ELIZABETH HARVEY

HOMELANDS ON THE MOVE

GENDER, SPACE AND DISLOCATION IN THE NAZI RESETTLEMENT OF GERMAN MINORITIES FROM EASTERN AND SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

In autumn 1940 the émigrée German-Jewish journalist Rosie (aka Countess) Waldeck travelled from her base in Bucharest, where she covered events in Romania for *Newsweek*, to a transit camp at Galaţi/Galatz on the banks of the river Prut dividing Romania from Soviet-occupied Bessarabia. Looking across the river, she witnessed the arrival of uprooted Bessarabian Germans en route to the Reich via Galatz.

> "'They are coming', somebody in our little group said now, and far away on the flat horizon of the other shore the first wagon appeared. Someone gave me a Zeissglass, and I saw a spectacle which reminded me of engravings of the American frontier era: a long line of wagons, covered with white canvas, oxen drawn, sometimes with a colt or a horse running alongside. It was strange to find the covered wagon, America's symbol of individual pioneering, become Europe's symbol of the totally protective State."[1]

Waldeck was struck by the cleanliness of the camp, the numbers of babies and children everywhere, and the youngsters who "marched and sang and heiled under the supervision of SS-men and *Volksdeutsche*".[2] She noted the efforts of nurses, kindergarten teachers, and canteen girls doing their bit to care for the resettlers. She also remarked on the SS men who strolled around the camp and made a fuss over the children: whatever SS men were elsewhere, she observed, "here they were a gentle, baby-kissing lot".[3] But if she was briefly impressed by the camp at Galatz, as she returned to Bucharest by train she overheard SS men whose casual anti-semitism was

[1] R. G. Waldeck, *Athene Palace* (New York: McBride, 1942), 305. Thereafter Waldeck, *Athene*.

[2] Waldeck, *Athene*, 306.

[3] Waldeck, *Athene*, 307.

combined with a confident ruthlessness about what would happen to Romanians once the Germans were in charge. So much for SS men as baby-kissers, she observed: what she had seen and heard, taken together, was indeed the new European order in the making, created to benefit Germans at the expense of everyone else.[4] This snapshot of resettlers en route to the Reich was a sardonic take by an outside observer on elements of Himmler's resettlement operation that loomed large in contemporary National Socialist propaganda: the epic spectacle, seeming to belong to another age, of families trekking in covered wagons; the resettlement saga as part of the attempt to create a German 'New Order' in Europe; and the women volunteers and SS men demonstratively playing their distinctive roles as part of the 'totally protective state' caring for resettlers on the move. Waldeck's observations provide a point of departure for considering how a perspective of gender can sharpen an understanding of the violent reordering of space and population undertaken by the Nazi regime in its pursuit of long-term domination and ethnographic restructuring of Eastern Europe.

Historians of Nazi population planning and policy in wartime Eastern Europe have pointed out how space and race, blood and soil were connected in the minds of the planners in different ways.[5] The Nazi idea of Lebensraum meant that territory had to be brought into line with the perceived needs of the population: new space had to be conquered, secured, and organized in order to enable the racially-based community to flourish. Conversely, the security of the conquered territory depended on having only those of the right 'blood' in place to defend it. Forced expulsions and genocide were the prerequisite for the attempt to create homelands for Germans and those classified through processes of racial and national-

[4] Waldeck, *Athene*, 308-9.

[5] Uwe Mai, *Rasse und Raum: Agrarpolitik, Sozial- und Raumplanung im NS-Staat* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002); Isabel Heinemann, *'Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut': Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003). Thereafter Heinemann, *'Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut'*. Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Alex J. Kay, *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder. Political and Economic Planning for German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1940-1941* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2006); Isabel Heinemann and Patrick Wagner, eds., *Wissenschaft, Planung, Vertreibung: Neuordnungskonzepte und Umsiedlungspolitik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006). Thereafter Heinemann and Wagner, *Wissenschaft*. Andreas Strippel, *NS-Volkstumspolitik und die Neuordnung Europas: Rassenpolitische Selektion der Einwandererzentralstelle des Chefs der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1939-1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2011). Thereafter Strippel, *NS-Volkstumspolitik*. – Annotation by the editors: The author wished to leave out title translations that were provided in the whole volume for purposes of transparancy.

political sifting as German or 'Germanizable'. The monstrous blueprints that constituted the different drafts of the so-called *Generalplan Ost* (General Plan East) projected the transplanting and decimation of Slavic populations decades into the future.[6] If those deemed to be 'of German blood' could not be imagined within the time frame of General Plan East as the sole inhabitants of the spaces of the East, they could be envisaged as its masters, organized spatially in 'marches' and 'strongholds' of Germandom.

The National Socialist regime's drive to secure future homelands in the conquered East also entailed the forcible dissolution of older German 'homelands' outside the borders of pre-war Germany.[7] On the eve of the Second World War, the existence of scattered communities of German-speakers across Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe had posed a conundrum. On the one hand, the regime celebrated the link between 'blood and soil' both at home within the Reich and beyond its borders, while Nazi activists from the Reich and from within the minorities themselves sought to mobilize these 'outposts of Germandom' for Nazism.[8] But behind the scenes, National Socialist priorities were shifting: the preservation of historic areas of settlement in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe was becoming secondary to larger foreign policy and military-strategic considerations.[9] Population transfers were in the air: plans were already being laid in the early months of 1939 for the resettlement of the

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[6] Mechtild Rössler and Sabine Schleiermacher, eds., *Der 'Generalplan Ost': Hauptlinien der nationalsozialistischen Planungs- und Vernichtungspolitik* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993); Czesław Madajczyk, ed., *Vom Generalplan Ost zum Generalsiedlungsplan* (Munich: Saur, 1994). Thereafter Madajczyk, *Generalplan*.

[7] Recent work on the history of German minority communities abroad includes the contributions to Krista O'Donnell, Renate Bridenthal and Nancy Reagin, eds., *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Jerzy Kochanowski and Maike Sach, eds., *Die 'Volksdeutschen' in Polen, Frankreich, Ungarn und der Tschechoslowakei: Mythos und Realität* (Osnabrück: fibre, 2006); Mathias Beer, Dietrich Beyrau, and Cornelia Rauh, eds., *Deutschsein als Grenzerfahrung: Minderheitenpolitik in Europa zwischen 1914 und 1950* (Essen: Klartext, 2009).

[8] Mariana Hausleitner and Harald Roth, eds., *Der Einfluß von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus auf Minderheiten in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa* (München: IKGS, 2006); Paul Milata, *Zwischen Hitler, Stalin und Antonescu: Rumäniendeutsche in der Waffen-SS* (Köln: Böhlau, 2007), 11-48; Elizabeth Harvey, 'Mobilisierung oder Erfassung? Studentischer Aktivismus und deutsche "Volkstumsarbeit" in Jugoslawien und Rumänien 1933-1941', in Carola Sachse, ed., *'Mitteleuropa' und 'Südosteuropa' als Planungsraum: wirtschafts- und kulturpolitische Expertisen im Zeitalter der Weltkriege* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010), 363-90. Thereafter Sachse, ed., *Mitteleuropa*.

[9] Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries, The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933-1945* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 73-130. Thereafter Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*.

Germans of South Tyrol.[10] 'Blood' could – it was hoped – flourish elsewhere, and 'space' could be correspondingly re-organized.

Hitler's speech of 6 October 1939 to the Reichstag announcing a "reordering of ethnographic conditions" given that Eastern and Southeastern Europe was allegedly filled with "unviable fragments" of German *Volkstum*, and the appointment of Heinrich Himmler as *Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germandom* (Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums, or RKF) confirmed this new turn in policy.[11] The Nazi-Soviet pact and the accompanying secret agreements between Hitler and Stalin paved the way for treaties agreeing to the immediate removal to the Reich of the German minorities from Estonia and Latvia, who were sent by ship to Stettin and Gdynia in October and November 1939, and from the regions of Galicia and western Volhynia and the Narew district in Soviet-occupied eastern Poland, who were transferred by trek and train between December 1939 and February 1940.[12] The secret annex to the Nazi-Soviet pact also assigned Bessarabia in eastern Romania to the Soviet sphere of influence: this made the resettlement of the Bessarabian Germans a virtual certainty. When Soviet forces occupied Bessarabia and northern Bukovina at the end of June 1940, the machinery of resettlement that had been put in place the previous autumn and winter swung into action again, leading to the transfer of the Bessarabian, Bukovina and Dobrudja Germans in the autumn of 1940.[13] By 1941, several hundred thousand ethnic german resettlers had been channelled to the conquered territories of Poland and to resettler camps in the *Altreich*. Later in the war, planned resettlement operations dwindled and were in the end overtaken by improvised measures to evacuate ethnic Germans from the path of the approaching Red Army.

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[10] Markus Leniger, *Nationalsozialistische 'Volkstumsarbeit' und Umsiedlungspolitik 1933-1945: Von der Minderheitenbetreuung zur Siedlerauslese* (Berlin: Frank und Timme, 2006), 35-47. Thereafter Leniger, *Volkstumsarbeit*.

[11] Hitler, speech to Reichstag on 6 October 1939, in Max Domarus, ed., *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen 1932-1945*, vol. 2 (Würzburg: Domarus, 1963), 1383.

[12] Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*; Leniger, *Volkstumsarbeit*; Dietrich Loeber, ed., *Diktierte Option: Die Umsiedlung der Deutsch-Balten aus Estland und Lettland 1939-1941* (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 1972); Stephan Döring, *Die Umsiedlung der Wolhyniendeutschen in den Jahren 1939 bis 1940* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001). Thereafter Döring, *Umsiedlung*.

[13] Dirk Jachomowski, *Die Umsiedlung der Bessarabien-, Bukovina- und Dobrudschadeutschen. Von der Volksgruppe in Rumänien zur 'Siedlungsbrücke' an der Reichsgrenze* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1984); Ute Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien: Eine Minderheit aus Südosteuropa (1814 bis heute)* (Köln: Böhlau, 2006). Thereafter Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*.

The resettlement programme, and the violence and coercion involved in 'making space' for ethnic Germans in the conquered territories of eastern Europe, have been explored from a number of angles: as part of the longer history of particular German-speaking minority communities, emphasising their perspective on and role in the process[14]; within the context of the Nazi attempt to restructure the population of Eastern Europe through policies of racial selection, exclusion, and destruction[15]; and as the precondition and trigger for the mass expulsion of German-speaking minorities from eastern Europe in the aftermath of the war.[16]

For all the important insights gained through recent scholarship on Nazi resettlement and ethnic restructuring, the gendered dimensions of this process still remain under-explored. A perspective of gender opens up questions both about the actors and agencies involved and about the discourses, concepts, and plans that informed their actions.[17] Questions can be posed about the men and women who implemented policy and chronicled events, what motivated them and how they self-consciously tested, developed, and reflected on their own (gendered) capacities and careers in the process. There is also scope for examining more closely the gendered assumptions about marriage, families, fertility and motherhood that coloured Nazi policymakers' views of the population groups that the resettlement agencies sought to relocate and resettle, or displace and destroy. Such assumptions pervaded both the ethnographic and 'racial-biological' analyses carried out on German minorities in Eastern and Southeastern Europe before the Second World War[18], and the destructive fantasies of the future entertained by the authors of and commentators on General Plan East with its reference to the future potential of anti-natalist measures to combat the

[14] For example Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*.

[15] Götz Aly, *'Endlösung': Völkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995); Heinemann, *'Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut'*.

[16] Michael Esch, 'Kolonisierung und Strukturpolitik: Paradigmen deutscher und polnischer Bevölkerungspolitik 1939-1948', in Christian Gerlach and Christoph Dieckmann, eds., *Besatzung und Bündnis: Deutsche Herrschaftsstrategien in Ost- und Südosteuropa* (Berlin: Schwarze Risse, 1995), 139-79.

[17] The author's own study, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) focuses on the role of German women in monitoring and training ethnic German resettlers in occupied Poland.

[18] See contributions in Mathias Beer and Gerhard Seewann, eds., *Südostforschung im Schatten des Dritten Reiches: Institutionen – Inhalte – Personen* (München: Oldenbourg, 2004), thereafter Beer and Seewann, *Südostforschung*; and in Sachse, ed., *Mitteleuropa*.

"enormous biological reproductive power" of "the peoples who are our Eastern neighbours".[19]

In the following, the gendered discourses and power relations involved in the resettlement programme are explored through an analysis of journeys and journey narratives. If journeys generally lend themselves to narratives of transformation, of self-fashioning and consciousness-raising, these journeys offered a supreme opportunity for turning experiences of travel into *völkisch* allegory.[20] The examples analysed below are texts – mostly published articles and memoirs – deriving from two major phases of the resettlement programme involving the predominantly 'peasant' populations with which Himmler was obsessed: the transfer of *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic Germans) from Volhynia, Galicia and the Narew district in Soviet-occupied eastern Poland in the winter of 1939/40, and the transfer of the German-speaking minorities of Bessarabia and Dobrudja via Yugoslavia in autumn 1940. Both the journeys taken by the resettlers – particularly the spectacular wagon treks – and the journeys taken by the resettlement teams across Europe in order to organize their transfer 'back to the Reich' generated an outpouring of reportage presenting the transformative effects of mobility, transit, and displacement. The resettlement programme was staged as a spectacle and used as a metaphor of a 'world on the move', a bold experiment in demographic reorganization signalling the power of the Reich and its leadership.

For the German men and women from the Reich who were agents and assistants of resettlement, the resettlement programme offered not only career advancement but travel and adventure, physical challenges, exciting encounters and the gratifying 'discovery' of German-speaking communities in remote corners of Eastern Europe. 'Moving the peoples' was also an opportunity for gendered self-fashioning and self-reflection. Examining texts written by men from the resettlement commandos who set out from Berlin in the winter of 1939/40 and by women propagandists who encountered the resettlers en route reveals, among other things, how the authors represented themselves as models of soldierly masculinity or motherly zeal and how they experienced travel as a form of empowerment.

The texts are also explored for their ideological justification of displacement as a mobilizing and educative process for those uprooted. Abandoning their homes and farms for an uncertain future in the Reich was presented as a character test for the resettlers. Here, a perspective of gender helps

[19] Erhard Wetzel, 'Stellungnahme und Gedanken zum Generalplan Ost des Reichsführers SS, 27 April 1942', in Madajczyk, *Generalplan*, 50-81, here 52, 74.

[20] Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 162.

illuminate how those implementing the resettlement programme depicted 'homelands on the move' under the protection of the Reich. Gender shaped their sometimes admiring, sometimes critical reflections on resettler customs and their presentations of tough resettler men and resolute women who were galvanized by the upheaval but still responsive and grateful to those who led and managed them in transit.

Masters over time and space: the resettlement teams and their narratives

In early November 1939 nearly three hundred men converged on the *Reichssportfeld* in Berlin, where they were quartered for a three-week 'training camp' in the *Friesenhaus*, a residential block built as athletes' accommodation for the 1936 Olympics. Under the command of *SS-Standartenführer* Horst Hoffmeyer from the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* (Ethnic German Liaison Office), these volunteers constituted the *Umsiedlungskommando* (resettlement commando) which was to be dispatched, once the detailed transfer agreement with the Soviet Union had been concluded, to organize the registration and transport of the German-speaking communities of Soviet-occupied eastern Poland 'back to the Reich'. The *Umsiedlungskommando* included SS men, ordinary policemen and members of the NS motorcycle corps (*Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrerkorps*, or NSKK); doctors, vets, pharmacists and other medical personnel; and Volhynian and Galician Germans with knowledge of the settlement areas and interpreting skills.[21] It was also a magnet for political activists, publicists, academics and administrators from organizations promoting German cultural identity in the borderlands and abroad who were eager to put their ethnographic knowledge and commitment to the *Volkstumskampf* (ethnic struggle) into action. Among them was Lothar von Seltmann, an Austrian Nazi who had spent several years as a Hitler Youth leader and student in Germany before 1938 and who returned to Vienna following the Nazi annexation of Austria. There, he became head of the Vienna branch of the Society for Germandom Abroad (*Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland*, or VDA).[22] For the author Rolf Bongs, volunteering for the *Umsiedlungskommando* was also – by his own admission – a chance to escape his desk

[21] Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 90-93.

[22] Claudia Brunner and Uwe von Seltmann, *Schweigen die Täter, reden die Enkel* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2006), 111. Thereafter Brunner and von Seltmann, *Schweigen die Täter*. Seltmann became the local plenipotentiary (*Ortsbevollmächtigter*) for Kostopol in Volhynia.

job with the VDA in Düsseldorf.[23] Karl Kölsch, *Gaukulturwart* (warden of culture) of the Saarpfalz and editor of the periodical *Die Westmark*, saw an opportunity to encounter and 'bring home' Germans whose forebears had once come from his home region.[24] For the ethnographer Alfred Karasek, taking on the task of resettling the Volhynian Germans continued his long-standing connection to that particular community. This dated back to 1926 when he had taken part in a youth movement expedition to 'discover' German-speaking minority communities in Volhynia and document their folklore.[25] Karasek, who was employed before the war by the *Südost-deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (Southeast German Research Society) in Vienna, took part – like Bongs – both in the transfer of the Volhynian Germans from Soviet-occupied eastern Poland in winter 1939/40 and that of the Bessarabian Germans in autumn 1940.[26]

Seltmann, Bongs, Kölsch and Karasek, together with the reserve police officer Hans Richter, all published or contributed to books recounting their exploits as members of the *Umsiedlungskommando* in 1939/40.[27] They were

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[23] Rolf Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße nach Westen* (Berlin: Wiking, 1942), 7, thereafter Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*; see also Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 152-55. Bongs was sent to Lomza and Jesiorka in the Narew district.

[24] Kurt Kölsch, *Galiziendeutsche Heimkehr: Ein Tagebuch* (Neustadt an der Weinstraße: Westmark-Verlag, 1940), 9. Thereafter Kölsch, *Galiziendeutsche Heimkehr*. Kölsch was assigned to Dornfeld in Galicia. On Kölsch, see also Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 206-7.

[25] Karasek was district plenipotentiary (*Gebietsbevollmächtigter*) in the area designated Wo I (Luck): Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 89. On Karasek and the Volhynian Germans, see Wilhelm Fielitz, *Das Stereotyp des wolhyniendeutschen Umsiedlers: Popularisierungen zwischen Sprachinselforschung und nationalsozialistischer Propaganda* (Marburg: Elwert, 2000), 48-74, 240-2, thereafter Fielitz, *Stereotyp*; on the youth movement expedition of 1926 to Volhynia, see also Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of* Ostforschung *in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 107-8. Thereafter Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards*.

[26] On the *Südostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft,* see Michael Fahlbusch, 'Im Dienste des Deutschtums in Südosteuropa: Ethnopolitische Berater als Tathelfer für Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit', in Beer and Seewann, *Südostforschung*, 175-214, thereafter Fahlbusch, 'Im Dienst des Deutschtums'; on Karasek and the resettlement of the Bessarabian Germans, see below.

[27] Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*; Kölsch, *Galiziendeutsche Heimkehr*; Lothar von Seltmann, *Tagebuch vom Treck der Wolhyniendeutschen* (Potsdam: Voggenreiter, 1941), thereafter Seltmann, *Tagebuch*; Alfred Karasek, 'Der Wille zum Reich', in Otto Engelhardt-Kyffhäuser, ed., *Das Buch vom großen Treck* (Berlin: Grenze und Ausland, 1940), 14-29, thereafter Karasek, ‚Der Wille zum Reich', and Engelhard-Kyffhäuser, *Das Buch vom großen Treck*; Karasek, 'Brief eines Umsiedlungsbevollmächtigten', *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten*, 12, 4 (1940), 4-6, thereafter Karasek, 'Brief eines Umsiedlungsbevollmächtigten'; Hans Richter, *Heimkehrer: Bildberichte von der Umsiedlung der Volksdeutschen aus*

part of the flood of media coverage of the resettlement that contributed to the instant mythologizing of the 'great trek' of the Volhynian and Galician Germans in the winter of 1939/40 and its recapitulation in less perilous conditions by the Bessarabian Germans in autumn 1940. Targeting a popular audience, the books came decorated with trek motifs and illustrated with maps, photos, or artwork: such a book could be – for instance – given by a leader of the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* as a Christmas present in 1941 to one of her subordinates in the district of Merseburg.[28] The texts can be read as propaganda for the SS and the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* and their successful 'rescue' mission. This propaganda distracted attention from the disorder that ensued once resettled ethnic Germans arrived 'in the Reich' and were marooned for months or years in camps. It also drew attention away from the brutal expulsions of Jews and Poles: these deportations were an essential goal of Nazi Germanization policy and at the same time freed up resources for the incoming settlers. The texts can also be seen as exercises in 'image management', portraying resettled ethnic German peasants in such a way as to engage popular interest in them, to combat prejudices about their 'backwardness', and to promote their integration into the Reich.[29] Moreover, they presented a parable of pan-German comradeship, showing Reich Germans and *Volksdeutsche* cooperating within the *Umsiedlungskommando* and demonstrating comradeship in turn with the resettlers. At the same time, these accounts – typically presented in diary form to heighten the 'eye-witness' effect – can also be read as narratives of a quest that confirmed but also tested the authors' masculinity through physical challenges, confrontations with Soviet officials, Poles and Jews, and experiences with other versions of manliness encountered among the ethnic Germans.

The members of the resettlement commando cultivated a paramilitary style: they left the Friesenhaus training camp kitted out in "field grey *Wehrmacht* uniform without insignia or weapons".[30] Bongs professed astonishment at the way some of his colleagues once in uniform "lost the ability to walk naturally or speak normally".[31] Bongs' mockery notwithstanding, the uniform served its purpose: at any rate, a Volhynian German pastor later recalled that the uniform worn by the men of the *Umsied-*

Bessarabien, Rumänien, aus der Süd-Bukowina und aus Litauen (Berlin: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1941). Thereafter Richter, *Heimkehrer*.

[28] Flyleaf inscription in a copy of von Seltmann, *Tagebuch*.

[29] Fielitz, *Stereotyp*, 23.

[30] Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 7.

[31] Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 11.

lungskommando had served to impress his fellow-villagers.[32] Military references pervaded the texts: references to "general staff", being "in the field" or on "home leave" underscored the mimicry of a military operation, while the descriptions of manly comradeship through long days on the road, late-night drinking, and shared living quarters echoed the style of a campaign memoir. The texts made much of the arduous routes travelled by the resettlement teams to their designated areas of operation, inviting the armchair traveller to share in the adventure of getting lost in snow and darkness and sometimes invoking a sense of an expedition into the unknown, with the rumbling lorries imagined as an "elephant herd".[33] The vast horizons and long distances were invoked in order to underline the "historic" and "unprecedented" scale of their tasks and, in Karasek's words, "inhuman" responsibilities.[34] Bongs and Seltmann also traced how the journey was transforming them: with increasing distance from loved ones and home comforts, they observed themselves as they shook off the trappings of bourgeois life, became 'wild', stopped washing, wrapped themselves in furs and – in Bongs' case – grew a beard.[35]

Along with their self-representation as wild freebooters and frontiersmen, the authors also stressed their identity as managers on the move with suitcases full of forms and the equipment to set up mobile offices, living out the model of the Nazi technocrat, implementing systems but capable of improvization, and demonstrating "a hard, quiet heart".[36] 'Hardheartedness' was directed towards those to be excluded from resettlement, since the task of registration was an initial sifting process to select those of German ancestry and reject any others – Poles, Ukrainians or Jews – seeking, for whatever reason, to cross the demarcation border into German-occupied territory.[37] (Further sifting in the form of the 'sluicing' process conducted by the immigration officials of the *Einwandererzentralstelle* awaited the resettlers on arrival on Reich territory – including a camouflaged 'racial examination' conducted by SS 'racial experts' masquerading as medical personnel).[38] How many were clamouring to enter the Reich who were then turned away by the resettlement teams is hard to

[32] Pastor Reinhold Rudof Henke cited in Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 99.

[33] Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 17.

[34] Karasek, 'Brief eines Umsiedlungsbevollmächtigten', 4.

[35] Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, 49; Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 32, 48.

[36] Karasek, 'Brief eines Umsiedlungsbevollmächtigten', 5.

[37] Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 106-7.

[38] Strippel, *NS-Volkstumspolitik*, 98-129; Heinemann, *'Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut'*, 232-46.

verify.[39] For the purposes of the resettlement men's memoirs, it suited them to emphasise how they had stood firm against a throng of 'aliens' – presented as noisy or troublesome urban-dwellers, instantly distinguishable from the silent and respectful German peasant – and to play up their role as 'destiny' for the people they encountered seeking registration.[40]

The resettlement men depicted their encounter with the Galician and especially the Volhynian Germans as a colonial-style meeting with 'natives'. Elaborating stereotypes of peasant culture that were already well established in the ethnographic literature on 'Germandom abroad', the visitors expressed an astonishment tinged with ambivalence at the behaviour of men and women seemingly little touched by modernity: bearded patriarchs, fathers of countless children, who let their wives wait on them at table; mute, fecund women uninhibitedly breastfeeding in the presence of strangers.[41] They wondered at the profusion of children among the Volhynian Germans; but also at the high infant mortality. For all their admiration for the toughness they encountered (Seltmann felt sufficiently challenged to test his powers of endurance in a snowstorm against one "old Nikolai")[42] the resettlement officials' accounts implied that the resettlers would have to adapt their customs and attitudes – including their views of women's status – to the modern world they were entering.

The epic high point of the resettlement men's narratives was the transport of the resettlers, portrayed as a "battle against space and weather".[43] It was an operation which typically entailed separating families and sending the majority of the resettlers, including the elderly, the women, and the children by rail. The men of the resettlement teams then oversaw the trek by horse and wagon of the menfolk (some with their families) to the border points demarcating the Soviet from the German zones. The trek option had the straightforward purpose of allowing the resettlers to transport as much

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[39] Valdis O. Lumans, 'A Reassessment of *Volksdeutsche* and Jews in the Volhynia-Galicia-Narew Resettlement', in Alan E. Steinweis and Daniel E. Rogers, eds., *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and Its Legacy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 81-100, here 90, gives an impression based on contemporary reports. Some who sought resettlement may have been prevented not by German but Soviet officials: Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 106.

[40] Karasek, 'Der Wille zum Reich', 21; Karasek, 'Brief eines Umsiedlungsbevollmächtigten', 5; Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, 28; Kölsch, *Galiziendeutsche Heimkehr*, 21.

[41] Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 34, 42; Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, 53; Karasek, 'Der Wille zum Reich', 23; the artist Otto Engelhardt-Kyffhäuser, 'Aus meinem Tagebuch', in Engelhardt-Kyffhäuser, *Das Buch vom großen Treck*, 34, mentioned a father who had difficulties recalling the exact number of his children.

[42] Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, 75.

[43] Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, book jacket.

of their belongings as would fit on a wagon (for those who travelled by train, the baggage allowance was limited).[44]

However, for the purposes of resettlement propaganda the trek evoked much grander meanings associated with peoples in history setting out to new lands and frontiers.[45] It also provided the basis for much-repeated heroizing tales of endurance by a community united under Reich leadership bringing off an astonishing logistical feat in pitiless conditions.[46] Even with the positive gloss of these souvenir accounts, resettler officials admitted that things had gone wrong: treks had set off too late or not waited for the order to go, trains had been delayed for days leaving families stranded in sub-zero temperatures.[47] While the mortality from the train transports and the trek was outstripped by the mortality from epidemics that broke out in the resettler camps after arrival on Reich territory, it was clear from the resettlement men's memoirs that there were resettlers who perished en route.[48]

Along with their stories of dramatic action, the accounts of resettlement journeys were also political travelogues depicting a world in transformation. The descriptions did not only stress the distances travelled but painted for German readers a panorama of the borderlands of the emerging 'new Europe' in 1939/40 as envisaged by the Nazi leadership, a world in which German interests prevailed. The Soviet authorities – at this stage of the war, following the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939 – were portrayed as ready to cooperate with and recognise German power. Red Army soldiers were portrayed as riding to the rescue of the *Volksdeutsche* from their Polish tormentors, or as high-spirited drinking companions.[49] A glimpse of Cossacks gave Bongs the thrilling sight of warriors on horseback wielding sabres, while Ukrainian girls with "bright red lips and gleaming black hair" serving in a village tavern offered a touch of exotic allure.[50] Soviet officials appeared as sometimes vigorous and efficient, sometimes unreliable or recalcitrant partners in the business of resettlement. Meanwhile, hostile, defeated, and 'alien' peoples were of no consequence, glanced at

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[44] Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 68.

[45] Kölsch, *Galiziendeutsche Heimkehr*, 35-6; Karasek, 'Der Wille zum Reich', 26; on the cultural associations of the 'trek' see Fielitz, *Stereotyp*, 148-50.

[46] Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, 82; Karasek, 'Der Wille zum Reich', 26.

[47] Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 52, 56; Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, 21-22.

[48] Kölsch, *Galiziendeutsche Heimkehr*, 54-55; Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, 59; on mortality figures during the trek and afterwards, see Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 124; Fielitz, *Stereotyp*, 137-9; Lumans, 'Reassessment', 90.

[49] Kölsch, *Galiziendeutsche Heimkehr*, 34, 42.

[50] Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 15, 35.

by the resettlement teams as they moved onwards. Poles were mentioned as a trigger for atrocity stories about the 'martyrdom' of the *Volksdeutsche* in September 1939.[51]

In the accounts by Kölsch, Karasek and Seltmann, Jews featured as the ultimate 'other'. Short vicious passages portrayed Jews encountered en route as cowed and noisy and their settlements indistinguishable from one another: in Seltmann's words "everywhere the same ghetto faces, the same filth, the same desolation".[52] Sarcastic humour at the expense of Jews who dared to start discussions with the men of the *Umsiedlungskommando* served to remind readers of the hierarchies of power now in place.[53] What these narratives did not mention was the deployment of Jews as forced labourers to dig out resettler trains from the snow, or to carry the baggage of resettlers on disembarkation in the Warthegau.[54]

In their summings-up of their experiences in the Volhynia-Galicia-Narew resettlement of winter 1939/40, the reports' authors conveyed their feeling of having mastered time and space, boasting how such an 'incredibly small' commando of 300 men had moved 135.000 resettlers over such distances within such a short time. Gazing at a column of horse-drawn wagons traversing the horizon, Karasek found that they reminded him of "a chain of toy figures, carefully arranged, each group separated from the next" – an image intended to convey martial orderliness, but also betraying German readiness to pick up and manipulate populations around the terrain of Nazi Europe.[55] Even as the transfer of the Volhynian and Galician Germans ended, the resettlement teams were already looking ahead. Bidding goodbye to his Soviet "partners" and taking part in group photos, Seltmann noticed that many were saying "see you again in Bessarabia!".[56]

With the resettlement of Bessarabian Germans still pending, yet another resettlement 'action' was being prepared in the summer of 1940 within

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[51] Seltmann, Tagebuch, 61-65.

[52] Karasek, 'Der Wille zum Reich', 22; Kölsch, *Galiziendeutsche Heimkehr*, 53; Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, 97. For further references to anti-semitic passages in reports by resettlement officials, Lumans, 'Reassessment', 90-92.

[53] Seltmann, Tagebuch, 89-90. On the function of soldiers' humour in the Second World War to assert 'hierarchies of cleverness and power', see Martina Kessel, '"Laughing About Death?" German Humor' in the Two World Wars', in Alon Confino, Paul Betts, and Dirk Schumann, eds., *Between Mass Death and Individual Loss: The Place of the Dead in Twentieth-Century Germany* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2008), 197-218.

[54] Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 142, 154; Lumans, 'Reassessment', 93-94. For an example of a contemporary text that did mention Jews carrying resettlers' luggage: Felix Lützkendorf, *Völkerwanderung 1940: Ein Bericht aus dem Osten* (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1940), 35.

[55] Karasek, 'Brief eines Umsiedlungsbevollmächtigten', 4.

[56] Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, 94.

German-occupied Poland. This measure was to relocate to the *Reichsgau Wartheland* the ethnic Germans from the Lublin-Cholm-Hrubieszów area of the *General Government* in exchange for Polish deportees from the Warthegau, a removal that took place in autumn/winter 1940/1.[57] Bongs spent June and July 1940 selecting and registering ethnic Germans in the Cholm area.[58] Seltmann, too, was involved in the Lublin-Cholm resettlement in summer 1940 as resettlement team leader; in August 1940 he joined the staff of the SS and police headquarters in Lublin as *Beauftragter* (delegate) of the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*.[59] Meanwhile, at the end of August 1940, Bongs had been summoned to Romania to assist with the transfer of the Bessarabian Germans; there, he encountered Karasek, who was by then acting as the district plenipotentiary for Beresina and working once again with his Soviet opposite number from the Volhynian operation.[60] Hans Richter, involved in January 1940 in the transfer of the Volhynian Germans, went on to Dobrudja in the autumn of 1940, where he accompanied resettlers on ships up the Danube, moving on to southern Bukovina in December 1940 and Lithuania in February/March 1941.[61]

The men's encounters en route with other 'old resettlement hands' reinforced their sense of comradeship and shared knowledge gained through each station of their journey. Through repetition, the logistical challenge of setting tens of thousands of resettlers in motion became routine. For Bongs, pondering in the summer of 1940 a new map of the 'German East' showing the Warthegau and the *General Government* and the border with Soviet-held territory, and tracing on it in red pencil all the routes he had travelled on resettlement business, being 'on the road' summed up his sense of the historical moment: "We drive thousands upon thousands of kilometers, restlessly driven by our tasks. Each journey has an end, but that end brings forth new goals."[62]

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[57] Heinemann, *'Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut'*, 377-8; Strippel, *NS-Volkstumspolitik*, 191-3.

[58] Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 69-112.

[59] Brunner and von Seltmann, *Schweigen die Täter*, 113.

[60] Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 169, 195; Waldemar Löbsack, 'Aus meinem Tagebuch während der Umsiedlung der Bessarabiendeutschen', *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten*, 12, 12 (1940), 2-6. On Bongs' and Karasek's role in the resettlement of the Bessarabian Germans, see Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 152-58.

[61] On the transfer of the Lithuanian Germans, see Christoph Dieckmann, 'Plan und Praxis. Deutsche Siedlungspolitik im besetzten Litauen 1941-1944', in Heinemann and Wagner, *Wissenschaft*, 93-118, here 98-101, thereafter Dieckmann, 'Plan und Praxis'; Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 168-9.

[62] Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 111.

Communities on the move: the transit camp at Semlin

I turn now to a particular moment within the transfer of the Bessarabian and Dobrudja Germans en route to the Reich in autumn 1940 - the journey briefly witnessed by Waldeck at Galaţi/Galatz. One major locale that served as a propagandistic 'stage' in their journey was the transit camp at Zemun/Semlin near Belgrade.[63] Here, many of the paths involved in the resettlement programme crossed for a short space of time: those of male resettlement officials, a female photographer and a female artist, local Yugoslav German men and women drawn in to assist the resettlement operation, and the resettlers themselves. Exploring the accounts and images of this particular site of transit reveals how women and men as chroniclers and propagandists of resettlement presented themselves in action, reflected on the character of the resettlers, and produced a legitimating discourse of 'rescue' and 'protection'.

The transit camp at Semlin, operated by the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* between late September and December 1940, was significant partly for its setting, its construction, and its layout. It was constructed, with the permission of the Yugoslav government, by Yugoslav German volunteers in five weeks between August and September 1940 as a temporary 'holding point' for thousands of resettled ethnic Germans from Bessarabia and Dobrudja who were disembarked from ships coming up the Danube from Romania and then dispatched onwards a few days later by train to the Reich and thence in due course to further camps and/or resettlement in Poland.[64] Built on sand on the left bank of the Sava river at the confluence of the Sava and Danube, the camp was endowed with particular meaning as embodying the German capacity for creating order, immediately juxtaposed and in contrast to the stereotypical 'Balkan chaos' of Belgrade. Narratives by Reich Germans recounting their arrival made much of the "disorder" and "foreignness" of Belgrade giving way to the regulated environment of Semlin, marked out by swastika flags round its perimeter, a world apart.[65] Visitors registered predictable wonderment at the camp's clockwork routines and its exemplary hygiene facilities (including 24 washrooms, 8 shower rooms and latrines with 291-seat capacity), and noted how cheery brass bands played

[63] A second camp was also constructed at Prahovo on the Yugoslav-Bulgarian border.

[64] 'Das Lager in Zemun', *Deutsches Volksblatt*, 18 October 1940, cutting in: Bundesarchiv [Federal Archive] Berlin, hereafter abbreviated BArch B, R57 neu, 1070 box 2. See also Jachomowski, *Umsiedlung*, 84.

[65] Richter, *Heimkehrer*, 13; Hertha Strzygowski, 'Bessarabiendeutsche Umsiedlung', *Deutsche Monatshefte*, 8, 1, 2. Juli/August 1941, 48. Thereafter Strzygowski, 'Bessarabiendeutsche Umsiedlung'.

as each shipload arrived and each trainload departed. With giant tents and 'streets' constructed of wooden slats, the camp combined the look and feel of a military camp with elements of a small 'city'. With lugubrious humour, the main route through the camp was named "Kurfürstendamm" / "Unter den Linden" and various tents became designated as the "Hotel zu sämtlichen Jahreszeiten", "Hotel Adlon" or "Café Bauer".[66]

The camp was also significant because of the involvement of the Yugoslav German volunteers and how this was claimed to have forged new connections with the Reich and with their fellow-Germans from Romania. The construction and staffing of the camp, the donation of foodstuffs and clothing for distribution to the resettlers, and the supply of personnel to accompany the passenger ships plying up and down the Danube between the embarkation ports (Galatz and Reni) and Semlin, were celebrated as evidence of the *Volksgemeinschaft der Tat* (community of the deed).[67] It was described as a project that for the first time had united the disparate groupings of Yugoslav Germans of different classes and from different areas of German-speaking settlement in the service of their fellow Germans.[68] Three hundred Yugoslav German men were reported to have helped build the camp; 100 Yugoslav German women spent a month sewing clothes and other textiles for the incomers.[69] The whole enterprise served to raise the profile of the recent reorganization of the Yugoslav Germans which had taken place a year earlier and had put Sepp Janko in post as the new leader of the Yugoslav Germans.[70] According to propagandistic accounts by Yugoslav German women who had 'served' in Semlin, this had been their moment of national awakening, generating a sense of belonging to the pan-German *Volksgemeinschaft* for the first time.[71]

Semlin was also important as a site for encounters and reunions between resettlement experts from the *Altreich*, from Austria and from German-speaking areas beyond the Reich. Along with other transit camps like

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[66] Richter, *Heimkehrer,* 14; Strzygowski, 'Bessarabiendeutsche Umsiedlung', 48.

[67] Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 142.

[68] Spaeth, Lagebericht Jugoslawien: Volksgemeinschaft der Tat: Der Bau der Umsiedlungslager, o.D., BArch B, R57 neu, 31.

[69] Lagebericht Jugoslawien; 'Neusatz: Ortsgruppe des Kulturbundes', *Deutsches Volksblatt*, 30 December 1940, cutting in: BArch B, R57 neu, 1070 box 1.

[70] Thomas Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division 'Prinz Eugen': Die Banater Schwaben und die nationalsozialistischen Kriegsverbrechen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 2003), 139-40.

[71] Liesl Obmann, 'Frauen und Mädel im Dienst auf den Schiffen'; Lissi Lehmann, 'Der Einsatz des Freiwilligen Arbeitsdienstes der Frauen und Mädel im Durchgangslager Zemun-Semlin', *Volk im Osten*, 2, 8 (1941), 30-32.

Galatz and together with the ships going to and fro along the Danube, these were places where in the autumn of 1940 Germans could feel particularly pleased with themselves. To be in Belgrade assisting with the resettlement was, as the reserve police officer Hans Richter wrote in *Heimkehrer*, a good time and place to be a German.[72] It was also a gift for the media: the camp served, so to speak, as a showcase for the Bessarabian Germans with their traditional costumes, large families and much-vaunted faith in Germany and the Führer. Having been registered, gathered from their villages in Bessarabia, and now marshalled en masse in the camp, the resettlers were – in the absence of any privacy in the camp – in the spotlight and on display for visiting observers and journalists, who marvelled at the spectacle of such a large number of model and picturesque peasant families in one place and at the appealing sight of grateful German children being looked after and fussed over by fellow-Germans. The photos in Richter's 'souvenir' volume *Heimkehrer* included several appealing shots of uniformed members of the Order Police helping in Semlin by carrying a laundry-basket full of clean dishes, holding a baby, and using a spoon to help feed a small girl with blonde hair under the caption "Everywhere the police give a helping hand".[73] In a camp that presented itself as one big family, policemen could assume the guise of indulgent fathers.

The camp offered particular opportunities to women propagandists who travelled there in search of subject matter. Hertha Strzygowski, an artist specializing in ethnographic themes, was in Vienna in the summer of 1940 when she was tipped off by her old friend and later (second) husband Alfred Karasek (she married him in 1942) to go and draw the resettlers in Semlin.[74] She recalled years later that he had urged her to go, now, and draw them while they could still be recorded as "real Bessarabian colonists".[75] In Semlin, she stayed in a tent with the Yugoslav German girls and women helping in the camp, and produced a series of portraits of the resettlers there. One tent thrilled her in particular:

> "I went in and saw an extraordinary and wonderful sight. On both sides of this tent, fifteen metres wide and fifty metres long, there were straw mattresses laid out on the floor in four rows. And on them: children, children and more chil-

[72] Richter, *Heimkehrer*, 13.

[73] Richter, *Heimkehrer*, picture section (unpaginated).

[74] On Hertha Karasek-Strzygowski, see Alfred Karger, *Hertha Karasek-Strzygowski: Biographie und Bibliographie zum 70. Geburtstag* (Dortmund: Ostdt. Forschungsstelle im Lande Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1968); see also Fielitz, *Stereotyp*, 295-6.

[75] Hertha Karasek-Strzygowski, *Es führet uns des Schicksals Hand: Bessarabisches Tagebuch* (Marburg: Elwert, 1990), 17. Thereafter Karasek-Strzygowski, *Tagebuch*.

> dren! Small, large, standing, sitting, rolling around, crawling and on every second or third mattress sat a mother breastfeeding her youngest infant."

Strzygowski – who herself was in her mid-forties and had one child – could not get over how young the mothers were and how many children they already had.[76]

The sight of settler mothers and children being cared for was likewise a photo-opportunity for the 'house photojournalist' of the *NS-Frauenschaft*, Liselotte Purper, who travelled to Belgrade in late October 1940 in order to document 'women's work' at the camp. Arriving at Semlin on 3 November, she encountered Werner Lorenz, head of the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*, who proposed that she document the resettlement of the Dobrudja Germans. Purper spent several days photographing in the camp before travelling downriver to Dobrudja to document the preparations of the German community there for their resettlement and returning to Semlin on the 'Franz Schubert' along with the resettlers a month later.[77] She wrote in her diary of the marvellous comradeship on the four-day Danube trip she had enjoyed with the ship's crew and the accompanying nurses, doctors and other personnel on board. Arriving back at Semlin, with the ship bedecked with flags as it docked, Purper watched the ritual of disembarkation: the first to step off the ship was a mother with a child in her arms. There were far more hands stretched out to help those disembarking than were necessary, Purper observed: this, for her, seemed to sum up the help and protection offered at the camp.[78]

Thinking about Semlin as a crossroads bringing together once again resettlement officials and the resettlers en route to the Reich, there is a striking contrast between the experiences of the mobile 'cadres' and propagandists who organized and documented the resettlement as part of a sequence of rewarding wartime assignments well away from the front line, and the experiences of the resettlers themselves, subjected to a series of mass transports over which they had no control. In a symbolic act of immobilization en route to Semlin, still recalled sharply decades afterwards by

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[76] Karasek-Strzygowski, *Tagebuch*; Hertha Strzygowski, 'Bessarabiendeutsche Umsiedlung', *Deutsche Monatshefte*, 8, 1-2 (1941), 44-57, here 49.

[77] Liselotte Purper, Tagebuch, 3 November 1940. Deutsches Historisches Museum, Rep. I/ 2 Wk. / F1 / M11. On Liselotte Purper, see Katja Protte, '"Bildberichterstatterin" im "Dritten Reich": Fotografien aus den Jahren 1937 bis 1944 von Liselotte Purper', *DHM Magazin*, 7, 20 (1997); Elizabeth Harvey, 'Seeing the World: Photography, Photojournalism and Visual Pleasure in the Third Reich', in Pamela Swett, Corey Ross and Fabrice d'Almeida, eds., *Pleasure and Power in the Third Reich* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 177-204.

[78] Liselotte Purper, Tagebuch, 19 November 1940.

those interviewed by Ute Schmidt, the Bessarabian Germans had been forced to abandon their horses and wagons in Romania at the embarkation point of Galatz: these were later purchased by the Transylvanian Saxons or requisitioned by the Romanian state.[79] The world of the camp at Semlin portrayed in propaganda reports and photos banished many things from view that were later recalled by the Bessarabian Germans: in particular, the separation of family members from each other and the tearing apart of communities in the process of transit and later resettlement.[80] The enforced community life of Semlin was just the beginning, for many, of a sequence of camps, some bearable, some rife with epidemics, some corrupt and abusive, but all requiring adaptation to the norms and expectations of those in charge as Party organizations and rituals structured their days. While one former Dobrudja German resettler recalled being looked after well in Semlin and elsewhere, this recollection contrasted with the difficulties of constantly moving from one camp to another and finally in 1942 to what would be a short-lived resettlement in the 'Protectorate'.[81]

The camp at Semlin, built on sand and perhaps best evoked as a mirage of the energies harnessed for building the Nazi empire, was taken down in December 1940.[82] The microcosm of 'German order' was dismantled, and the Yugoslav Germans were dispatched homeward. Their own displacement, through resettlement or expulsion from 1944 onwards, still lay in the future; the destruction of German 'homelands' in Southeastern Europe had only just begun.

Onward journeys

The journeys begun by some of the resettlement officials continued onwards to other parts of occupied Eastern Europe. Some pursued careers that took them into different institutions and agencies involved in occupation policy. Having arrived in Lublin in summer 1940, Lothar von Seltmann was involved in implementing SS and police leader Odilo

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[79] Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 349.

[80] Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 358-68.

[81] Irmgard Gerlinde Stiller, 'Heimat – Umsiedler, Ansiedler, Flüchtling, Neubürger', *Jahrbuch der Dobrudschadeutschen 1960*, 31-94, here 43-44.

[82] Under German occupation a year later a concentration camp was set up nearby in Semlin on the former exhibition grounds: an estimated 7500 Jews were imprisoned there before being murdered in gas vans between March and May 1942. See Walter Manoschek, *'Serbien ist judenfrei': Militärische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941/42* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995), 69, 169-84.

Globocnik's Germanization policies 'trawling for German blood' among the population of the Zamość district in autumn 1940 and subsequently, after the attack on the Soviet Union in summer 1941, in *Distrikt Galizien*, now conquered and absorbed into the *General Government*.[83] Seltmann transferred in 1942 to the staff of the SS and police in Krakow and was later involved in the suppression of the Warsaw ghetto uprising in spring 1943.[84] Alfred Karasek was recruited into an SS unit, the *Sonderkommando* Künsberg, attached to the German Foreign Office but integrated into the Waffen-SS in 1941, that located and seized maps, books, and other cultural artefacts in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. He was later involved in an operation to confiscate material from Jewish bookshops in Budapest in 1944.[85]

Other, broader lines of continuity make the connection evident between the work of resettling and 'protecting' the ethnic Germans and the work of deportation and murder following the attack on the Soviet Union. When the Reich Security Head Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, or RSHA) assembled from May 1941 onwards the four *Einsatzgruppen* in preparation for the attack on the Soviet Union, a similar recruitment model was used to that of the resettlement commandos, combining members of the SS and police with people who had specific regional knowledge. *Einsatzgruppe D* (destined for operations in the southern Soviet Union) included personnel who had been involved in the resettlement commandos, some of them from the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* and some of them *Volksdeutsche* who had recently lived in the Soviet Union or in Bessarabia.[86] The tasks of *Einsatzgruppe D* extended beyond the murder of Jews and capturing political commissars: it also became involved in the 'protection' of the *Volksdeutsche* in the Soviet Union.[87] A further line of continuity can be traced from the initial resettlement commandos to the later campaign in the

[83] Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 241; Elizabeth Harvey, '"Wir kamen in vollkommenes Neugebiet rein": Der "Einsatz" von Mitgliedern nationalsozialistischer Frauenorganisationen im besetzten Polen', in Marita Krauss, ed., *Wir waren dabei: Mitläuferinnen, Nutznießerinnen, Täterinnen im Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008), 83-102, esp. 92.

[84] Brunner and von Seltmann, *Schweigen die Täter*, 113-23.

[85] Ulrike Hartung, *Raubzüge in der Sowjetunion: Das Sonderkommando Künsberg 1941-1943* (Bremen: Temmen, 1997), 126; Fahlbusch, 'Im Dienst des Deutschtums', 199-200.

[86] Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: Die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion 1941-1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003), 85. Thereafter Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik*.

[87] Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik*, 265-6.

Soviet Union through the *Sonderkommando* R under Horst Hoffmeyer, which was sent to 'look after' the *Volksdeutsche* in Transnistria (part of Ukraine placed under Romanian administration) and which in early 1942 together with members of the local ethnic German militia (*Selbstschutz*) became involved in the murder of Jews there.[88]

The ethnic German resettlers on Reich territory, meanwhile, were channelled and shepherded from one point to the next and made to wait for their next move into the unknown. While the story of their resettlement generated spin-offs for the German propaganda industry ranging from the feature film *Heimkehr* (1941) to novels and children's books celebrating their record and potential as peasant colonists,[89] male resettlers were recruited into the *Waffen-SS* and conscripted into the Wehrmacht.[90] Those that were selected for settlement in the territories of occupied Poland faced an uncertain future on farms and properties seized from deported Poles and Jews, while many – in May 1941 an estimated 270.000 – remained long-term in resettler camps.[91]

Some of those who had overseen the uprooting of the Bessarabian Germans sought to keep track of what had happened both to them and to their homelands subsequently. According to Hertha Strzygowski, Alfred Karasek wrote to her in October 1940 having returned to Bessarabia after the departure of the resettlers. He described the rapid decay of the empty villages, the plundered houses and the vineyards left unharvested. The steppe, he reported, was beginning to encroach on the cultivated land.[92] Strzygowski herself tracked down the Bessarabian German settlers to a camp near Łódź/Litzmannstadt in early 1941, seeing this as her last chance to make drawings and sketches of them while they had the time to "sit still".[93] To her dismay, she found them "dreadfully changed", weary and discouraged by life in the resettler camp.[94] On returning to Vienna, she put all the more energy into immortalizing in an oil painting the original trek from their homelands.[95]

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[88] Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik*, 273-87.

[89] Fielitz, *Stereotyp*, provides a detailed analysis of this output.

[90] Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 213-14; Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 155; Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 252.

[91] Estimated figure in Dieckmann, 'Plan und Praxis', 100.

[92] Karasek-Strzygowski, *Tagebuch*, 147-8.

[93] Karasek-Strzygowski, *Tagebuch*,164.

[94] Karasek-Strzygowski, *Tagebuch*, 189.

[95] Karasek-Strzygowski, *Tagebuch*, 197.

In 1942, Strzygowski took another trip across Europe to 'capture' German colonists in situ. This time she had been summoned by her old acquaintance Walter Kuhn, a veteran of the 1926 youth movement expedition to Polish Volhynia and since 1936 professor of ethnography at the University of Breslau.[96] Kuhn's proposition was that Strzygowski join a summer assignment by women students from Breslau among ethnic German villages in formerly Soviet eastern Volhynia, now under German occupation.[97] Strzygowski leapt at the chance: as she recalled, this was a unique opportunity to travel to these 'distant settlements' which had been so inaccessible under Soviet rule.[98] Once again Strzygowski found peasant women to portray, revere, and empathise with, while revelling in the sense of escape and freedom that travel and new sights and subject-matter gave her.[99] Decades after the war, Strzygowski published her wartime drawings along with her memories of encounters with villagers in eastern Volhynia, the tone and perspective little changed from what she had written in 1941, seemingly satisfied that even if the people she had drawn had perished in the upheavals and violence of war, they lived on in her art.[100] The gesture of presenting the stories of vulnerable ethnic Germans as a legitimating narrative while ignoring the destruction wrought by Himmler's population restructuring proved astonishingly durable.

Conclusions

As they travelled from one corner of Europe to another, the resettlement teams found that organizing mass migration over such distances gave them an exhilarating sense of power. The journeys of those resettled, meanwhile, were presented as the dramatic main event, with the resettlers as the stars of the propaganda show – but at every point subject to the authority of the resettler teams. The power relations and transformations involved in these different journeys can be analysed from a number of perspectives: they can, I have argued here, also be usefully read in terms of gender.

The reports and travelogues produced by the men of the resettlement commandos turned what was essentially a process of dissolution and decol-

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[96] On Walter Kuhn's pre-war career and his wartime involvement in advising resettlement planners, see Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards*, 105-8, 176-8.

[97] Hertha Karasek-Strzygowski, *Wolhynisches Tagebuch* (Marburg: Elwert, 1979), 11. Thereafter Karasek-Strzygowski, *Wolhynisches Tagebuch*.

[98] Karasek-Strzygowski, *Wolhynisches Tagebuch*, 12.

[99] Karasek-Strzygowski, *Wolhynisches Tagebuch*, 13.

[100] Karasek-Strzygowski, *Wolhynisches Tagebuch*, 6.

onization into an inspiring political pilgrimage and a triumph of forward motion for Nazism. In these narratives, the authors presented their experiences beyond the borders of the Reich as formative for their gendered identities as men of action. From one angle, they presented themselves as volunteer soldiers on a bloodless pseudo-military campaign during which they wore uniforms, lived rough, slept little, forged comradely bonds, drank and jested with each other and with their Soviet counterparts. From another angle, they constructed a self-image as self-sufficient technocrats on the move, turning theory into practice, becoming 'experts for everything', taking on all-encompassing responsibilities, acting as leaders, educators and 'fatherly' role models for the resettlers and demonstrating toughness towards non-Germans.

A perspective of gender also highlights the fact that it was a vision of fathers, mothers and children that embodied the 'homelands on the move'. Removed from their surroundings and stripped of their privacy, resettler families were rendered by their dislocation into the raw material for a gigantic human experiment. The prominent presence of resettled mothers and children opened up opportunities for female 'experts' and propagandists – historians, ethnographers, welfare organizers, artists, photographers – to add their own brand of caring and maternalistic engagement to the resettlement operation alongside the male architects and technocrats who dominated the resettlement apparatus. More generally, the focus on resettler mothers and children engendered a protective attitude among all the men and women involved in resettling them. This offered opportunities for SS men and other agents of the Reich to appear as patrons and benefactors and to present a benign picture of what the war was about and what it was achieving. At the same time, the potentially limitless neediness of the settlers – particularly of uprooted mothers and children – was used to legitimate the unlimited violence used against the non-German population.