

## THE RE-GERMANIZATION PROCEDURE: A DOMESTIC MODEL FOR NAZI EMPIRE-BUILDING

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### I.

Georg Rödel would not abandon his post, not even as the world he knew crumbled around him amid the heavy snows of January 1945. The American Third Army loomed just across the Rhine from Rödel's office in Wiesbaden, and constant shelling had seriously complicated his commission as the regional head of the SS Race and Settlement Main Office (Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt, RuSHA) — not to mention endangered his life (see Figure 1).

Yet none of this could stop Rödel and his assistant from venturing into the countryside each day to carry on with their work: performing racial examinations on foreign forced laborers, most of them from the Soviet Union, to determine whether any of them possessed “lost German blood” — a supposed biological heritage of Germanic colonists from centuries past. This was a calling near and dear to the man's heart, and one in which he had considerable expertise. Back in 1940, he had conducted similar appraisals on inhabitants slated for deportation from German-annexed western Poland; in 1941 and 1942, he did the same thing in northwestern Yugoslavia before moving on to yet another assignment in Paris. Now, in the twilight phase of the Second World War, he plied his trade as a “race inspector” conscientiously as ever in Germany itself, where Hessian households and businesses supplied a steady stream of employees for him to peruse, even with Allied troops right on their doorstep. As Rödel scurried from town to town, evaluating subjects in underground cellars and bomb shelters, he found it equally encouraging that many of those judged favorably agreed to what he had in mind for them: Germanization, or re-Germanization. Eager to fulfill his “duty,” not even the certainty of military defeat could dampen his spirits. “Soon it will all be over,” he wrote to a friend, “and then there will be a lot of work to catch up on. I hope and expect that it will not take too long. Here we are thoroughly optimistic.”<sup>1</sup>

These surreal scenes beg the question of how this SS officer could have possibly believed that such pursuits would continue after the fall

<sup>1</sup> Berlin Document Center (hereafter BDC) SSO/38B: Personnel File on Georg Albert Rödel. His correspondence from early 1945 can be found in Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Wiesbaden (hereafter HStW) Abt. 483, Nr. 7359.



**Figure 1. A group of RuSHA officials in Łódź (circa 1943). United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives #02378. Courtesy of Instytut Pamięci Narodowej.**

was delusional, his actions were not unique, no more of an anomaly than the seeming amenability of the people he encountered outside Wiesbaden in those chaotic final days. The circumstances were distinct, but the interactions themselves closely resembled something that took place across the continent of Europe under National Socialist rule.

In recent years, scholars have substantially broadened our knowledge of the Nazis' multifaceted enterprise to transform the demographic make-up of conquered foreign lands. With a frame of investigation widened beyond the Holocaust itself, we now know a great deal more than we used to about programs of colonial resettlement, racial classification, and mass expulsion that affected millions of Europeans who never set foot in a death camp, faced a killing squad, or perished in the ghettos. Strangely, however, despite its centrality to the Nazi agenda, far less attention has been paid to the policy field of assimilation, even though its immense grasp encompassed numerical proportions that actually exceeded the grim toll of the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question." This disparity is all the more puzzling given that Germanization as a social process affords fresh insights into another topic that has garnered intense interest lately among historians: the many ways in which ordinary Germans contributed to the imperial project of the National Socialist regime.

At the same time, it also reveals a side of civilian life under wartime occupation that is harder to reconcile with orthodox interpretations of the period. Although a number of studies have skillfully reconstructed how non-Germans reacted to Nazi hegemony — with

of the Third Reich, and why he thought they were so worthwhile to begin with. Was he just another Nazi fanatic with his head buried in the sand, detached from the reality of imminent collapse? Or did he have good reason to be sanguine in the apparent support his efforts received from the local population? If Rödel

a spectrum of behaviors ranging from collaboration to resistance — previous research has yet to address sufficiently how practices of accommodation on their part influenced the trajectory of state decision-making. Germanization policy offers us a textbook example of this interplay, but its salience has been obscured by a literature that remains geographically fractured and overly top-down. For all their heavy-handedness, Nazi officials throughout occupied Europe were keenly sensitive to popular opinion and often responsive to stimuli from below (especially in Germany itself). They also circulated ideas and methods that traversed political boundaries and linked center with periphery in a huge web of reciprocal exchanges.

I argue in my dissertation that these dynamics are essential to understanding the scope and impact of Nazi Germanization policy.<sup>2</sup> In turn, they help us comprehend how it came to be that over six million people obtained German citizenship in the midst of the most destructive conflict in history.<sup>3</sup> Rather than concentrating on a single country or region in isolation, my analysis weaves together a more integrated, comprehensive account by tying the implementation of “ethnic reordering” in the occupied territories to the experiences of civilians on the home front, German and non-German alike. At the core of this network stood the Re-Germanization Procedure (*Wiedereindeutschungsverfahren*, WED), a special initiative designed to assimilate “racially kindred” foreigners by sending them to live with German families throughout the Third Reich. Eventually drawing in nearly 100,000 people (most of them from Poland), the WED was a relatively small component of the so-called hunt for good blood, but one with significance that extended far beyond its numbers. Although a brainchild and hobbyhorse of *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler, it opened up a forum in which civilians could articulate their own definitions of Germanness as well. Situated at the ground level of the imperial metropole, it served as a crucial mechanism for canvassing grassroots attitudes toward the “consolidation of Germandom” abroad. Because “re-Germanizables” were kept under close surveillance and instructed to write letters to the SS officers who had selected them — men like Rödel — Himmler’s agents were able to monitor their everyday relations with native-born Germans in minute detail. At issue in this arena was nothing less than the question on which the Nazis’ irredentist ambitions fundamentally hinged: whether Europeans generally, and Germans specifically, would embrace the idea of a supranational polity organized on the basis of race — a vision of the future built just as much on inclusion as exclusion.

2 Bradley J. Nichols, “The Hunt for Lost Blood: Nazi Germanization Policy in Occupied Europe” (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee-Knoxville, 2016).

3 This figure includes roughly one million ethnic German “resettlers”; see the statistical charts in Library of Congress, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunal: Green Series, vol. IV* (hereafter LOC), p. 940-941; Doc. NO-3568: “Brief Facts about Resettlement” (English transcript), January 1944.

As the editors of one fascinating recent volume have pointed out, while the extent to which the National Socialist regime can be labeled a “racial state” is highly debatable, it is abundantly clear that the Third Reich never became any sort of out-and-out “racial society.”<sup>4</sup> The WED provides an edifying glimpse into some of the factors that prevented such a transformation from occurring. But it also indicates that the involvement of non-state actors who did contribute to racializing endeavors bore dramatic ramifications for how the Nazis governed their far-flung empire. Driven by a desire to unite all “persons of German blood” into a tight-knit “ethnic community” (*Volksgemeinschaft*), they ultimately relied on these very same people to make that chimera a reality. And while many individuals balked at the undertaking and declined to voice their assent, it also achieved a far greater measure of success than one might typically expect.

## II.

“From my experience, the prospects for Germanization are not very good.” That was what Wilhelm Wagner told the *Landrat* of Limburg on December 14, 1944, though his words could have easily been written by many other proprietors who agreed to participate in the re-Germanization procedure. The owner of a mill outside the small town of Dauborn, Wilhelm had originally taken in the Kowalski family with high enthusiasm back in 1942, having heard that their “healthy, clean, and decent appearance” denoted the presence of “German blood in their veins.”<sup>5</sup> What he did not realize at the time was that the SS had based this verdict solely on the Kowalskis’ physical features, or “racial phenotype,” after evicting them from their farm in western Poland (see Figure 2). Dispossessed though they were, Herr Wagner was nonetheless hopeful that his new charges would settle in quickly. He even treated them to steak dinners at his home. As several years went by, however, his optimism had gradually waned, and now he wanted the Kowalskis removed from his custody. As the father of two sons killed in action, he found it unconscionable that these immigrants refused to earn their keep and do their part to sustain the war effort. He also could not fathom why they continued to speak their mother tongue and engage in “forbidden relations” with Polish laborers despite repeated admonishments from the Gestapo. “In my opinion,” Wilhelm wrote in frustration to the *Landrat*, “we must soon decide whether these people are actually German or not.”<sup>6</sup>

That tensions existed between WED candidates and their German hosts would have come as no surprise to the mid-level Nazi functionaries

4 See the introduction in Devin O. Pendas, Mark Roseman, and Richard F. Wetzell, eds., *Beyond the Racial State: Re-thinking Nazi Germany* (New York, 2017), 17.

5 Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg — Staatsarchiv Sigmaringen (hereafter StS) Wü 168 T2, Nr. 207: “Betriebsführer-Merkblatt für den Einsatz wiedereindeutschungsfähiger Personen,” unsigned, undated.

6 HStW Abt. 411, Nr. 1008, Bd. 1138: Wagner to Landrat Limburg-Lahn, December 14, 1944.

who managed the operation. As early as 1940, one agent of the SS Security Service (Sicherheitsdienst, SD) had warned that distinctions between “good” and “bad” foreigners would likely “induce a sense of confusion among the German population.”<sup>7</sup> A civil servant in Frankfurt am Main picked up on just that a year later: “To the general public, who are



unfamiliar with the motives behind Germanization policy, the extensive concessions granted to such families are totally incomprehensible.”<sup>8</sup> The Nazis created this dilemma, of course, by forcibly importing millions of “ethnic aliens” to toil in the fatherland, but “re-Germanizables” were supposed to be regarded as “ethnic comrades.” What exactly occasioned the bewilderment these men spoke of, and what were its consequences? For the Kowalskis, the answer to the latter question was brutally direct: denunciation, arrest, and imprisonment.<sup>9</sup> And most supervisors did not display nearly the same amount of patience or depth of commitment as Herr Wagner.

Indeed, many of these *Betriebsführer*, as they were called, completely ignored regulations on the treatment of WED candidates, particularly when it came to furnishing them with a “German standard of living.” Far too many “re-Germanizables” languished in filthy, dilapidated hovels with no plumbing or heating, some of them literally falling apart or infested with vermin.<sup>10</sup> Such squalid circumstances made a mockery of any attempt to authenticate their “racial worth” by exhibiting “German order and cleanliness.” It certainly did not help that they also lacked basic household items such as beds, blankets, kitchen utensils, and soap.<sup>11</sup> Beyond their obvious practical uses, these objects functioned as markers of social status and racial

**Figure 2. A family of “re-Germanizable” Poles awaiting transport to the Reich (circa 1941). United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives #77867. Courtesy of Instytut Pamięci Narodowej.**

7 Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich* (New York, 1997), 69.

8 Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (hereafter BArch) R 36/1052: Preiser to Oberbürgermeister Frankfurt am Main, February 1941.

9 HStW Abt. 411, Nr. 1008, Bd. 1136: Gestapo Frankfurt-Main to Landrat Limburg-Lahn, June 29, 1944.

10 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (hereafter USHMMMA) 15.021M/2/20/94: Pluskota to RuSHA Aussenstelle, December 8, 1940. Because these letters stem from the same record group and were addressed to the same office, I will cite them in an abbreviated form; for example, 5/31/30: Dudaczyk, 8.11.40.

11 BArch R 49/73/11-12: Greifelt to HSSPFs, December 5, 1940.

privilege, with the want of one signifying the absence of the other. The real and symbolic meaning of segregated mealtimes underscored this connection. Upon arriving at a nursery in Waldsee, Stanislaw Stanczak quickly noticed that “The Poles eat at one table and the Germans eat at another, and they get better food.” Relegated to the ranks of the underclass, he immediately blamed the race inspectors: “You told us that we would have the same rights as German workers, but here it is not so.”<sup>12</sup> The poor quality of the clothing distributed to WED candidates became a further index of stratification. As Feliks Majerczyk explained in one letter, “We stand out from the local Germans not just because we don’t speak German, but on account of our ragged attire.”<sup>13</sup> The appearance of many “re-Germanizables” grew more disheveled over time given that employers confiscated their ration cards, paid them meager wages (if anything), and forced them to work in the fields in all weather for up to eighteen hours a day. Even those who were not consigned to agricultural labor often got saddled with “the worst kinds of jobs.” Wladislawa Palczewska described how she and her fourteen-year-old son slogged daily through the sewers of Lützenhardt “amid water, mud, feces, and refuse,” clad only “in torn-up shirts and boots.” When she objected to these conditions, her boss replied, “If I can stand it, then you can too.”<sup>14</sup> Needless to say, this did nothing to “advance their acclimation” or “form a strong bond with the workplace.”<sup>15</sup>

What is truly striking, however, is that exploitation and neglect led WED candidates to affirm their Germanness all the more vociferously. Angered by the favoritism shown to native-born farmhands in Bielefeld, Stefan Kulawczyk declared, “We belong to the German nation just as much as them,” and asked rhetorically, “Why should they earn more and work less than we do?”<sup>16</sup> Jan Masurek’s unhappiness stemmed not so much from the rigors of being a chimney-sweep as it did from his belief that this profession was “unbefitting for a well-educated German.” In a similar vein, Zygmunt Seweryn attributed the contempt his German co-workers reserved for him to his employer’s insistence that he unload stone-carts alongside Ukrainians and French prisoners of war.<sup>17</sup> Zygmunt and others grumbled that non-German workers were actually “better off” than them, that it was “re-Germanizables” who ranked lowest in local hierarchies of foreign labor. “I too am a German,” wrote Jan Karlikowski in May 1943, “yet here I am treated as an inferior. There are Poles and Russians who work on the same farm as me, but our boss hates me far more than them.”<sup>18</sup> Like many WED candidates,

12 5/31/25-26: Stanczak, 8.7.40.

13 5/32/81: Majerczyk, 5.26.41.

14 5/32/37: Palczewska, 3.6.41.

15 StS Wü 168 T2, Nr. 207: “Betriebsführer-Merkblatt für den Einsatz wiedereindeutschungsfähiger Personen,” unsigned, undated.

16 2/20/193: Kulawczyk, 10.26.40.

17 5/35/70-71: Masurek, 8.25.42; 5/35/116: Seweryn, 11.4.42.

18 5/35/155: Karlikowski, 5.16.43.

Jan appropriated Nazi ideology for his own ends, appealing to notions of racial solidarity to gain redress for personal grievances. But there was something else going on here as well. Apart from the shock of abject subordination, these individuals seem to have been genuinely dismayed that Germans would not recognize their claim to membership in the “ethnic community,” even though they tried to ingratiate themselves by adopting Nazified social conventions. Nikolai Fornalczyk was one of many who discovered that striving to “act German” did not result in public acceptance: “It pains me very much that when I go to work on the farm nobody replies with the ‘Heil Hitler’ greeting when I give it, as if they don’t hear me.”<sup>19</sup> Be that as it may, ostracism did not necessarily instill “re-Germanizables” with empathy for sanctioned targets of discrimination; on the contrary, they invoked the dismal plight of “undesirable” foreign laborers to highlight the injustice of “German-blooded families” enduring the same hardships. “If I were a Polish girl, then I would have to suffer,” young Jadwiga Ciupinska stated baldly, “but I am a German.”<sup>20</sup> Even if these people merely simulated the Nazis’ virulent racism, they nevertheless ended up reifying it, above all in their conflation of non-Germans (especially Slavs) with “serfs” or “slaves.”<sup>21</sup> In seeking to avoid oppression, they legitimized the oppression of others.

And all the while, the Nazis were listening, fully cognizant of the dysfunction creeping over the re-Germanization procedure at the ground level. In reference to a group of supervisors in Brandenburg, RuSHA chief Otto Hofmann informed Himmler in August 1940, “It is evident from available reports and the incoming letters of these Polish families that no effort is being made to bring them closer to Germandom, neither with respect to accommodations nor with respect to treatment in general. The farmers are obviously not aware of their obligations.”<sup>22</sup> Hofmann and his underlings had no intention of sitting idly by and letting such malpractice stand. For starters, they personally responded to letters of complaint and sought to reassure supplicants that all would be well, as *SS-Sturmbannführer* Ermin Künzel did when he sent the following message to Wladyslaw Skrzypeck in October 1940: “I have received your letter and can see that you have concerns. I have written today to the authorities in Germany about your request for them to assist you. Write to me again so that I know how things are going.”<sup>23</sup> RuSHA functionaries did indeed contact local administrators to ensure that “we are doing everything we can to recover these racially valuable persons and refraining from anything that might hinder this goal.”<sup>24</sup> Sometimes they

19 5/35/51: Fornalczyk, 6.28.42.

20 5/33/57: Ciupinska, 10.9.41.

21 5/32/30: Pawlak, 2.16.41.

22 USHMMA 15.007M/10/125/8-9: Hofmann to Himmler, August 28, 1940.

23 USHMMA 15.021M/2/20/157: Künzel to Skrzypeck, October 29, 1940.

24 Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen — Standort Düsseldorf (hereafter LNWD) Reg. Aachen, BR0005, Nr. 19997: Jeckeln to Regierungspräsident Aachen, November 15, 1940.

got in touch with individual hosts too. Hofmann wrote to Else Schmidt in Treskow to clarify that the Polish-speaking housemaid allocated to her was “German in terms of appearance and blood” and “must be reared in every respect to become a full-fledged German.” He similarly urged Maria Meyer in Hamburg to exhibit “extreme patience and understanding” in her dealings with “re-Germanizable” workers.<sup>25</sup> The Nazi Party assisted this public relations campaign by disseminating special bulletins and brochures designed to “enlighten” the populace on the purpose of the WED.<sup>26</sup>

Getting errant overseers to heed their wishes, however, turned out to be easier said than done. At first, Nazi officials presumed that “difficulties of any kind can be remedied through on-the-spot consultations with the employer.”<sup>27</sup> This type of conflict resolution usually fell on deaf ears. Stanislawa Magdzinska for one discerned the limits of state monitoring: “Whenever someone comes here from the SS, the boss naturally invites them in and tells them that everything is peachy, but when they leave he acts worse than before... He does nothing to sow the seeds in our hearts that would make us want to become German citizens.”<sup>28</sup> Soon enough, Nazi mediators began to lose faith and concede that the situation was hopeless. After investigating quarrels between one “re-Germanizable” family and their hosts, the farm bureau chief in Hersfeld opined, “Blame lies on both sides, to be sure. For the most part though, it is the fault of the employer and his family members, who do not possess the necessary tact and do not understand how to deal with these people.”<sup>29</sup> One Nazi Party deputy in Eckernförde criticized nearly all the *Betriebsführer* in his district for failing to demonstrate adequate sensitivity to the needs of their “re-Germanizable” wards.<sup>30</sup> These accusations only irritated them further. In February 1941, an estate-owner by the name of Bernstorff fired off an angry missive to the local SS command in Celle in which he took umbrage at charges of dereliction and voiced strong displeasure with what he deemed unwarranted meddling.<sup>31</sup> This incident perfectly encapsulates the fraught dialogue the re-Germanization procedure initiated between the National Socialist regime and its citizenry.

No matter how hard they tried, the Nazis could not get most Germans to embrace WED candidates as fellow compatriots, and it is worth taking a moment to step back and consider why. The temptation here is to conclude that allergic reactions to these newcomers were simply a symptom of the deeply rooted anti-Polish prejudices that pervaded every level of German society. While such a reading would

25 BArch NS 2/45/193-194: Hofmann to Schmidt, June 19, 1941; Isabel Heinemann, *'Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut': Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen, 2003), 291.

26 BArch R 59/45/18-19: “Mitteilungen des Hauptamtes für Volkstumsfragen,” unsigned, July 1943.

27 *ibid.*

28 S/35/146-147: Magdzinska, 4.5.43.

29 Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg (hereafter HStM) 180 Fulda, Nr. 6133, Bd. 53: Kreisbauernführer Hersfeld to Landrat Fulda, December 2, 1942.

30 BArch NS 18/528/73: Kreisleiter Eckernförde, “Wochenbericht betr. Eindeutschung von Polen,” November 20, 1941.

31 Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv — Hauptstaatsarchiv Hannover (hereafter NLH) Hann. 310 I, Nr. 358, Bd. 147: Bernstorff to Dörhöfer, February 2, 1941.

no doubt be accurate to an extent, the evidence suggests a more complex reality. It is important to bear in mind that fraternization between Germans and East European laborers was commonplace despite the Gestapo's ceaseless efforts to curb it, which proves that some people remained just as unreceptive to state-sponsored images of the Slavic "subhuman" as others were to propaganda trumpeting equality for all "persons of German blood."<sup>32</sup> There is another, more useful framework for grasping the cruel behavior of the *Betriebsführer*: the ambiguous, liminal condition postcolonial theorists refer to as hybridity.<sup>33</sup> Because WED candidates inhabited an intermediate position between two distinct cultures, they muddled perceived contrasts meant to differentiate German from non-German and thereby undermined assumptions of in-group homogeneity and superiority. This phenomenon elucidates why residents in the town of Mönchberg, for instance, took to denigrating them as "shitty Polish-Germans" — an insult which conveys with vulgar precision the psychological unease their hyphenated identities provoked and the public disavowal that came with it.<sup>34</sup> Ironically, their struggle to fit in and "act German" often isolated the "re-Germanizables." They incurred popular contempt not so much because they were foreigners, but because they professed and aspired to be Germans, because they came off as uppity and inauthentic, neither fish nor fowl.

Given the hybrid aura that surrounded them, it is little wonder that Germans judged WED candidates according to how closely they measured up to traditional benchmarks of ethnic belonging, implicitly rejecting the racial criteria of the SS in favor of cultural and socio-economic definitions of nationality. By and large, ordinary civilians found these signifiers of Germanness much easier to latch on to than vague suppositions of "biological fitness." That is why the language barrier constituted the most frequent obstacle to integration, not just because it hampered interpersonal communication, but because it audibly distinguished the "re-Germanizables" as outsiders. "Life in Germany is very bad for those who don't speak German," Aniela Okrzesik observed, "I can't understand anything the people say, and they can't understand me, so they constantly ridicule me."<sup>35</sup> When German employers castigated WED candidates for loafing on the job and maligned them as "lazy bastards," they were often drawing inferences about ethnic difference, insinuating that these people inherently lacked what one overseer dubbed "the German conception of work."<sup>36</sup> The same negative connotations applied to their seeming inability to conform to bourgeois norms of dress, consumption,

32 Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy, 1933-1945* (New York, 1990), 215-252.

33 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York, 1994), 145-174.

34 5/33/34: Rynkowski, 9.9.41.

35 2/20/97: Okrzesik, 12.12.40.

36 5/33/72: Marchlewski, 10.21.41; HStM 180 Fulda, Nr. 7133, Bd. 89: Kersten to Landrat Fulda, January 23, 1942.

domesticity, and hygiene. Needless to say, all of this indicates that most Germans did not buy into egalitarian ideals of “racial kinship” that transcended ethnic and national boundaries. As one RuSHA functionary lamented in the summer of 1943, “arbitrary abuses of power” by those charged with looking after “re-Germanizables” had done nothing but “subvert the consolidation of our pan-European vision.”<sup>37</sup>

Relations with German hosts grew so toxic in some areas that the police had to intervene to stop things from spiraling out of control. All throughout Germany, accounts of physical violence were far too widespread and consistent to write off as falsehoods or hyperbole. Zygmunt Malkowski and Mieczyslaw Janiak alleged that their foreman issued routine beatings on the job; for Josef Lesinski, they occurred once a week, on Sunday.<sup>38</sup> Jan Karlikowski told the even more bizarre tale of how his boss reveled in chasing him around the farm with a whip.<sup>39</sup> Brutality was not merely an occupational hazard either; “re-Germanizables” courted danger in public as well. In the fall of 1941, two teenagers from Mönchberg viciously assaulted Grzegorz Rynkowski, apparently just for kicks, and capped off the attack by threatening to kill him.<sup>40</sup> To make matters worse, candidates did not take the abuse of their overseers lying down, and one episode recounted by Magdalena Kaczorowska illustrates the harsh consequences that retaliation could bring down upon their heads:

Our boss, Herr Übermayer, came over to our house at lunchtime. He insulted my husband and punched him in the face twice, and because my husband fought back, there was a brawl between the two of them. When I placed myself between them to calm things down, the farmer hit me as well. Afterwards, my husband went directly to the gendarme in Pferdling to ask for help. Herr Übermayer phoned the same gendarme, who thereupon arrested my husband as a foreigner and handed him over to the Gestapo in Linz. He has still not returned.<sup>41</sup>

Scenes like this, combined with mounting pressure from below, finally convinced Himmler in the spring of 1942 to authorize something he had previously been loath even to contemplate: “punitive educational measures,” or rather, the internment of WED candidates in the concentration camp system “for reasons of insubordination or a politically resistant attitude.”<sup>42</sup> Gestapo officers had in fact

37 BArch R 69/966/3: Hildebrandt to RuS-Führer and Eignungsprüfer, September 1, 1943.

38 3/20a/202: Malkowski and Janiak, 8.31.41; 5/35/4: Lesinski, 5.10.42.

39 5/35/155: Karlikowski, 5.16.43.

40 5/33/34: Rynkowski, 9.9.41.

41 5/35/159: Kaczorowska, July 30, 1943.

42 BArch R 59/46/35-37: Greifelt, “Strafmassnahmen und Herausnahme aus dem Wiedereindeutschungsverfahren,” June 22, 1942.

already started arresting “re-Germanizables,” almost always at the instigation of civilians in their districts. In a letter to the *Landrat* in Fulda dated January 23, 1942, Leo Grzegorz’s host condemned him as a fat, drunken slob, belittled his protestations of illness as “sheer fantasy,” and added that “His entire ethos is un-German!” That same day, local policemen detained Leo for “refusal to work, disobedience, agitation, and the like.”<sup>43</sup> Conflicts with a supervisor also triggered the apprehension of Jadwiga Ciupinska. Because she was “not cut out to be a domestic servant” and continued to speak Polish, Jadwiga’s mistress demanded her removal in July 1941; the following year, the Gestapo transferred her to the women’s concentration camp at Ravensbrück.<sup>44</sup> Zdzislaw Lorek had voluntarily changed his name to “Franz” and done his utmost to learn the German language; that did not save him from being denounced and shipped off to Mauthausen, where he was beaten to death by camp guards just days after his arrival.<sup>45</sup> Rather than precipitating the “rapid assimilation” of “racially valuable foreigners,” the Nazis’ bid to “recover lost German blood” had produced the exact opposite of its intended objective, transforming locales all over the Third Reich into hotbeds of inter-ethnic antagonism. The re-Germanization procedure, it seems, had turned out to be a total fiasco.

### III.

Or was it? Ksawera Zoltobrocka certainly did not think so. In the summer of 1941, far away from her home in western Poland, young Ksawera lived a charmed life in the northern German province of Holstein. The SS had enrolled her in the WED in May of that year as a domestic servant, though her daily routine at the villa of the Georg family was hardly onerous. She arose from bed late in the morning, and after a few hours of chores and a quick lunch, she whiled away the hours sunbathing and swimming in a nearby lake. Most of her evenings were spent taking in various diversions in the port city of Kiel. On one occasion, the Georgs even took Ksawera along on a vacation to Berlin, where the bright lights of the “flashy city” left a captivating impression. In a letter written to *SS-Sturmbannführer* Fritz Schwalm, she thanked God for the opportunity to be “re-Germanized” and announced with great pride that her “transition” would soon be complete.<sup>46</sup>

Police surveillance reports confirm that Ksawera’s gratitude was not at all unusual. As one SD functionary noted in September 1942,

43 HStM 180 Fulda, Nr. 1633, Bd. 89: Kersten to Landrat Fulda, January 23, 1942; HStM 180 Fulda, Nr. 1633, Bd. 90: Gendarmerie Fulda to Landrat Fulda, January 23, 1942.

44 5/33/57: Ciupinska, 10.9.41; International Tracing Service Digital Archives (hereafter ITS) 0.1/53251592: File Card on Jadwiga Ciupinska. On the specific experiences of housemaids in the WED, see Bradley J. Nichols, “Housemaids, Renegades, and Race Experts: The Nazi Re-Germanization Procedure for Polish Domestic Servant Girls,” *German History* 33, no. 2 (June 2015): 214-231.

45 3/20a/85: Lorek, 5.3.41; ITS 0.1/39189472: File Card on Zdzislaw Lorek.

46 5/32/127: Zoltobrocka, 7.14.41.

“Although a substantial number of Germanization attempts have miscarried, there are many others that have been brought to full fruition.”<sup>47</sup> While acknowledging the “disobedience” of a few “bad apples,” his colleague in Berlin concurred: “The character flaws of re-Germanizable Poles are well-known here on the basis of lengthy observation. I must explicitly emphasize, however, that there have also been many positive experiences.”<sup>48</sup> The SD commander in Stuttgart went much further in his praise, insisting that 85 to 90 percent of the WED candidates in Württemberg were “worthy of the honor of Germanization,” not to mention “hardworking, compliant, upstanding, thrifty, domesticated, and surprisingly clean.”<sup>49</sup> This was exactly what superiors wanted to hear, of course, but their subordinates did not try to conceal evidence of failure or malfeasance either. Surely the abominable plight of most “re-Germanizables” should have dampened expectations and eclipsed any glimmers of “progress.” What were the “positive experiences” that led these men to arrive at such optimistic conclusions, and what implications did they draw from them? The warm reception Ksawera Zoltobrocka enjoyed in Holstein definitely sheds light on the answer to the first question, and some German citizens adopted a much more proactive approach to “racial consolidation” than the Georgs did.

There is plenty of evidence to the effect that WED candidates did form amicable relationships with their assigned custodians — villagers, townsfolk, and city-dwellers alike. For instance, Stanislawa Kowalska’s loneliness in the days following her resettlement in Ulm soon dissipated because “the woman to whom I was entrusted is very kind to me, and we get along famously.”<sup>50</sup> It was also not uncommon for participating households to serve as a surrogate family to their “re-Germanizable” guests and make a point of introducing them to the local community. Zofia Pieskarska recalled her time in the home of a rural doctor and his wife as one in which “I was treated as a social equal. I ate with them, traveled with them, and went with them to the movies and the theater.”<sup>51</sup> In the town of Mehrow, to take another example, a certain Ulrich Senf procured extra votive candles for the municipal Christmas Eve festivities in 1941 so that the WED candidates staying with him “could celebrate with us under the tree in the German style.”<sup>52</sup> Access to the rituals of daily life opened the door to personal connections outside the workplace too. Jan Ratajaki asserted that he and his family were “quite well-regarded” in the Dortmund neighborhood where they resided, while Stefan Wajman derived great satisfaction from the camaraderie he shared with his

47 BArch NS 2/82/167: Heissmeyer to Hofmann, September 30, 1942.

48 BArch NS 2/82/168-169: Hinsch to Heissmeyer, September 29, 1942.

49 Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg — Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg (hereafter StL) K 110, Bü 48, Bd. 28-29: SD Stuttgart to SD Aussenstellen in Württemberg, September 1, 1941.

50 2/20/10: Kowalska, 10.19.40.

51 United States National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA) RG 238/M894/15/5269: Testimony of Zofia Pieskarska, undated.

52 Heinemann, *Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut*, 296-297.

neighbors in the tiny hamlet of Rosengarten.<sup>53</sup> Roman Sobkowiak's circle of friends and acquaintances in Ulm encompassed a broad range of personalities, some of them die-hard Nazis, others former Socialists, each of them perfectly willing to overlook Roman's foreign background and offer him companionship.<sup>54</sup>

These expressions of conviviality coincided with a type of ethnogenesis: the fostering of what anthropologists refer to as fictive kinship. Put another way, interactions with individual Germans encouraged WED candidates to associate themselves with the German nation as a whole. "Our employers are angels," Maria Smulska wrote in November 1940, "and we had no idea that Germans could be so nice... I had heard so many bad things about them, but now I have totally changed my mind."<sup>55</sup> For Marianna Wawrzyniak, having "gotten to know some good people" was essential to becoming "a good patriot for our German fatherland."<sup>56</sup> Wladyslaw Adamczyk described a similar conversion: "The people here are polite and forthcoming, and I am now convinced that brotherly love prevails among the German *Volk*."<sup>57</sup> Such emphatic declarations of newfound loyalty undoubtedly reflected a sense of appreciation for the material benefits of Germanness. Johanna Palikowska freely admitted that she was "very content" with her placement in St. Georgen because she and her husband had decent housing and dined on "the best food available." Yet beyond the solace of creature comforts, she also credited their happiness to the respect accorded to them by local Bavarians.<sup>58</sup> The hospitality of Irena Jasinska's caretakers likewise laid the foundation for bonds of mutual affection. But it was their emotional support which prompted her to proclaim, "I now see that German blood flows inside of me."<sup>59</sup>

It would be foolish to take these statements entirely at face value. The authors could have embellished the truth, and we cannot verify their sincerity with certitude. It is just as plausible to argue that they were merely paying lip service to the ideals of their SS benefactors as it is to contend that they actually internalized their classification as members of a "master race." If authentic, the pro-German sentiments voiced by WED candidates expose the degree to which Nazi racial categories could generate a self-perpetuating dynamic of identity formation. Yet even if feigned, the likelihood is that, as with any habitual pretense, the longer one played the role, the more real the façade became. Regardless of their inner motives, what mattered most in the grand scheme of things was that Himmler and his acolytes interpreted pledges of fidelity to "Germandom" as

53 2/20/181: Ratajaki, 10.13.40; 3/20a/47: Wajman, 3.23.41.

54 Roman Sobkowiak, *Eindeutschungsfähig?! Eine polnisch-deutsche Biografie im NS-Staat und in der jungen Bundesrepublik* (Ulm, 2009), 48-49, 52, 63-64.

55 2/20/36: Smulska, 11.4.40.

56 5/33/62b: Wawrzyniak, 10.13.41.

57 5/31/87: Adamczyk, 12.26.40.

58 5/32/84: Palikowska, undated.

59 2/20a/102: Jasinska, 6.24.41.

an unequivocal sign that the program had begun to bear fruit. And even though the welcoming demeanor of some *Betriebsführer* did not necessarily denote grassroots backing for racialized concepts of nationality, SS leaders chose to construe it as an endorsement of their principles all the same.

The fact that local policemen corroborated the accounts of WED candidates lent their letters an enormous amount of credibility as valid intelligence. After visiting with the Lamcha family in September 1941, a gendarme in Grossenlüder predicted that they would soon be “fully educated in the ways of the German peasant” thanks to the attentiveness of their employer.<sup>60</sup> That same month, an SS advisor in Lower Saxony likewise commended the supervision of the Orzechowskis, whose overseer had made “great strides in his efforts to incorporate [them] into Germanism.”<sup>61</sup> A prefect in the small town of Weyher was equally impressed with his constituents’ devotion, and no less confident that the “re-Germanizables” living there were “properly immersing themselves in the ethnic community.”<sup>62</sup> Auspicious reports like this left RuSHA chief Hofmann satisfied enough to boast to a friend in the summer of 1941 that “The results of the initiative have been very good thus far.”<sup>63</sup>

A comprehensive overview on the re-Germanization procedure from December 1942 presented a somewhat more nuanced analysis of events. The SD officer who composed this document, *SS-Standartenführer* Hans Ehlich, did not mince words in his estimation that nearly all candidates encountered some kind of difficulty adjusting to their new surroundings. Nor did he shy away from disclosing the reality that many hosts “based their treatment of these ethnic aliens on their own false opinions” and “paid no mind to the fulfillment of their appointed ethnic-political duties.” Quick to blame complications on the “ignorance” of the *Betriebsführer*, he advised a stricter protocol for vetting them so as to preclude any misunderstandings in the future. Aside from “a small amount of hopeless cases,” however, Ehlich maintained that most candidates had “rapidly adapted to the German environment.” According to a sample survey of 216 families, 62 percent fit this profile, as opposed to 28 percent who were still “hesitant to commit” and 10 percent who remained “unwilling to be Germanized.” Ehlich cited a multitude of factors to substantiate his findings: that these people endeavored to “perfect their grasp of the German language,” decorated their homes with swastikas and icons of Hitler, submitted “numerous appeals to retrieve their relatives for

60 HStM 180 Fulda, Nr. 6133, Bd. 40: Gendarmerie Grossenlüder to Landrat Fulda, September 25, 1941.

61 NLH Hann. 310 I, Nr. 358, Bd. 57: Dörhöfer to Pancke, September 10, 1941.

62 HStM 180 Fulda, Nr. 6133, Bd. 282: Gendarmerie Weyher to Landrat Fulda, June 15, 1942.

63 BArch NS 2/45/160-161: Hofmann to Körbel, June 9, 1941.

Germanization,” and “affirm in their letters that they belong to the German *Volk*.” As further proof that the majority had undergone a “thorough acclimation,” he also referenced individual “success stories,” such as Stanislaw Wrobel’s “close rapport with his comrades,” Bronislawa Kosmala’s “interest in German culture,” and Kasimierz Procyszyn’s “stellar reputation” among the villagers of Oberhausen.<sup>64</sup> It goes without saying that Ehlich painted an overly sunny portrait of the status quo, and a few of his more clear-eyed colleagues did not hesitate to dispute his conclusions.<sup>65</sup> But none of them could deny that the re-Germanization procedure had yielded at least some tangible headway.

By that point, moreover, a novel development had given advocates as well as detractors a potent incentive to stay the course: citizens were no longer just participating in the WED as volunteer hosts; they were actively supplying fresh prospects too. With millions of foreign laborers quartered in locales throughout Germany and Austria, the most accessible and potentially abundant source of “lost German blood” now lay within the borders of the Reich itself. Himmler had granted the RuSHA permission to screen Polish migrant workers back in July 1941, though only in mid-1942 did the number of these examinations start to skyrocket — right around the time when the impressment of laborers from all over Europe assumed truly colossal proportions.<sup>66</sup> From the outset, the vast majority of recommendations came from private enterprises, and the decision to accept someone into the WED depended in large part on whether he or she was “eligible for re-Germanization according to the judgment of the employer.”<sup>67</sup> Vested with the power to augment the “ethnic community,” many Germans took advantage of this prerogative with remarkable alacrity; all they had to do was file an application with local authorities (see Figure 3). Fritz Harnasch did just that; the owner of an estate in Pāwesin, he sponsored four Polish farmhands for re-Germanization in March 1941.<sup>68</sup> Hans Graeff, the manager of a truck factory outside Hannover, saw no need to restrict himself to Poles; in September 1942, he wrote to the *Landrat* in Alfeld to vouch for a handful of recent hires from Hungary and Yugoslavia as well.<sup>69</sup> Gustav Freilinghausen was an even more prolific patron; between April and August 1943, he brought in subjects for the RuSHA to evaluate on no fewer than five separate occasions.<sup>70</sup> Much to the annoyance of the race inspectors, some proprietors declared people “capable of Germanization” without formal approval.<sup>71</sup> In such circumstances, the “hunt for good blood” took on a life of its own.

64 USHMMA 15.021M/6/38/11-21: Ehlich, “Bericht über den Verlauf der Einddeutschung von rassisch wertvollen Fremdstämmigen,” December 19, 1942.

65 BArch NS 19/1780/20-27: Creutz, “Bericht über das Verfahren zur Wiedereindeutschung von rassisch wertvollen Personen,” March 25, 1943.

66 BArch R 49/73/50: Himmler, “Anordnung 42/I,” July 23, 1941.

67 USHMMA 15.021M/1/3/30-31: Schwalm to Waldeck, January 7, 1941.

68 USHMMA 15.021M/5/36/18: Klinger to Harnasch, May 24, 1941.

69 NLH Hann. 174 Alfeld, Nr. 16/1: Graeff to Landrat Alfeld, September 25, 1942.

70 Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv — Staatsarchiv Oldenburg (hereafter StO) Best. 136, Nr. 19592.

71 USHMMA 15.021M/5/36/45-46: Klinger to Andrae, August 7, 1941.

Der Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer \_\_\_\_\_ den \_\_\_\_\_ 1942

An das  
**Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt**  
 Aussenstelle  
**Litzmannstadt**  
 Landsknechtstrasse 73

Slp. Nr. \_\_\_\_\_  
 nur durch Aussenstelle ausfüllen

**Antrag auf Wiedereindeutschung**

I. Name des zu Überprüfenden: \_\_\_\_\_

II. Die Wiedereindeutschung wird beantragt durch: \_\_\_\_\_

III. Beurteilung durch den Betriebsführer: \_\_\_\_\_

IV. Bemerkungen und Erläuterungen: \_\_\_\_\_ Im Altreich seit: \_\_\_\_\_

Der Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Unterschrift)

**Figure 3. "Application for Re-Germanization." Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, R 186/11/52.**

In seeking to ascertain what compelled these seemingly ideological deeds, several factors must be considered. In the first place, German businesses were reluctant to surrender trained personnel whom the police would otherwise ship back home once their seasonal term of employment ended. In January 1942, for instance, the directors of the Thüringische Zollwell A.G. in Schwarzau wanted to keep on two skilled workers indefinitely and therefore inquired as to "whether these men can be included in the Germanization program."<sup>72</sup> The logic here hardly speaks to altruism, though it is worth noting that admission would have entailed concessions: "re-Germanizable" employees were entitled to a higher standard of living and could not be exploited with impunity. Although these requirements proved too burdensome for many firms to abide, most assented without complaint, and some even offered to accommodate the

families of newly-minted WED candidates. One case in particular demonstrates the curious mix of benevolence and self-interest that characterized these proceedings, not to mention the eagerness of non-Germans to appeal for recognition. In a letter dated October 24, 1942, a farmer named Alfred Thies wrote to the SS command in Celle to endorse the petition of Stanislaw Banaszak on the following grounds: "The girl has distinguished herself through her diligence in the fields. She would feel much more at home here if she were Germanized, which would also prevent her from having to return to poverty in Poland. Naturally her relatives in Poland are currently trying to effect their Germanization too. Although Stanislaw does not really have a Germanic look to her, she is extremely reliable and upstanding." Thies almost certainly had ulterior motives. But he also seems to have genuinely cared for this young woman and believed that she truly possessed "German roots" regardless of her "racial phenotype."<sup>73</sup>

Whatever their specific reasoning, individuals who contributed to the WED in this fashion facilitated the demographic aims of the National Socialist regime whether they realized it or not. Most of them probably had little to no knowledge of contemporary racial theory, though their words and actions sometimes overlapped with its precepts quite explicitly, even with military defeat lurking on the horizon. Thus

72 USHMMA 15.021M/5/37/15: Waldeck to Dongus, Stier, and Klinger, January 6, 1942.

73 NLH Hann. 310 I, Nr. 358, Bd. 65: Thies to Dörhöfer, October 24, 1942.

we have the story of the Hessian veterinarian Dr. Eigendorf and his nineteen-year-old Ukrainian housemaid, Valentina Vigowskaja. On December 2, 1944, Eigendorf contacted none other than Georg Rödel to propose Valentina as a candidate for re-Germanization. Beyond commenting on her blond hair and blue eyes, Eigendorf marveled at the way Valentina embodied his (sexist) conception of a “proper” German woman: “She has quickly grown accustomed to our large household and handles the tasks we assign her to complete satisfaction. She is hard-working, honest, obedient, and always cheerful. She is also eager to learn, speaks German very well, and has the will and aptitude to become an efficient housewife in the German sense with further guidance and good role models.” Even more promising was “how utterly and honestly” she renounced her native upbringing and averred that “Her greatest wish and aspiration is to be officially Germanized soon.”<sup>74</sup> Valentina’s “wish” came true a few weeks later, when Rödel diagnosed her as “physically and mentally sound” and free of “alien racial elements.” “In my opinion,” he announced, “there is no obstacle to Germanization.”<sup>75</sup>

Although surviving statistics on RuSHA activity inside the Reich are woefully incomplete, it appears that approximately 20,000 foreign laborers entered the WED in roughly the same manner as Valentina Vigowskaja.<sup>76</sup> Rödel and his colleagues had effectively converted the Third Reich into a vast laboratory of racial selection. Germany, however, was not where the main impact of the re-Germanization procedure ultimately landed. Long before Dr. Eigendorf made his request in late 1944, the Nazis had extended the scope of the “hunt for good blood” across the length and breadth of Europe, from the Atlantic coast all the way to the Black Sea. And as the architects of Germanization policy undertook to “recover” every last trace of “valuable stock” extant in the empire abroad, they very much drew their inspiration from what was happening simultaneously back home.

#### IV.

Sometime in late June 1942, Heinrich Himmler sat down to read a special document prepared for him by the brightest minds of the SS resettlement and security apparatus. Entitled the “General Plan for the East” (*Generalplan Ost*), it envisioned nothing less than the wholesale destruction of entire Slavic nations through the enslavement, expulsion, and mass murder of their “non-Germanizable elements.” The plan’s authors, Konrad Meyer and Hans Ehlich (whom we met

74 HStW Abt. 483, Nr. 11377: Eigendorf to Rödel, December 2, 1944.

75 HStW Abt. 483, Nr. 11377: Staatliche Gesundheitsamt Dillkreis to Stroop, December 19, 1944.

76 The monthly figures for “Old Reich Examination Cases” can be found in USHMMA 15.021M/6/48/49-101. Also see Heinemann, *Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut*, 479-480, 487-488.

before), condemned some thirty-one million people to death in the frozen wastelands of Siberia while awarding their homelands to a projected eight to ten million ethnic German pioneers.<sup>77</sup> Beyond all that, the General Plan for the East also anticipated an unprecedented scheme of cultural genocide. As Ehlich elaborated that December, the history of German colonization in Eastern Europe had deposited huge quantities of “Nordic blood” over the course of past millennia; it was therefore necessary to “sift” the region’s non-Jewish population in order to “harvest” every person “of good race” through a process of “ethnomorphosis” (*Umvolkung*).<sup>78</sup> The estimates for how many individuals would qualify for this “honor” directly corresponded to the obverse percentages of those targeted for elimination: 15 to 20 percent of the Poles, 15 percent of the Lithuanians, 25 percent of the Belarusians, 25 to 30 percent of the Russians, and 50 percent of the Latvians, Estonians, and Czechs respectively.

The *Generalplan Ost*, of course, was only implemented on a limited scale (in eastern Poland, where the RuSHA screened 113,451 inhabitants in 1942–1943 and classified around half of them as “persons of German descent”).<sup>79</sup> But it does illustrate the inordinate influence the WED exerted over National Socialist rule in the occupied territories, the way in which events on the home front reverberated outward and upward through the channels of state power at center and periphery, conferring legitimacy upon biopolitical initiatives not just in Germany, but all along the fringes of the Nazi imperial frontier. As the SD’s point man on Germanization policy, Ehlich was intimately familiar with the WED, and he fed Meyer’s office reams of pertinent data to boot. Another key contributor to the plan, Erhard Wetzel, openly acknowledged that incoming reports on the program shaped his thinking as well.<sup>80</sup> What these personal and institutional connections reveal is that the cooperation of Germans who did help integrate “racially kindred” foreigners, not to mention the acquiescence of many candidates themselves, served to validate the content of Himmler’s ambitions. The perception of popular backing, however modest, set the “hunt for good blood” on a far more radical trajectory, all the while pushing it in a number of different geographical directions. Hence, by the summer of 1942, with the experience of no more than thirty thousand subjects to go by, the re-Germanization procedure had morphed into a pilot project for the assimilation of millions, a template for the consolidation of the Nazi “New Order” in Europe.

The first inkling that such an agenda was in the offing came in the former Yugoslav provinces of Upper Carniola and Lower Styria

77 BArch R 49/157a: Meyer, “Generalplan Ost. Rechtliche, wirtschaftliche und räumliche Grundlagen des Ostaufbaus,” May 28, 1942.

78 Ehlich, “Die Behandlung des Fremden Volkstums,” December 10, 1942, in *Der “Generalplan Ost”: Hauptlinien der nationalsozialistischen Planungs- und Vernichtungspolitik*, ed. Mechthild Rössler, Sabine Schleiermacher, and Cordula Tollmien (Berlin, 1993), Doc. 2.

79 ITS 1.2.7.7.24/82183014-033: Krumei, “Abschlussbericht über die Arbeit der UWZ,” December 31, 1943.

80 Wetzel, “Stellungnahme und Gedanken zum Generalplan Ost des RFSS,” April 27, 1942, in *Vom Generalplan Ost zum Generalsiedlungsplan*, ed. Czesław Madajczyk (Munich, 1994), Doc. 16.

(modern Slovenia) in the spring of 1941, when the General Plan for the East was still being drafted. Arriving on the heels of the Wehrmacht, RuSHA functionaries began conducting racial examinations at a feverish pace, scrutinizing the bodies of native Slovenes to establish their “suitability for Germanization.” By August 1943, a team of twenty-five inspectors

had evaluated just shy of 550,000 people, 96 percent of whom gained a positive verdict.<sup>81</sup> Those deemed “racially worthy but politically unreliable” (15,532 to be exact) were earmarked for the WED and transferred to Germany “because their presence in this ethnically endangered environment was unacceptable” (see Figure 4).<sup>82</sup> The overwhelming majority, those who ostensibly did not require the corrective atmosphere of “pure German surroundings,” stayed behind and obtained “conditional state subjecthood,” a form of provisional citizenship. The Nazi Party took over from there, enacting a compulsory platform of linguistic schooling and ideological indoctrination designed to “return the people of these areas to the ethnic community on account of their Germanic blood quotient.”<sup>83</sup> The framework of Germanization in northwestern Yugoslavia, in other words, looked a lot like what WED candidates were expected to undergo in the Reich.

Much the same can be said about the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (the present-day Czech Republic), especially after the appointment of *SS-Gruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich as its de facto



**Figure 4. “Total Number of Re-Germanizable Poles and Slovenes, counted separately by SS-Districts, as of January 31, 1943.” Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, NS 19/1780/28. Note: Where there are two columns, the left column refers to Poles and the right column to Slovenes. Single columns refer to Poles.**

81 Koch, “Bericht über die Ergebnisse der rassischen Bewertung der Bevölkerung in den besetzten Gebieten Kärntens und Krains,” November 18, 1941, in *Quellen zur nationalsozialistischen Entnationalisierungspolitik in Slowenien 1941-1945*,

ed. Tone Ferenc (Maribor, 1980), Doc. 177; Obersteiner to Hildebrandt, August 23, 1943, in Ferenc, *Quellen*, Doc. 315.

82 NARA T-81/307/2435225-227: “Abschlussbericht der EWZ über die Erfassung

der im Altreich untergebrachten Slowenenab-siedler,” unsigned, October 3, 1943.

83 Demir Cesar, *Die Volkstumspolitik des NS-Regimes in Slowenien 1941-1943* (Munich, 2013), 7-13.

governor in the autumn of 1941. Even more so than with Poles or Slovenes, the Nazis assumed that most Czechs harbored basically the same biological make-up as that of the Germans, a “racial equivalence” molded by centuries of intermingling between the two groups. Heydrich had all sorts of ideas on how to pick out “bearers of Nordic blood” and “lay the scientific foundations for [their] future Germanization”: one involved performing “aptitude tests” on Czech schoolchildren; another focused on applicants for marriage licenses; a third linked the issuance of state ID cards to assessments of “racial-biological fitness.” Here too, deportation to Germany “for the purpose of a more thorough education” became the preferred option “in borderline cases of endangered ethnic consciousness.”<sup>84</sup> Most importantly, the RuSHA exercised a large measure of authority over matters of naturalization, and by the time the war drew to a close, around 300,000 residents of the Protectorate had become German citizens.<sup>85</sup>

Western Europe also became a major theater of operations in the “hunt for good blood.” In the annexed provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, wrested back from France in the spring of 1940, the award of “conditional state subjecthood” was initially contingent upon enrollment in the Nazi Party or one of its affiliated organizations.<sup>86</sup> To cast the net wider, Hitler dropped this prerequisite in July 1942, and a decree from the Interior Ministry released the following month stipulated the approval of the RuSHA in all proceedings where the person in question could not verify German descent (the same guidelines applied in Luxembourg as well).<sup>87</sup> “In the interest of a smooth Germanization,” one Nazi official proclaimed, it was imperative to treat all Alsatians and Lorrainers “as valuable members of the German ethnic community.”<sup>88</sup> When it came to “politically unreliable” inhabitants who “had to be removed... in order to win them back for Germanism,” the WED once again became the favored vehicle of “rehabilitation.”<sup>89</sup> Beginning in late 1942, the Nazis resettled approximately 15,000 people from Alsace, Lorraine, and Luxembourg to locations spread across Germany, though they represented only a tiny fraction of the 1.6 million people in these three areas who acquired German citizenship between 1940 and 1944.<sup>90</sup>

It was in western Poland, however, that Nazi Germanization policy reached its apogee and grew beyond the ability of the SS to control. Although usually permitted to recruit WED candidates at will, Himmler’s race inspectors had little say in the deliberations of a

84 BArch NS 2/153/33-41: Hildebrandt, “Bericht über die Tätigkeit des RuSHA auf dem Gebiet des Staatsangehörigkeitswesens in Böhmen und Mähren,” January 25, 1944. Also see Detlef Brandes, “Umwolkung, Umsiedlung, rassistische Bestandsaufnahme”: NS-“Volkstumspolitik” in den böhmischen Ländern (Munich, 2012), 138, 181-182, 198, 201-202, 214-215, 245.

85 Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (New York, 2007), 245.

86 Lothar Kettenacker, *Nationalsozialistische Volkstumspolitik im Elsass* (Stuttgart, 1973), 75.

87 ITS 1.2.7.17.3/82196428-429: Lammers to Himmler, Keitel, Bürckel, Wagner, and Simon, July 22, 1942; HStW Abt. 483, Nr. 1359, Bd. 439: Schultz to Gutenberger, December 8, 1942.

88 Stuckart to Obersten Reichsbehörden, November 5, 1941, in *Europa unterm Hakenkreuz: Die faschistische Okkupationspolitik in Frankreich 1940-1944*, ed. Ludwig Nestler (Berlin, 1990), Doc. 77.

89 See the testimony of Günther Stier in LOC, pgs. 923-931.

90 Heinemann, *Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut*, 324fn, 328-329, 331-332; LOC, pg. 939: Doc. NO-3568: “Brief Facts about Resettlement” (English transcript), January 1944.

much larger system known as the Deutsche Volksliste, or DVL. Throughout the three “incorporated eastern territories” (Wartheland, Danzig-West Prussia, and Upper Silesia), the watchword of the DVL remained the same — “not a single drop of German blood may be left behind” — but the Nazi Party bureaucrats entrusted to classify the population of these regions often had highly divergent views of what that meant in practice.<sup>91</sup> A restrictive taxonomy based on ethno-cultural criteria prevailed in the Wartheland, where claimants also had to certify descent from a minimum of two German grandparents. In Danzig-West Prussia and Upper Silesia, on the other hand, provincial governors disregarded these qualifications almost altogether, opting instead for a more generous approach organized around standards of race so nebulous that even the RuSHA thought they went too far. Nevertheless, with the exception of the Wartheland, where the numbers were always comparatively low, registration for the Volksliste did not truly spike until after the emergence of the General Plan for the East, coinciding with the dramatic subsequent expansion of the WED. Although officially introduced in March 1941, by December of that year only around 31,000 inhabitants of Danzig-West Prussia had joined the DVL; ten months later, that figure had risen to nearly 800,000.<sup>92</sup> Likewise, the number of inductees in Upper Silesia stood at 238,921 in January 1942, but by the onset of 1943, its ranks had swollen to over one million.<sup>93</sup> As of January 1944, the Nazis had naturalized a total of 2.68 million people in the annexed provinces of western Poland, most of whom received “conditional state subjecthood.”<sup>94</sup> A further 250,000 can be added to this sum if we count the individuals who signed up once the Nazis transplanted the DVL to occupied Ukraine in the fall of 1942.<sup>95</sup>

Equally as telling, in Poland as well as Ukraine, the prescribed methodology of assimilation bore a strong resemblance to the paradigm initially devised for the WED. Careful observation was one crucial aspect of this, which is why Nazi activists regularly checked in on “persons of German descent” and asked their neighbors, co-workers, and teachers “whether [they] conduct themselves like Germans.” Above all though, the real emphasis lay on forging the bonds of a “family- and community-oriented culture,” a utopian “melting pot” where ethnic distinctions faded away and sustained social interactions inspired subjects from a variety of backgrounds to live together in harmony. To attain this lofty goal, almost every conceivable Party agency presided over a range of activities such as festivals, athletic

91 USHMMA 15.169M/3/NTN198/1-4: Frick, “Verordnung über die Deutsche Volksliste und die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten,” March 4, 1941.

92 On the DVL in general, see Gerhard Wolf, *Ideologie und Herrschaftsrationalität: Nationalsozialistische Germanisierungspolitik in Polen* (Hamburg, 2012).

93 USHMMA 15.007M/9/113/158-161: Bracht, “Durchführungsverordnung zur Vereinfachung des Volkslistenverfahrens in Oberschlesien,” February 14, 1942. Also see the statistics in BArch R 49/467.

94 LOC, pg. 939: Doc. NO-3568: “Brief Facts about Resettlement” (English transcript), January 1944.

95 BArch NS 19/543: Himmler to Koch, September 8, 1942. The figures for Ukraine come from Ingeborg Fleischhauer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Deutschen in der Sowjetunion* (Berlin, 1986), 205-208.

events, folk dances, and group singing, each of which aimed to “root the people more and more into the collective ethos of Germandom” and “surround them in a National Socialist milieu.”<sup>96</sup> As one propaganda leaflet distributed in the Wartheland put it, the essence of Germanization had nothing to do with material rewards or individualistic advancement; the principal measure of success was learning to have faith in a vision of racial unity, to recognize that “We are all one tribe; we are all Germans.”<sup>97</sup>

That many Europeans continued to buy into this message long after the war turned against Germany goes a long way toward explaining why Georg Rödel and his associates kept searching for “lost German blood” until the bitter end. They believed, in short, that Germanization worked, and this never would have happened without the credible displays of “progress” on the home front that animated the “consolidation of Germandom” there as well as abroad. Under the wartime Third Reich, racial and ethnic formats of identity often existed in opposition to one another. The irony is that, within the context of the WED, ordinary Germans who behaved like decent human beings and treated immigrants with compassion wound up fostering the construction of a racialized imperial society (wittingly or not), whereas the more chauvinistic or malevolent among them who clung to ethnic nativism were the ones who actually subverted it. We should also not be too quick to judge the “re-Germanizables” or any other would-be “Germans” for the compliant role they played in this dubious venture, even if some readily hitched their fate to the Nazi cause while others did so more reluctantly. The specter of coercion (“punitive educational measures”) was never far from the surface, and it is always easier to wax self-righteous in the abstract when unfettered by the kind of exigencies that drain relevance from normal codes of morality. Most of these people were not outright collaborators, but nor were they utterly passive victims devoid of agency or responsibility. It would be far more accurate to say that they succumbed to hegemony as the Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci defined it: a state of affairs in which the oppressed internalize and perpetuate the conceptual categories of the oppressor, a form of subaltern adaptation, calculated or subliminal, that traps them within the political structures of the dominant power, yet also leaves ample room for maneuver.<sup>98</sup> The National Socialists created exactly this kind of situation all across the continent of Europe, bringing millions of non-Germans into the fold, though not without first testing a prototype inside the homeland. In that sense, the re-Germanization

96 USHMMA 15.007M/9/113/221-226: Bracht, “Anordnung A 71,” April 17, 1942; ITS 1.2.2.0.13/82157258-265: Wohler to Schlegelberger, March 10, 1942; BArch R 49/3553/30-34: Globocnik, “Richtlinien zur kulturellen Betreuung der Siedler,” May 12, 1943. Also see Eric C. Steinhart, *The Holocaust and the Germanization of Ukraine* (New York, 2015).

97 USHMMA 15.021M/6/38/65: “Merkblatt für Deutschstämmige im Gau Wartheland,” undated.

98 Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Smith (London, 1971).

procedure was a model for Nazi empire-building, and remains a model for those who seek to understand it.

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