vera, as it turns out, is familiar with the art of weaving native to her region. Vera recognizes the value of her traditional artisanal craft as a means of personal income and, therefore, as a means of incorporating old with new.<sup>13</sup> The latter tradition, that of horse training, has been represented by Prusso, whose name derives from his land of origin. The horse embodies East Prussian strength, history (“son of Wotan”), and, not unproblematically, its “blood” as well. A reviewer from the *Rheinische Post* wrote in 1956: “The young Trakehner stallion Prusso doesn’t just win the ‘Prize of the Nations’ at the end, . . . in fact, we would gladly award the film something like a ‘Prize of the Nations,’ namely, for being the best Blut-und-Boden product of the year” (Maro).<sup>14</sup> The “East Prussian Song” plays during his wreath ceremony at the end of the film, in a celebration not just of the horse’s and its trainers’ achievement but of East Prussia and its traditions and people.<sup>15</sup>

In this film, the discourses of *Heimat* and victimhood condense into the figure of Prusso. And yet, as reviewers have noted, the images of a bleak East Prussia and the scenes of suffering, while intended to provide the “backstory” for the rag-to-riches/victim-to-winner story, indicate divides in the film: hardship

yields to an uncannily cheerful acceptance of mild inconveniences in the West; the coming-of-age story splits between mother, daughter, and, most importantly, horse.<sup>16</sup> The chronotope of the road is present solely as the road of flight; the historical and social implications of the intrusion of the referent (even if composite and displaced onto the horse) are not confronted in the film. And yet, even if the images of flight sit like an erratic block at the beginning of the film, *Preis der Nationen* is one of the few films in West Germany to have included them. As the transference of *Heimat* and victimization discourses onto the horse indicate, there is much at stake in these kinds of images—most prominently, the reality of irredentist politics and desires.

#### East Germany: *Wege übers Land*

While Schleif displaces the discourses of lost *Heimat* and victimhood commonly associated with refugees/expellees in the FRG, thereby avoiding their political realities, Eckermann carefully situates flight from the East in a Socialist conversion narrative. Unlike the West German films that represent flight from the Red Army or even Kurt Maenzig's *Schlösser und Katen*, which depicts flight from the Soviet Occupation Zone rather than the “lost East,” in *Wege übers Land*, the minor chronotope of the road corresponds to the film's major chronotope. By approaching images and sequences of flight as manifestations of the chronotope of the road, we can determine the function of these images within the context of the entire film. According to this reading, the historical *Ostsiedler* or *Mitläufer* ‘follower’ fleeing from the Red Army may be read simultaneously as a kind of Proppian seeker-hero and as a convert-to-Socialism in progress.

*Wege übers Land* focuses on the fate of Gertrud Habersaat in her quest for happiness, which she defines for most of the film as respectability, dignity, and a farm to call her own. Her search for happiness begins at a large estate “irgendwo in Mecklenburg” ‘somewhere in Mecklenburg’ as Nazi Germany invades Poland. She marries Emil Kalluweit (a member of the Nazi party), not for love but for the opportunity to escape rejection from her lover and heir to the estate, Jürgen Leßtorff—and to have land of her own. As *Ostsiedler*, Gertrud and Kalluweit move to the Wartheland and take over a farm expropriated from Poles. In occupied Poland, Gertrud adopts two children, a Jewish girl (Mala) who had become separated from her parents while the Nazis were expelling them from their homes as well as a Polish boy, Stefan. Kalluweit enlists to fight on the front in order to avoid an SS-officer who has been coercing him to join the *Einsatzkommandos* ‘task forces.’ He leaves Gertrud at the end of Part II, but not without hesitatingly providing her with the signature needed to complete the adoption papers for both children.

The film then skips from 1939 to the winter of 1944/45, just as Gertrud and the two children flee from the Soviet army. This scene is devoid of dramatic music. Only the diegetic sounds of wagon wheels and the thick crunch of snow accompany Gertrud and the children as they trudge onward. During the flight, a Russian soldier shoves a crying infant into her arms, making this her third adopted child. Rather than lead her into the unknown (as was the case for most refugees), however, her trek brings her back to her hometown of Rakowen, now in the Soviet Occupation Zone. In conjunction with Gertrud's saga, the film also follows the path of Willi Heyer, a German Communist who had spent years interned in a Gestapo jail and in a concentration camp. After the war, Gertrud falls in love with Heyer, who becomes the new mayor of Rakowen. Still disenchanted with their marriage, Kalluweit and Gertrud separate after he returns years later, thereby freeing Gertrud and Heyer to pursue happiness together as a couple in love and as partners in establishing the local collective farm in 1953.

As the title of the film suggests, the major characteristic chronotope of this film is that of the road. In fact, every episode begins with an image of a road and a variation on the question: "Wohin führt der Weg [auf der Suche nach Glück]?" 'Where does the path lead [in the search for happiness]?' As the introduction to each episode illustrates, the film employs the chronotope of the road as a metaphor for the "path of life" and as a physical path that characters traverse (i.e., a setting for narrative events). Additionally, however, the chronotope of the road also manifests as a representation of historical events and of the typified "roads" associated with them, namely the road/railroad tracks of deportation and the road of flight from the Soviet army. These typified roads intersect through Gertrud, whose fate is intertwined with that of the German nation.<sup>17</sup> These moments of intersection are didactic; they illustrate the exclusionary evils of capitalism/fascism, contrast with Socialist teamwork, and reveal the role of the individual (Gertrud) in national history.

Gertrud's flight from the Red Army represents the climax, not only of her personal journey, but that of the German people, for her flight from the Red Army is intertwined with that of the retreat of the *Wehrmacht* and the imminent fall of the Nazi state. The very depiction of mass flight from the Red Army at the beginning of the third episode illustrates the entanglement of the refugees with the German military. Although Alina Laura Tiews is certainly right to recognize that "the staging of flight in *Ways Across the Land* draws on the iconic images of the treks" (68), she does not explore the ways in which this mere similarity presents the opportunity for a re-interpretation of the event as it was depicted by, for example, the *Deutsche Wochenschau*. In comparison to the *Deutsche Wochenschau* footage or even the recreated springtime trek in Milo Harbich's semi-documentary *Freies Land* (1946), cameraman Hans-Jürgen Heimlich limits the scope of the composition and offers a bird's-eye-view of the scene. There are no long, winding

treks curving through the landscape; rather, there are two truncated, parallel lines of movement: the line of refugees (relegated at first to the margin of the frame) and the line of military vehicles that occupy the road as well as the middle of the frame (compare Figures 3 and 4). The camera begins with its focus on the military vehicles, but sweeps over the trees to center on the refugee trek. While this composition is a visualization of the parallel that the film establishes between Gertrud's life and the history of the GDR, it also adds an element generally missing from most of the previous cinematic representations of flight: the retreat of the *Wehrmacht*.<sup>18</sup>

According to the film, the metaphorical death of the Nazi state prepares the way for the birth of the antifascist GDR. After becoming separated from the trek and being abandoned by the *Wehrmacht*, Gertrud encounters Soviet soldiers in the ruins of a church. In the service of the GDR's particular foundational narrative, however, the encounter between refugee woman and Soviet soldier is neither physical nor brutal but rather symbolic: a meeting in which the Soviets charge Gertrud, the German, with the responsibility to help rebuild, and in which they declare her a mother, conferring upon her an abandoned infant. The statue of the weeping Virgin Mary with Child towers in the background as Gertrud, surrounded by what are now her three children, contemplates her new responsibility. In contrast



Figure 3: Still from *Deutsche Wochenschau 754*



Figure 4: Still from *Martin Eckermann's Wege übers Land, Part III*

to Mala and Stefan, this third child barely plays a role in the rest of the film. The child signifies Gertrud's (and by extension, the German nation's) acceptance of responsibility for rearing new life, a chance afforded her by the sacrifice of others.

Sakowski and Eckermann implicate Gertrud in Nazi crimes even as they do not diminish the representation of the suffering that women such as Gertrud may have experienced along the trek. Suffering, so the film argues, does not preclude culpability. This lesson is instrumental for *Wege übers Land* as a conversion film: Gertrud (and by extension, the German people) is made to confront her own complicity and to assume responsibility for herself and others, even as she is in the

midst of tribulation. Importantly, the entirety of the flight segment is preceded by the depiction of the deportation of Jews and Poles in occupied Poland. This context is missing entirely from the other German films that depict flight, both in the GDR and the FRG. Gertrud becomes witness to the deportation of Poles and Jews and to Nazi indifference to the humanity of those being deported. The benefits that Gertrud accrues as a result of the intersection of her “road of life” with the chronotope of the road of forced migration (the deportation of Poles and Jews) color and contextualize the hardships that Gertrud suffers during her flight from the Red Army.

And yet, as Tiews and Bill Niven rightly point out, Gertrud’s flight from the Red Army is historically atypical: she flees not from home but towards home, such that flight is then a kind of “homecoming”; the children who accompany her are not biologically hers; rather than lose children along the trek, she gains a third.<sup>19</sup> Tiews concludes: “It is only because the screenplay offers Gertrud the ‘alibi’ of being originally from Rakowen (that is, to come from west of the Oder and Neisse) that *Ways Across the Land* can be everything: a film about the flight and expulsion of the Germans, a film about socialism in the countryside, and, finally, a GDR-Heimatfilm” (76-77). Reading Gertrud’s flight primarily as a kind of “homecoming,” however, neglects additional layers of meaning: firstly, this flight is the second of three instances in which Gertrud runs away; and secondly, it forms part of the film’s fairy tale interpretive framework, which I will discuss below.

Retrospectively, that is, with the advancement of the narrative into the postwar period, the significance of the road of flight expands. Though Gertrud’s flight from the advancing front in Part III represents first and foremost a historic event, this is not Gertrud’s only instance of flight. She also attempts to flee her home Rakowen twice. In the first case, she attempts to preserve her dignity and fails, precisely as the voiceover introducing Part IV explains. In order to acquire house and farm, she had to relinquish her human dignity—that which she had insisted meant most. Dissatisfied with her lot in postwar Rakowen, she attempts to flee her hometown again. This time, Gertrud and the children pause under a tree on the outskirts of town, surrounded by the rusting remains of overturned military vehicles. Willi Heyer happens upon them and coaxes Gertrud to return to town, insisting that, just as she cannot run from herself, so she should not run from others or from her problems. This scene takes place under the same tree where Gertrud and the children rested at the end of their trek as refugees.

While the scenes of flight from the front are couched in questions of guilt and (un)just suffering, the parallel location of Gertrud’s flight from Rakowen retroactively recasts the historical reality of flight as a personal flight from responsibility. All three instances of flight converge underneath the tree alongside the road leading to/away from Rakowen. What does this mean for the discourse on flight/expulsion? For one, it dissolves the claim of the individual to victimhood (at

least Gertrud's possible claim); furthermore, it dramatizes history, framing the historic event as a personal event, a necessary stage in the individual's development or coming-of-age, even as her own development allegorically parallels that of the GDR. Nevertheless, flight from the front becomes recast into the discourse of responsibility. The film combines wartime reality with questions of character and biography that simultaneously transcend the specificity of Gertrud's historic moment.

In addition to inscribing the historical experience of flight retroactively within the realm of biographical drama, the film also draws on the tropes of fairy tales and incorporates their typical structures, thereby also diverting the lengthy depiction of the flight from the realm of biography or history. In his study *Morphology of the Folktale*, Vladimir Propp notes that many tales "proceed from a certain situation of insufficiency or lack, and it is this that leads to quests . . ." (34). As the synopsis-narrator tells the viewer at the beginning of each episode, Gertrud is "auf der Suche nach Glück" 'in search of happiness.' She attributes her lack of happiness to a lack of property. At the first opportunity to acquire property/happiness, Gertrud marries and begins her quest—in folkloric terms, she does so as a "seeker-hero" (Propp 37) and in historical terms as an *Ostsiedlerin*. Because Gertrud misidentified the object of her search (private property as happiness rather than community and Socialism), she sets out on the road as part of her quest three times. In fact, the "trebling" of fairy tales, which Propp only mentions in passing, peppers Gertrud's story: three flights along the road; three children (one Jewish, one Polish, one presumably German); and three suitors who correspond to three systems of rule (Leßtorff and feudal power, Kalluweit and National Socialism, Heyer and Socialism).<sup>20</sup>

During the third instance of flight/search, Heyer makes the film's structural parallels with the fairy tale explicit. In coaxing Gertrud to return to town, he tells her a fairy tale, a thinly veiled retelling of her own life that explicitly reinterprets her quest in search of happiness/property as flight from herself. Heyer, the good Communist, is not only Gertrud's educator but the viewer's as well. Heyer's fairy tale and the film's structural elements that derive from fairy tales are to provide gentle instruction. According to the rule of threes, there are no options left beyond Socialism, home (Rakowen/the GDR), or Heyer (the "correct" love interest and educator). The roads are closing and happiness is to be found "with us" in Socialism.

The film ends with a "happily ever after": Gertrud and Willi Heyer skip hand-in-hand off screen, the evening landscape illuminated by the moon and the bright lights of the castle (now occupied by the "people"). More importantly, the heroine has been converted to Socialism and the enchantment of private property has been broken. Gertrud, Rakowen, and the GDR have arrived at the goal at the end of the road. The motivic chronotope of the road of forced migration—from

Gertrud's flight to the deportation of Jews and Poles—works in conjunction with the film's characteristic chronotope of the road as the allegory of the founding of the GDR.

### Conclusion

Whether it is to displace the discourses bound up with iconic images, as in *Preis der Nationen*, or to harness them and weave them together as an integral part of a national foundational narrative, both films—as with all films in this small corpus—require stunts in order to stage such loaded images in a way that diffuses irredentist political messages. Despite the cantankerousness of the League of Expellees in the FRG, for example, none of the West German films argue for the return of the “lost German East” nor set out to defame the Red Army in an act of Cold War posturing. Even when the films overtly espouse few or no political arguments, their representations of flight adhere to certain coded understandings of the course and the consequences of the Second World War in terms of categories such as victimhood, justice or retribution, reconstruction, and the integration of displaced peoples. On the one hand, in *Preis der Nationen*, the motivic chronotope of the road coupled with the restaged icon creates a weighty anomaly in a film that draws attention to the film's overall strategy of discursive displacement, illustrating what may be seen as the political and ideological precariousness of the appropriation of such images in 1950s West German feature film. In *Wege übers Land*, on the other hand, the motivic chronotope of the road of forced migration harmonizes with the film's characteristic chronotope and constitutes an integral part of the complex web of ideologies and structural frameworks that naturalize flight as part of the foundational narrative of the GDR. Regardless of whether or not they do so seamlessly, cinematic stagings of flight from the Red Army, such as those in *Preis der Nationen* and *Wege übers Land*, interact with, challenge, re-frame, or re-purpose the icons of forced migration (e.g., the newsreel footage) in order to demonstrate the successful integration of *Flüchtlinge* ‘refugees,’ *Vertriebene* ‘expellees,’ and *Umsiedler* ‘resettlers’ into East and West Germany, according to each state's respective foundational narrative.

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## Notes

1. For the implications of the term *Umsiedlung*, see, for example, Segert and Zierke 168 and Ther, “The Integration of Expellees” 782.
2. See Halicka 40.
3. 1970 marks the primary boundary of this project because of its consequence with regard to the topic of forced migration and the German-Polish border. Around this time, major shifts in power and politics began to take place: in the GDR, Erich Honecker replaced Walter Ulbricht (1971), and in the FRG, Willy Brandt replaced Kurt Georg Kiesinger (1969) and initiated his *Ostpolitik*. Most importantly, 1970 marks the year in which the FRG recognized the Oder-Neisse Line as Poland’s western border (the GDR had already done so in 1950).
4. See, for example, Moeller’s “The Politics of the Past in the 1950s” and *War Stories* as well as von Moltke’s “Location *Heimat*” and *No Place Like Home*.
5. See Niven’s edited volumes *Die Wilhelm Gustloff* and *Germans as Victims*, as well as his monograph *Representations of Flight and Expulsion in East German Prose Works*. For Röger’s scholarship, see “Bilder der Vertreibung,” “Ereignis- und Erinnerungsgeschichte von ‚Flucht und Vertreibung,‘” and “Film und Fernsehen in der Bundesrepublik.”
6. Films depicting flight from the Red Army prior to the founding of the two states include Milo Harbich’s *Freies Land* (‘Free Land’, Soviet Occupied Zone; 1946), Helmut Käutner’s *In jenen Tagen* (*Seven Journeys*; 1947), and Wolfgang Liebeneiner’s *Liebe 47* (‘Love 47’; 1949). Relevant films in the FRG include Wolfgang Liebeneiner’s *Waldwinter* (‘Forest in Winter’; 1956), Wolfgang Schleif’s *Preis der Nationen/Das Mädchen Marion* (‘Prize of the Nations’/‘The Girl Marion’; 1956), and Frank Wisbar’s *Nacht fiel über Gotenhafen* (*Darkness Fell On Gotenhafen*; 1959). Prior to 1970, only two films in the GDR actually depict flight from the Red Army in some form: Kurt Maetzig’s *Schlösser und Katen* (*Castles and Cottages*; 1957) and Martin Eckermann’s television film *Wege übers Land* (‘Ways Across the Land’; 1968).
7. Röger brings necessary attention to the problematic nature of these images and the history of their reproduction in her article “Bilder der Vertreibung.”
8. See Brink, “Secular Icons” 137. All translations of phrases and quotes into English are my own.

9. See, for example, Stam, *Subversive Pleasures*; Alexander, “Storytelling in Time and Space”; Montgomery, *Carnivals and Commonplaces: Bakhtin’s Chronotope, Cultural Studies, and Film*; and Ganser, Pühringer, and Rheindorf, “Bakhtin’s Chronotope of the Road.”

10. See Bemong and Borghart 6.

11. See Robins 8. See also Röger, “Bilder der Vertreibung” 267 and “Flucht, Vertreibung und Heimatverlust” 81-82.

12. See Moeller’s “The Politics of the Past in the 1950s” and *War Stories* and Moltke’s “Location *Heimat*” and *No Place Like Home* for analyses of the role of refugee figures in the Heimatfilm of the 1950s.

13. See von Moltke, “Location *Heimat*,” in which he argues that Arthur Pohl’s *Die Brücke* (1949) and Liebeneiner’s *Waldwinter* (1956) “imagin[e] the migrant as the prototype for a new order” (89)—by engaging in the production of traditional crafts.

14. Given that the screenwriter, Lützkendorf, had been a member of the NSDAP and the SS and had written propaganda espousing the *Blut-und-Boden* ideology, it is not entirely surprising that remnants thereof are to be found in the script.

15. In Schleif’s earlier film *Ännchen von Tharau* (1954), the song “Ännchen von Tharau” links main character Anna to East Prussia. This is another film espousing the magical power of kindred “blood” to attract almost magnetically a father and son separated by war. Schleif’s own film career includes Nazi propaganda films such as *Jud Süß* (‘Jew Süß’; 1940) and *Kolberg* (1945) (editor for both).

16. See “Preis der Nationen,” in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 24 Nov. 1956; “Preis der Nationen,” in *Kölner Stadt-Anzeige* 17 Nov. 1956; and “Preis der Nationen,” in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 13 Nov. 1956.

17. See, for example, “Wege übers Land” and the interview with Helmut Sakowski also titled “Wege übers Land.”

18. The West German film *Nacht fiel über Gotenhafen*, for example, is the first to depict the *Wehrmacht*’s retreat in conjunction with flight. See also Niven, “On a Supposed Taboo” 234.

19. See Niven, “On a Supposed Taboo” 230 and Tiews 72.

20. Many thanks to Annette Werberger (Europa Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt an der Oder) for drawing my attention to some of these instances of trebling. See also Propp 74.

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