



TOTALITARIANISM, DEPORTATION and EMIGRATION

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The Nazi vision of the reorganisation of Europe: destruction, racist hierarchies, resettlement.

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For a discussion of deportations and forced migration during the Nazi period one has to take a look at Nazi ideology. At its very foundation lay the belief in inequality among 'races', some superior, others inferior, and the privileges they could claim accordingly. At the top stood, of course, the Germanic, the 'Aryan' races, at the bottom, as an antithesis to 'Aryans', as their deadly enemies, the Jews. But the rest of mankind was also categorized into more or less 'valuable races'. Tied to it is the allocation of space, of land, as the Nazis subscribed to a romanticized model of an agrarian society. Germany, as the top 'race', had the right to rule, and to rearrange conquered Europe.

This was a radical departure from hundreds of years of European thought and civilization. The Nazis, however, thought that their notion of racist hierarchies was supported by science; spoke of 'Aryan' blood as opposed to Jewish blood. How far away that was from any scientific reality is, in my view, demonstrated very well by a document I once found in the Archives here in Tallinn. A mother writes to the Gestapo, in order to free her child, which had been arrested as Jewish. The mother claims that her child was not from her Jewish husband, but had another biological father. And, the writer adds, why do you not simply take a blood sample, which would prove that there is no "Jewish blood" in my child. This shows the whole absurdity of the concept, because this is exactly what the Gestapo could not do, demonstrate the difference between 'Aryan and Jewish blood' by analyzing blood samples.

The institutional link between racist oppression and resettlement actions was embodied in Heinrich Himmler. Himmler was Leader of the SS, Chief of German Police and Reichskommissar for the Strengthening of Germanism, which put him in charge of resettlement plans. Other organizations in the SS dealt with 'racial' evaluations and – to use a neutral term – the movement of people. Himmler

occasionally referred to his negative and his positive tasks. The negative was, of course, mass-murder, oppression and coercion. With the positive he referred to 'racial' evaluations and the attempt to increase the number of 'valuable' people, population transfers and resettlements projects. However, one can't see anything much positive in this part of his activities either – there is no room for the self-determination of individuals, for their own plans and wishes. Everything was to be determined by Nazi planners, who defined everybody's slot in life. One occasionally reads, that only Jews were doomed and others had choices. Of course, the Jewish population, after a certain point in time, was murdered just because they were Jews. But others were also to be treated according to the categories to which they had been assigned. As an example, in the context of research for the Presidential Commission of Estonia, an order was found that anybody with five prior criminal convictions (whether for pick-pocketing or murder) was to be killed. This did not leave room for individual choice.

Nazi political goals shifted over time, several grandiose plans for the reorganization of Europe (including the changing of landscape so it would befit the 'Germanic' psyche) were developed and shelved again, at least for the time being. As is well known, even the destruction of the Jewish population of Europe underwent several phases, from encouraged emigration, to forcibly transfers, to mass murder. Nazi aims towards other groups were more static. Slavic people were subject to oppression, expulsions and resettlements in Eastern Europe. From 1942 on massive deportations to slave labour in Germany took place. Ethnic Germans were a favoured group, but they too were subject to 'racial evaluation' (in Poland, for example, the Deutsche Volksliste was introduced, which contained several tiers) and subject to resettlement schemes (as an example, as a result of the Hitler Stalin pact.) Towards the end of the war, large numbers of Ethnic Germans, mainly from Ukraine, were transferred to the west (largely by horse and cart), resettled in the German annexed parts of Poland, there screened for their 'racial' value, which defined, where and how they were allowed to live. (What I found striking when reviewing many of these evaluations is, that racist categories clearly took precedence over political concerns. A 'racially' valuable individual was put into a favourable category, even if he/she had had Communist affiliations.)

How inter-connected these population movements were, is best visible in Poland between 1939-1941. Parts of Poland were annexed to Germany, from these parts Jews and Poles were expelled to a rump Poland, called *Generalgouvernement*. Because the Poles, according to Nazi planning, were destined to be serfs under German dominance, Polish elites were systematically murdered. Ethnic Germans, among others from the Baltic countries, were resettled in the regions which had been emptied of its Polish population.

This sounds a bit abstract, and is best illustrated by an individual example. Adolf Eichmann, infamous for his role in the Holocaust, was tasked from 1938 on with organizing the emigration (under pressure) of Jews from Austria, the Czech lands and Germany; after 1939 he implemented the various transfer plans which the Security Police had developed for Poles and Jews in occupied Poland. After Jewish emigration

had been stopped in 1941, Eichmann and his office organized the deportations of the Jewish populations of various European countries to their death in the East.

1941 marks not only the shift in the persecution of Jews from oppression, and forced transfers to genocide. Most of the grandiose resettlement schemes, in particular those for transforming the Soviet Union into German populated or German ruled space, had to be postponed for as long as the war lasted. However, some particularly ideologically committed Nazis pursued resettlement schemes. Odilo Globocnik, SSPF in Lublin and one of the worst Nazi mass-murderers, developed far-reaching plans for settling the East, for which he got Himmler's support and which then resulted in his acquiring a new assignment and title, designing SS and Police *Stützpunkte* (fortified outposts) throughout the occupied Soviet Union. This assignment fortified his powers, provided him with additional staff and allowed him to raise auxiliary forces from among Soviet POWs, called Trawniki (after the camp they were trained in.) In 1941, Globocnik began preparations for "*Aktion Reinhard* , a code word for the systematic murder of Jews in three death camps, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka. All of Globocnik's staff was assigned to this new task; the Trawniki, for example, served as guards in death-camps. Polish Jews, as well as Jews deported from other countries, perished in *Aktion Reinhard* camps. The estimated death toll is between 1.5 and 2 millions. Globocnik's activism was so strong that he (with Himmler's approval) unleashed in the same time period a huge mass-resettlement action in Zamosc region (part of the Lublin district), which created complete chaos, forcing tens of thousand of Polish people out of their homes, resulting in many deaths and also an up-surge of resistance. In the end, this contributed to Globocnik's transfer from Lublin (though he was promoted to HSSPF in his home town Trieste).

Another point I want to raise is the complete arbitrariness of these resettlement schemes. On the basis of unsubstantiated notions of 'racial values' and visions of agrarian societies thriving on reclaimed and re-populated land, far-reaching decisions were taken which impacted not only the subjugated people, but also the privileged, for instance the new settlers. Individual rights had no place in the new utopia. Any fanciful idea of Hitler, for example, could have far-reaching consequences. A good example is the Crimea and the phantasies Hitler developed about the future of Crimea in his after-dinner monologues. For example, the German-speaking population of South-Tyrol (which was a bone of contention between Hitler and Mussolini) should simply be transferred as a whole to the Crimea. They would find the climate congenial and accordingly thrive there. During war-time, these plans remained phantasies, but in all likelihood they would have been implemented later. *Gauleiter* Frauenfeld, who was designated to rule Crimea, already tried his hand at various resettlement schemes. What was implemented – apart from the usual oppression and economic exploitation – was the destruction of the Crimean Jewish population. However, who was to be considered Jewish was not clear, because several small groups existed (the Security Police speaks of Karaimen, Krimtschaken and Bergjuden) which were either adhering to the Jewish faith or considered to be of Jewish origin. The proper categorization mattered greatly to the Nazis, so several scholars were approached for their opinions, whether a group was

ethnically Turkish, but had converted to Judaism or had Jewish ancestors. The first were allowed to live, the latter murdered.

Another example of arbitrariness we find here in Estonia, which illustrates, how plans which were never even implemented, led to the death of hundreds of people. Generally speaking, the Holocaust in Estonia followed the overall pattern we find elsewhere. The first stage – the mass-murder of the very small Estonian Jewish population - was begun with the arrival of the Security Police and was mainly finished in January of 1942. The third stage, setting up Vaivara Concentration Camp in 1943, was the consequence of Himmler's order in June 1943 to empty the remaining Ghettos and transfer the inmates to a few concentration camps, where they would be worked to death. But in between, in September 1942, two deportation trains, one from the Czech lands and one from Germany, arrived at a small railway station not far from Tallinn. This was somewhat irregular, because just nine months earlier the Security Police had proudly declared Estonia "free of Jews." What was the purpose? Several historians have promoted theories, myself included, but there is no documented proof. All we know is that these people were shipped over a long distance, the not able-bodied were shot after arrival, the others sent into a newly-build camp nearby – where they remained, for no apparent purpose, till they were transferred, half a year to a year later, to the then existing camp system. A stroke of the pen by somebody in Berlin or Riga had been enough to sent 2000 human beings on this random journey and in part to their death.

To summarize: there were three distinctive features of Nazi deportation and forced migration politics. First, the belief in a 'racial' hierarchy reaching from superior to inferior 'races', and that this hierarchy justified privileges for the superior 'races' and oppression and destruction for those deemed inferior. Connected to this were plans for re-designing the map of Europe, projects of resettlement and population transfers and the creation of an economical model favouring the superior, Germanic, people. Second, the verdicts of the political decision-makers and planners were all-important. The lives, will, plans and wishes of individuals affected were of no concern. Third, and this is a consequence of the second point, because of the top-down decision making against which no legitimate counter-force existed, plans were often random and futile, causing suffering and death without even achieving their aims.

Whether any of these characteristics are also applicable to other repressive systems, we will hear in the next two days.