Visions of Community in Nazi Germany

Social Engineering and Private Lives

Edited by
MARTINA STEBER
and
BERNHARD GOTTO

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Contents

List of Abbreviations ix
Notes on Contributors xiii
Glossary xvii

1. *Volksgemeinschaft*: Writing the Social History of the Nazi Regime 1
Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto

I. *VOLKSGEMEINSCHAFT*: CONTROVERSIES

2. *Volksgemeinschaft*: Potential and Limitations of the Concept 29
Ian Kershaw
3. *Volksgemeinschaft*: A Modern Perspective on National Socialist Society 43
Michael Wildt
4. Echoes of the *Volksgemeinschaft* 60
Ulrich Herbert

II. A NEW FRAME OF REFERENCE: IDEOLOGY, ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES, AND SOCIAL CONTROL

5. Pluralities of National Socialist Ideology: New Perspectives on the Production and Diffusion of National Socialist *Weltanschauung* 73
Lutz Raphael
6. The NSDAP's Operational Codes after 1933 87
Armin Nolzen
7. Mobilizing German Society for War: The National Socialist *Gaue* 101
Thomas Schaarschmidt
8. Registering the *Volksgemeinschaft*: Civil Status in Nazi Germany 1933–9 116
Jane Caplan
9. Exporting *Volksgemeinschaft*: The *Deutsche Volksliste* in Annexed Upper Silesia 129
Gerhard Wolf

III. THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE REGIME: THE PROMISES OF *VOLKSGEMEINSCHAFT*

10. *Volksgemeinschaft* and the Illusion of 'Normality' from the 1920s to the 1940s 149
Andreas Wirsching

Science, Business & IP Centre, Social Sciences

Monday	10.00 – 20.00
Tuesday to Thursday	09.30 – 20.00
Friday and Saturday	09.30 – 17.00
Sunday and English Public Holidays	Closed

Asian & African Studies, Maps

Monday	10.00 –
Tuesday to Saturday	09.30 –
Sunday and English Public Holidays	Closed

Copy Counters

Humanities 1, Rare Books & M
Newsroom, Science – floor 2

Monday	10.00 –
Tuesday to Thursday	09.30 –
Friday and Saturday	09.30 –

Asian & African Studies

Monday	10.00 –
Tuesday to Saturday	09.30 –

Please note: collection items sho
the Issue Desk before the advertis

Ordering in the Re

Most collection items can be or
catalogue Explore the British Lib
specific delivery information for

- Collection items can be ordered
via our free wi-fi or on a Library
- Items can be ordered for the sam
visit
- Some items are stored offsite an
be delivered
- There is no delivery of offsite ma
- If ordering items using Explore th
  - Online Help, printed guides
are available
  - You may order up to ten iten
apply in the Manuscripts Rea
  - Remember to change the da
not ordering for the current
- Six requests can be reserved for
days
- Items ordered after 16.00 w
the same day

- Please ensure your hands are clean and dry
- Touch items as little as possible to reduce wear and tear
- ems or force

11. Greasing the Palm of the *Volksgemeinschaft*? Consumption under National Socialism — 157
Birthe Kundrus

12. *Volksgenossinnen* on the German Home Front: An Insight into Nazi Wartime Society — 171
Nicole Kramer

13. 'Community of Action' and Diversity of Attitudes: Reflections on Mechanisms of Social Integration in National Socialist Germany, 1933–45 — 187
Frank Bajohr

14. Social Spaces of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* in the Making: Functional Elites and Club Networking — 200
Rüdiger Hachtmann

IV. *VOLKSGEMEINSCHAFT*: A RATIONALE FOR VIOLENCE

15. The Holocaust: Basis and Objective of the *Volksgemeinschaft*? — 217
Christopher R. Browning

16. *Volksgemeinschaft* and Violence: Some Reflections on Interdependencies — 226
Sven Keller

17. Social Control and the Making of the *Volksgemeinschaft* — 240
Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann

V. THE LIMITS OF *VOLKSGEMEINSCHAFT* POLICIES

18. The Military Elite and *Volksgemeinschaft* — 257
Johannes Hürter

19. National Socialist Blueprints for Rural Communities and their Resonance in Agrarian Society — 270
Willi Oberkrome

20. The End of the *Volksgemeinschaft* — 281
Richard Bessel

Bibliography — 295
Index — 327

1

Volksgemeinschaft
Writing the Social History of the Nazi Regime

Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto

In 1938, Bertolt Brecht's play *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* was premiered in Paris. It presented a dramatized collage of incidents and situations drawn from everyday life in National Socialist Germany. Brecht had been collecting material for the play since 1934. The opening scene is entitled *Volksgemeinschaft*, a term that can be roughly translated as 'community of the people'—though, as we shall see, '*Volk*' has a significantly more loaded meaning than the word 'people' might suggest. In this opening scene, two intoxicated SS officers lurch down the streets of Berlin on the night of 30 January 1933. Brecht introduces them in a short poem which closes with the verse:

> Their aim is a People imperious
> Respected and powerful and serious
> Above all, one that obeys.

Urinating against a house wall and speaking in broad Berlin dialect, the SS officers discuss their hopes for the future:

> THE SECOND: And now it'll be a *Volksjemeinschaft*. I'm expecting the German people to have an unprecedented moral revival.
> THE FIRST: Wait till we've coaxed German Man out from among all those filthy subhumans...
> THE SECOND: Think he [the *Führer*] will really make us a *Volksjemeinschaft*?
> THE FIRST: He'll make anything.

The two SS officers believe themselves to be in a 'Marxist quarter'. When an old man in a nightshirt leans out of the window and calls softly for his wife, one of them pulls out his revolver and shoots wildly in all directions. The scene closes with the terrible cry of someone who has been hit.[1]

This scene brings out Brecht's angry exasperation at what was going on inside the 'Third Reich'. It is far from coincidence that, to describe German society under

[1] Bertolt Brecht, *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, trans. John Willett (London, 2002), 5–6. In quoting this passage, we have used the original term *Volksjemeinschaft* (Berlin dialect for *Volksgemeinschaft*) instead of Willett's attempt to render it in English. The original German version is to be found in Bertolt Brecht, *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches: 24 Szenen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1970), 8–9.

The authors would like to thank Jörg Arnold, Elizabeth Harvey, Andreas Gestrich, Nick Stargardt, and Andreas Wirsching, as well as the anonymous referees for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this introduction. We are grateful to Angela Davies for the translation of the first draft.

National Socialism, he focused on *Volksgemeinschaft*. *Volksgemeinschaft* was the Nazis' central social concept: it was within it, and via it, that visions of community in Nazi Germany were expressed, negotiated, and put into practice. This volume sets out to scrutinize the complex process of multilayered adaptation this involved and the social dynamic it instituted.

Volksgemeinschaft was the National Socialist social promise. Brecht's scene touches on many of the criteria upon which it was based: ethnic origin as the ultimate point of reference; an appeal to inner experience; tension between utopian expectations and the radical willingness to fulfil them; racist separation; unconditional trust in the *Führer*; and a deadly violence which was directed internally as well as externally. In recent years, historians have explored all of these aspects, and there has been a rapid growth in our understanding of all that the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept evoked. It is not easy to reduce this multifaceted concept to a common denominator: *Volksgemeinschaft* encompassed both a social utopia and precise instructions for realizing it. Its core component was not the individual but a collective subject, the *Volk*, being imagined as a timeless racial unit over which the *Führer* had been chosen to rule by destiny and could exercise unlimited authority. Membership of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, it was believed, overrode all differences of social stratification arising out of religious or class affiliation. It centred on notions of belonging that had to be biologically legitimized and performatively underpinned by acts and declarations of loyalty. Belonging determined people's opportunities of succeeding in the new Germany, and the new social inequalities were based on how these opportunities were distributed. And, for many, belonging determined much more: whether they could be assigned the right to live. The means by which the Nazis created the *Volksgemeinschaft* they projected were means of violence, and these turned inwards in the form of victimization and extermination as well as being directed outwards in aggressive territorial expansion.

The concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* cannot be understood in isolation from the multilayered historical semantics of the German idea of the *Volk*.[2] *Volk* clearly differs in meaning from the English word 'people', and therefore the word remains untranslated in this volume. In the National Socialist view, *Volk* included all the members of a race, both living and dead, as well as future generations. The *Volk* itself was seen as a timeless entity whose qualities were revealed in its individual members. Their physical appearance, character, and behaviour were all, in this way of thinking, determined by racial predisposition.

While the *Volk* was (supposedly) a pre-existent entity, it had, in the Nazis' view, become debased and deprived of its vigour. National Socialists were determined to rectify this: they wanted to change society to create a true 'community', the *Volksgemeinschaft*. This was their big project, and they intended to realize their vision of society by means of social engineering. Any belief that private lives would

[2] See Reinhart Koselleck, 'Volk, Nation, Nationalismus, Masse', in Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (eds), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 8 vols. (Stuttgart, 1972–92), vii. (1992), 141–431.

not be affected, that individuals could keep at a distance from 'politics' as many hoped in 1933, would soon prove to be illusory.

WHY THE FOCUS ON *VOLKSGEMEINSCHAFT?*

Increasingly, the regime's social engineering became entwined with the private lives of ordinary German citizens during the twelve years of Nazi rule. The propaganda picture of a young couple's private moment depicted on the cover of this book—the couple sunbathing on the beach with swastika bunting above them waving cheerfully in the wind—told Germans more about the envisioned *Volksgemeinschaft* than any picture of ecstatic masses at the Hitler rallies did. Nazi society demanded a lot from the individual, but it also had a lot to offer: a place for individual happiness and success was promised to all who belonged to the chosen community. This was the promise the concept contained. However, the picture also carried another message: this promise of happiness and success was to be denied to all those classified unfit to belong to the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The sunny face hid a dark and deathly background countenance.

Volksgemeinschaft was the Nazis' central social concept. This volume takes this observation as its starting point. Its objective is to clarify the heuristic and explanatory potential of the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept. By drawing on specific examples, the essays explore the extent to which the concept helps us understand social change during the period of National Socialism. The authors investigate the specific forms the concept assumed and how it was used as a guideline for the actions both of private individuals and of political leaders; they examine interpretations and perceptions of policies dictated by the notion of *Volksgemeinschaft*; and they illuminate how its utopian aims could motivate people and engage their emotions. The volume also attempts to sum up the lively international debate about *Volksgemeinschaft* as an approach to research.

Current research on the National Socialist concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* is especially interested in the interplay between the various National Socialist means of exerting power and how life went on in society. The contributions in this volume therefore focus first on the interaction between the institutions of the National Socialist state, with their Party organizations and functionaries, and people living their everyday lives. The people in Nazi Germany were divided into two categories: *Volksgenossen* (members of the imagined *Volksgemeinschaft*) and 'the others'. *Volksgenossen* were granted full citizenship and had access to the provisions of the welfare state; but the social and legal status of those who deviated from the norms established through the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept was significantly less secure, and such people suffered discrimination of many kinds. In a continual series of challenges when dealing with Party functionaries, civil servants, or even just officious supporters of the regime, every individual was repeatedly obliged to choose, and to show, on which side of the divide he or she stood. Research on the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* project therefore is inspired by Alf Lüdtke's concept of *Herrschaft als soziale Praxis*—the exercise of political control through social

practice.[3] This perspective casts light on the complexities individuals faced at the time, while also revealing the many ways in which the National Socialist regime reached out to people directly in their everyday lives.

In a second strand, the essays in this volume are interested in looking at how the diverse forms of National Socialist rule were combined with ideological convictions, patterns of argument, and strategies of legitimization. Ideology and the structure of rule are not seen as separate spheres, but as being inextricably intertwined with each other. Lutz Raphael's dynamic view of National Socialist ideology, which he presents in his essay, offers valuable insights into this. He interprets the Nazi worldview as a relatively open 'field' permitting a contained plurality of opinions, interpretations, and self-selected emphases.[4] In the same way, the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* developed its own fairly flexible 'field'. Its core elements, listed above, could be combined with each other in different variations, so that a range of different stresses could emerge.[5]

This semantic openness contributed enormously to the dynamic of social change that was such a feature of Nazi Germany. In parallel, and perhaps at an even faster rate, the regime itself incessantly assumed new forms. This constant change can be attributed to the Nazis' decisionistic view of politics. Their political style was characterized by an actionism and voluntarism that constantly reshaped the power structures. Numerous historians, following Max Weber, have therefore and for its *Führer* orientation characterized National Socialist rule as 'charismatic',[6] and it is not for nothing that, from its early days, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) called itself a 'movement'.

Despite its diversity and plurality of forms, however, the *Volksgemeinschaft* project and its practices did not lack direction. The Second World War marked a clear turning point. In the pre-war period, the priorities of the *Volksgemeinschaft* had been the affective integration of its members, the *Volksgenossen*, and the implementation of racist segregation, as shown in the restructuring of the welfare state. Mechanisms of selection based on racial biology were put in place, and for the broad sections of the population accepted as 'belonging', there were rewards—above all, the promise of the new consumerism. During these years, contemporaries experienced the *Volksgemeinschaft* as a blend not only of 'coercion and

[3] See Alf Lüdtke (ed.), *Herrschaft als soziale Praxis: Historische und sozial-anthropologische Studien* (Göttingen, 1991).

[4] See the essay by Lutz Raphael in this volume; in addition, Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Utopie als Ideologie: Geschichtsdenken und politisches Handeln im Dritten Reich. Hitler, Rosenberg, Darré, Himmler, Goebbels* (Paderborn, 1998).

[5] Taking the Swabian *Gau* as an example, see Martina Steber, 'Region and National Socialist Ideology: Reflections on Contained Plurality', in Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann and Maiken Umbach (eds), *Heimat, Region and Empire: Spatial Identities under National Socialism* (Houndmills, 2012), 25–42.

[6] See Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 5 vols. (Munich, 1987–2008), iv: *Vom Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges bis zur Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten 1914–1949* (2003); Rüdiger Hachtmann, 'Elastisch, dynamisch und von katastrophaler Effizienz: Zur Struktur der Neuen Staatlichkeit des Nationalsozialismus', in Sven Reichardt and Wolfgang Seibel (eds), *Der prekäre Staat: Herrschen und Verwalten im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 2011), 29–73; Ludolf Herbst, *Hitlers Charisma: Die Erfindung eines deutschen Messias* (Frankfurt am Main, 2010).

consent', but also of 'restoration and revolution'.[7] But from the summer of 1939, the emphases changed. The *Volksgemeinschaft* utopia was now projected as a valiant 'community of struggle' (*Kampfgemeinschaft*) in a transformation of its image the regime had engineered as it prepared for hostilities.[8] Plunged into war, Germans on the home front profited from the plundering of the occupied areas and from the seizure of Jewish property all over Europe.[9] At the same time, while they suffered the tribulations of the air war, stoic 'solidarity' was expected of them, in line with the *Volksgemeinschaft* ideal.[10] By the end of the war, it has been suggested, soldiers in the *Wehrmacht* were experiencing a similar duality. They went through sacrifice, but could truly believe that, piece by piece, the utopian ideals of *Volksgemeinschaft* were becoming reality: the strict social distinctions and boundaries they had known in the old Germany had seemingly begun to dissolve as shared political loyalties towards *Führer* and nation bound comrades together.[11] As an Allied victory looked more and more inevitable, the regime tried to present an increasingly fragmenting society as a 'community of fate' (*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*). This was in a desperate attempt to mobilize the resources that remained to it. Employing a mixture of threats of violence, warnings of horror scenarios of downfall, and ambivalent religious slogans, the regime urged people to hold out. At the same time, it still appealed to social solidarity.[12] And, remarkably, in a situation of defeat in which people had to think first of their own survival, German society was not totally atomized: its people shared the same existential troubles, fears, and hopes, and were aware of this commonality.[13] The notion of a 'community of sacrifice' (*Opfergemeinschaft*) was revived. The roots of this topos go back to the Weimar Republic, but it was reframed to fit German self-perceptions during the final phase of the war. Even afterwards it permeated the culture of remembrance in the Federal

[7] Christopher R. Browning and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, 'Frameworks for Social Engineering: Stalinist Schema of Identification and the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*', in Sheila Fitzpatrick and Michael Geyer (eds), *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared* (Cambridge, 2009), 231–65, at 248.

[8] See Nicole Kramer, *Volksgenossinnen an der Heimatfront: Mobilisierung, Verhalten, Erinnerung* (Göttingen, 2011), 124–48; Hans-Ulrich Thamer, 'Die Widersprüche der "Volksgemeinschaft" in den späten Kriegsjahren', in Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann (ed.), *'Volksgemeinschaft': Mythos, wirkungsmächtige soziale Verheißung oder soziale Realität im 'Dritten Reich': Zwischenbilanz einer kontroversen Debatte* (Paderborn 2012), 289–300.

[9] This is shown by Götz Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State* (New York, 2006).

[10] Dietmar Süß, *Der Tod aus der Luft: Kriegsgesellschaft und Luftkrieg in Deutschland und England* (Munich, 2011), 425.

[11] Felix Römer, *Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht von innen* (München and Zürich, 2012), 83; opposed to Römer's interpretation of the impact the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept had is Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer (eds), *Soldaten: Protokolle vom Kämpfen, Töten und Sterben* (3rd edn. Frankfurt am Main, 2011); Thomas Kühne also underlines the significance of the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept for understanding Hitler's army: Thomas Kühne, *Kameradschaft: Die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2006).

[12] Süß, *Tod aus der Luft*, 578.

[13] This view is not universally shared. See, for instance, Richard Bessel's essay in this volume, and Neil Gregor, 'A *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*? Allied Bombing, Civilian Morale, and Social Dissolution in Nuremberg, 1942–1945', *Historical Journal*, 43/4 (2000), 1051–70.

Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and can be understood as the last manifestation of *Volksgemeinschaft* rhetoric.[14]

Volksgemeinschaft was the main concept informing the Nazi social utopia, and it can be thought of as summing up the new order to which the National Socialists aspired. It is therefore a key for understanding the developments and changes that took place in German society in their time—which spaces of opportunity were opened up and which ones closed down, how the regime organized processes of inclusion and exclusion, and how it changed or cemented relations of inequality. The concept served as a justification for excluding so-called 'asocial elements' and the 'work-shy' from social benefits offered by the state and community services, but it was also used as an integrative formula for resocializing released prisoners.[15] It held out distinct social promises: for the *Volksgenossen* a seemingly meritocratic system offered chances of advancement for all, regardless of social background. Meanwhile, however, 'Jews' (as defined by the Nuremberg Laws), Sinti, Roma, black people, the mentally and physically disabled, and the openly homosexual were all excluded from these opportunities, as were many others branded as 'asocial'. The blunt discrimination drew new social boundaries: while certain victim groups experienced deprivation and denigration, the social and moral status of the 'true' *Volk* was correspondingly enhanced.[16] Especially for the workers, there was the enticing promise of social advancement. In the first scene of his *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*, quoted at the beginning of this introduction, Brecht was especially scathing about this aspect of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* concept. Led by his Marxist beliefs, he denounced it as a deadly con trick. But the attractiveness of the promise to contemporaries should not be underestimated: *Volksgemeinschaft* really did appear to offer them a chance to free themselves from the confining restrictions of an industrial class society.[17] For historians therefore, using the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept as a practical research key is highly illuminating: it allows us to decode how the various actors appropriated the rhetoric and semantics of the National

[14] See Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (London, 2009); Malte Thießen, 'Schöne Zeiten? Erinnerungen an die "Volksgemeinschaft" nach 1945', in Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt (eds), *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009), 165–87.

[15] See Bernhard Gotto, *Nationalsozialistische Kommunalpolitik: Administrative Normalität und Systemstabilisierung durch die Augsburger Stadtverwaltung 1933–1945* (Munich, 2006), 187–99; Christopher Bittenberg, '"Wiedereingliederung des Gestrauchelten in die Volksgemeinschaft": Hamburger Entlassenenfürsorge 1933–1945', in Silke Klewin, Herbert Reinke, and Gerhard Sälter (eds), *Hinter Gittern: Zur Geschichte der Inhaftierung zwischen Bestrafung, Besserung und politischem Ausschluss vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Leipzig, 2010), 159–73. A former Communist street fighter provides an especially impressive example. His reintegration, with the help of various Party organizations, after incarceration in a concentration camp was so successful that the Gestapo appointed him a *V-Mann* (confidential informant); Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann, 'Utopie und Realität der nationalsozialistischen "Volksgemeinschaft": Das Verhalten der Bevölkerung zwischen Selbstmobilisierung, Anpassungsdruck und wirksamen Kontrollmechanismen', in Manuel Becker and Christoph Studt (eds), *Der Umgang des Dritten Reiches mit den Feinden des Regimes* (Berlin, 2010), 43–55, at 51; also instructive is the regime's stereotyping of 'traffickers': Malte Zierenberg, *Stadt der Schieber: Der Berliner Schwarzmarkt 1939–1950* (Göttingen, 2008), 163–76.

[16] Neitzel and Welzer (eds), *Soldaten*, 57–8.

[17] Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, iv, 684–90.

Socialist regime, how they interpreted and applied the decrees and pronouncements, expectations and pressures that assailed them, and, of course, what consequences this all had.[18]

It is crucial to see *Volksgemeinschaft* not as a static condition, but as a forward-looking social policy project vigorously promoted by the regime. Though the concept of a German *Volk* was timeless, the National Socialists believed, when they seized power in 1933, that a living community based around the *Volk* had yet to be realized and it was their duty to achieve this.[19] *Volksgemeinschaft* was therefore the unifying blueprint for National Socialist social engineering initiatives at all sorts of levels. It gave rise to a considerable social dynamic; the initiatives it set in motion affected many political fields, areas of activity, and segments of society; and these initiatives opened up a vast potential for radicalization. Each *Volksgenosse* and *Volksgenossin* could feel legitimized, even charged, to make a personal and active contribution to the realization of the utopia: it is in acknowledgement of this that Michael Wildt speaks of 'self-empowerment'.[20] In a constantly accelerating process of participatory effort, individuals vied with each other to serve the new ideal. This explains the immense centrifugal spread the people's response to the *Volksgemeinschaft* idea unleashed: individual initiatives extended it to ever wider spaces and fields of activity. In Ian Kershaw's view, these individual initiatives were a product of the charismatic power structure of the Third Reich. By 'working towards the *Führer*', people in the Party and the state administration outbid themselves in order to enhance their chances of individual advancement, a process which was responsible for the ever-increasing radicalization of policies.[21] Ordinary citizens, however, were stimulated less by the distant *Führer* than by the new and immediately accessible spaces of opportunity afforded by the *Volksgemeinschaft* project.[22] The project did not only become any more radical as more and more people espoused it, but it became visibly more pluralistic and multifaceted. To explore this process, this volume investigates local, temporal, institutional, and actor-specific variants of how Germans appropriated and realized *Volksgemeinschaft*.

The specific forms taken by the *Volksgemeinschaft* idea did not grow out of thin air, but were embedded within an accretion of previous notions that had been

[18] For a similar approach, see Nicole Kramer and Armin Nolzen (eds), *Ungleichheiten im 'Dritten Reich': Semantiken, Praktiken, Erfahrungen* (München, 2012), esp. the editors' introduction, 9–26, at 18–9; for the semantics of regionality see Martina Steber, *Ethnische Gewissheiten: Die Ordnung des Regionalen im bayerischen Schwaben vom Kaiserreich bis zum NS-Regime* (Göttingen, 2010).

[19] See Beate Meyer, 'Erfühlte und erdachte "Volksgemeinschaft": Erfahrungen jüdischer Mischlinge zwischen Integration und Ausgrenzung', in Bajohr and Wildt (eds), *Volksgemeinschaft*, 144–64, at 146–7; Michael Wildt, '"Volksgemeinschaft": Eine Antwort auf Ian Kershaw', *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, 8 (2011), 102–9.

[20] See Michael Wildt, *Volksgemeinschaft als Selbstermächtigung: Gewalt gegen Juden in der deutschen Provinz 1919 bis 1939* (Hamburg, 2007), published in English as *Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft and the Dynamics of Racial Exclusion: Violence Against Jews in Provincial Germany, 1919–1939* (London, 2012).

[21] See Ian Kershaw, '"Working towards the Führer". Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship', *Contemporary European History*, 2/2 (1993), 103–18.

[22] See Bernhard Gotto, 'Dem Gauleiter entgegenarbeiten? Überlegungen zur Reichweite eines Deutungsmusters', in Jürgen John, Horst Möller, and Thomas Schaarschmidt (eds), *Die NS-Gaue: Regionale Mittelinstanzen im zentralistischen 'Führerstaat'* (Munich, 2007), 80–99.

formed long before 1933, as had the term *Volksgemeinschaft* itself. It is therefore necessary to take a serious look at the historical development of the idea.[23] It came into popular usage during the First World War as an integrative concept of national longing. After the November Revolution of 1918, almost all political parties ascribed to it and attached their dreams of a better future to it. It became the 'dominant formula of political interpretation' in the Weimar Republic.[24] Through its origins in First World War thinking, the vision of *Volksgemeinschaft* was intrinsically intertwined with nationalistic aspirations. Germans who used it envisioned an 'imagined community' which was essentially a community of the nation,[25] and this meant that it acquired a social dimension.[26] Here a fusion with the semantics of community proved decisive. From the turn of the century in German intellectual and political discourse, the concept of 'community' (*Gemeinschaft*) had been pitted against the concept of 'society' (*Gesellschaft*) and had been invested with a highly nationalist meaning. 'Community' was held to represent an organic form of social life that was quintessentially pure and German, whereas 'society' was associated with what was thought of as the deadeningly rational, mechanical, decaying civilization of 'the West'. In the Weimar Republic, a quest for 'unity' in a national German community became deeply ingrained in political culture.[27] Moreover, because the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* had been shaped in the context of wartime nationalism, it contained within it an aggressive defiance of other nations. After 1918/19, due to general non-acceptance of defeat and disgust at the Versailles Peace Treaty, this defiance was carried into the thinking prevalent during the Weimar Republic. In evocations of *Volksgemeinschaft* in these years, there always reverberated a demand for the restoration of Germany's imperial status.[28]

[23] See Norbert Götz, *Ungleiche Geschwister: Die Konstruktion von nationalsozialistischer Volksgemeinschaft und schwedischem Volksheim* (Baden-Baden, 2001); Paul Nolte, *Die Ordnung der deutschen Gesellschaft: Selbstentwurf und Selbstbeschreibung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2000), 169–71 and 187–207; see also the essay by Michael Wildt in this volume.

[24] Hans-Ulrich Thamer, 'Volksgemeinschaft: Mensch und Masse', in Richard van Dülmen (ed.), *Erfindung des Menschen: Schöpfungsträume und Körperbilder 1500–2000* (Vienna, 1998), 367–88, at 367; and Michael Wildt, 'Volksgemeinschaft und Führererwartung in der Weimarer Republik', in Ute Daniel et al. (eds), *Politische Kultur und Medienwirklichkeiten in den 1920er Jahren* (Munich, 2010), 181–204; *Steffen Bruendel, Volksgemeinschaft oder Volksstaat: Die 'Ideen von 1914' und die Neuordnung Deutschlands im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 2003).

[25] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 2006).

[26] See Jörg Echternkamp, 'At War, Abroad and at Home: The Essential Features of German Society in the Second World War', in Jörg Echternkamp (ed.), *Germany and the Second World War*, ix. pt. 1. *German Wartime Society 1939–1945: Politicization, Disintegration, and the Struggle for Survival* (Oxford, 2008), 1–101; Sven Oliver Müller, 'Nationalism in German War Society 1939–1945', in Jörg Echternkamp (ed.), *Germany and the Second World War*, ix. pt. 2. *German Wartime Society 1939–1945: Exploitation, Interpretations, Exclusion* (Oxford, 2014), 11–93.

[27] See Detlef Schmiechen Ackermann, "Volksgemeinschaft": Mythos der NS-Propaganda, wirkungsmächtige soziale Verheißung oder soziale Realität im "Dritten Reich"?—Einführung', in Detlef Schmiechen Ackermann, *'Volksgemeinschaft'*, 13–53, at 37–40; Nolte, *Ordnung*, 159–87; comprehensive: Manfred Riedel, 'Gesellschaft, Gemeinschaft', in Brunner, Conze, and Koselleck (eds), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, ii (Stuttgart, 1975), 801–62; for German readings of 'the West' see Riccardo Bavaj and Martina Steber (eds), *Germany and 'the West': The History of a Modern Concept* forthcoming (Oxford, 2015).

[28] See Lutz Raphael, *Imperiale Gewalt und mobilisierte Nation. Europa 1914-1945* (München, 2011), 213.

Volksgemeinschaft was nevertheless a broad enough term to be bent to different viewpoints. Ubiquitous in its use, it was characterized by a diversity of meaning, democratic versions coexisting with the term's appropriation by the far Right.

It is therefore no surprise that, after 1933, many people could believe in the validity of *Volksgemeinschaft* without necessarily subscribing to everything the National Socialists loaded onto the idea. Research must therefore ask when, and in what contexts, the term was used, and explore the meanings that were ascribed to it. When analysing these semantic fields, it is especially revealing to determine which of the central concepts of National Socialist ideology the *Volksgemeinschaft* formula could draw together, and also where the semantic range went wider, so that the concept could still have an integrative impact, drawing in those unconvinced by National Socialist ideology as such.[29]

The coining of parallel terms provides some indication of the hold the idea had: thus during the Nazi period people spoke not only of the types of integrated 'community' already mentioned—*Kampfgemeinschaft*, *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, and *Opfergemeinschaft*—but also, for example, of *Luftschutzgemeinschaft* (the air raid community), *Bodengemeinschaft* (the community of the soil), *Betriebsgemeinschaft* (the manufacturing community), and *Verkehrsgemeinschaft* (the motorists' community).[30] Germans thus took part in all sorts of 'communities' in their everyday lives. Whether or not they actually felt the feeling of 'belonging' that Nazi propaganda insisted on, anticipations of *Volksgemeinschaft* became a part of their everyday experience. 'Community' was a central theme, a kind of constant refrain, not only in Nazi Party propaganda, but also in a range of entertainments, the mass media, cultural productions, and advertisements.[31] It was certainly the aim of the Nazi regime to implant its programme for a racial community in every heart and mind. The new rules of thinking, feeling, and acting were to apply not only in politics, but also in leisure and in private life. For ordinary individuals, it was hardly possible to dissociate themselves from this imperative without risking social isolation or arousing political distrust.[32] Research therefore needs to ask how individuals appropriated the images, appeals, and offers that came under the Nazis' *Volksgemeinschaft* label, and to what extent their acceptance moulded the concrete shape of Nazi visions of community.

[29] An example of this is provided by the riflemen's associations (*Schützenvereine*), which simply integrated the semantics of *Volksgemeinschaft* into their concept of community care (*Gemeinschaftspflege*), but did not respond to attempts at political indoctrination at association level; Henning Borggräfe, *Schützenvereine im Nationalsozialismus: Pflege der 'Volksgemeinschaft' und Vorbereitung auf den Krieg (1933 bis 1945)* (Münster, 2010); also highly instructive in this respect is Rudolf Oswald, *'Fußball-Volksgemeinschaft': Ideologie, Politik und Fanatismus im deutschen Fußball 1919–1964* (Frankfurt am Main, 2008).

[30] For further similar compounds, see Götz, *Ungleiche Geschwister*, 79.

[31] Corey Ross, *Media and the Making of Modern Germany: Mass Communications, Society, and Politics from the Empire to the Third Reich* (Oxford, 2008); Michael Imort, '"Planting a Forest Tall and Straight like the German Volk": Visualizing the *Volksgemeinschaft* through Advertizing in German Forestry Journals', in Pamela E. Swett, Jonathan Wiesen, and Jonathan R. Zatlin (eds), *Selling Modernity: Advertising in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Durham, 2007), 102–26; Pamela E. Swett, Corey Ross, and Fabrice d'Almeida (eds), *Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany* (Houndmills, 2011).

[32] Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008).

THE HISTORIOGRAPHICAL DEBATE SURROUNDING *VOLKSGEMEINSCHAFT*

It is only recently that interpretations of the social history of National Socialism have taken the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept as their starting point. These interpretations at first raised a lot of controversy amongst scholars—and often still do. Part I of this volume juxtaposes three contrasting contributions to this debate—from Ian Kershaw, Michael Wildt, and Ulrich Herbert. Kershaw's fundamental questioning of recent research, and of Wildt's arguments in particular, took place at the London conference on which this volume is based. Published initially as a podcast on the German Historical Institute's internet homepage and then as an article (in German) in the journal *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, it provoked a response from Michael Wildt which was published in the journal *Zeithistorische Forschungen*.[33] As a critical discussant, Ulrich Herbert repeatedly intervened in the debate. His observations appear in written form for the first time here. The essays published in this volume reveal how passionately the debate was conducted and how contentious the issues still remain.

The origins of the searching dialogue around the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept can be traced back to the intense discussions of the 1970s, when a Marxist-inspired social history, primarily represented by the Oxford historian Tim Mason, emphasized the continued existence of class structures in Germany after 1933 and measured the Nazi propaganda of classlessness against the actual situation of the workers in the Third Reich. For Mason, *Volksgemeinschaft* was no more than a Nazi myth—one that disintegrated when the less-than-sparkling reality of life in the Third Reich was revealed.[34] Until the 1990s, historians tended largely to accept Mason's verdict. Researchers focused on the Hitler myth as a potent link between rulers and ruled; they assessed the potential there was for resistance by individuals and elaborated on the effects of terror; they looked into the relative significance of 'ideology' and 'structure' for the Nazi regime's ability to function; and they discussed the relationship between National Socialism and modernity.[35] In this context therefore, criticism was directed at an interpretation of *Volksgemeinschaft* that considered the National Socialist utopia of a classless society, flourishing under the undisputed leadership of Hitler, to have been an actual reality in the period between 1933 and 1945.

[33] See Ian Kershaw, '"Volksgemeinschaft": Potenzial und Grenzen eines neuen Forschungskonzepts', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 59 (2011), 1–17; Wildt, '"Volksgemeinschaft": Eine Antwort auf Ian Kershaw'.

[34] See esp. Timothy W. Mason, *Social Policy in the Third Reich: The Working Class and the 'National Community'*, ed. Jane Caplan (Providence, RI, 1992), first published as *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich: Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft* (Opladen, 1977); and the review by Heinrich August Winkler, 'Vom Mythos der Volksgemeinschaft', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 17 (1977), 484–90.

[35] See Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (4th edn. London, 2000); Riccardo Bavaj, *Die Ambivalenz der Moderne im Nationalsozialismus: Eine Bilanz der Forschung* (München, 2003).

Older works of social history that had testified to the effective power of the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept had by this point almost been forgotten. Bertolt Brecht, with the exile's clarity of distance, was not the only one to have noticed how the National Socialist promise of *Volksgemeinschaft* exercised its sway over the German populace. The jurist and political scientist Ernst Fraenkel, in an analysis of the National Socialist state written in exile in the USA, had also realized that the forging of a spirit of belonging via the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept lay at the heart of the regime's domestic policies.[36] Twenty years later, David Schoenbaum, in his pioneering study *Hitler's Social Revolution* (1966), drew attention to the paradoxical complexity within the Nazi regime that occurred when the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept gained independent force as 'interpreted social reality' and went on to acquire a 'bizarre reality' on a new level.[37] According to these scholars, *Volksgemeinschaft* was more than a trite propaganda phrase providing drum-thumping themes for mass rallies. In the 1980s, some relevant voices picked up on these views: Martin Broszat,[38] Manfred Messerschmidt,[39] Werner Conze,[40] Lothar Kettenacker,[41] and above all Detlev Peukert.[42] Yet, at the time what they had to say on *Volksgemeinschaft* went unheard in the mainstream of research.

In the 1970s and 1980s, however different the dominant approaches in these two decades may have been, the majority of historians of National Socialism shared common interests in the decision-making structures at the top of the regime, in the social structures of Germany's industrial society, and in institutional history. In addition, they focused on developments in the 1930s and on factors that tended to relativize ideological influences. They looked on politics as being primarily defined in terms of the state. Politics and society were thus seen as independent of each other. It was only from the mid-1980s that this segregation of social and political

[36] See Ernst Fraenkel, 'Der Urdoppelstaat' [1938], in Ernst Fraenkel, *Gesammelte Schriften, iii: Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand*, ed. Alexander von Brünneck (Baden-Baden, 1999), pt. 3, ch. 3, §2: 'Volksgemeinschaft und Rüstungskonjunktur', 460–4.

[37] David Schoenbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution: Class and Status in Nazi Germany 1933–1939* (New York, 1980; 1st pub. 1966), at 284–5. For a current evaluation see Riccardo Bavaj, 'Verdoppelte Widersprüchlichkeit: David Schoenbaums Thesen zur "braunen Revolution"', in Jürgen Danyel, Jan-Holger Kirsch and Martin Sabrow (eds), *50 Klassiker der Zeitgeschichte* (Göttingen, 2007), 93–7.

[38] See Martin Broszat, 'Zur Struktur der NS-Massenbewegung', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 31/1 (1983), 52–76.

[39] See Manfred Messerschmidt, 'The Wehrmacht and the Volksgemeinschaft', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 18 (1983), 719–40.

[40] See Werner Conze, 'Staats- und Nationalpolitik: Kontinuitätsbruch und Neubeginn', in Werner Conze and M. Rainer Lepsius (eds), *Sozialgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Beiträge zum Kontinuitätsproblem* (Stuttgart, 1983), 441–67, esp. 455–6.

[41] See Lothar Kettenacker, 'Sozialpsychologische Aspekte der Führer-Herrschaft', in Gerhard Hirschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker (eds), *Der 'Führerstaat': Mythos und Realität. Studien zur Struktur und Politik des Dritten Reiches* (Stuttgart, 1981), 98–132.

[42] See Detlev Peukert, *Inside Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life* (New Haven, 1987), first published as *Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde: Anpassung, Ausmerze und Aufbegehren unter dem Nationalsozialismus* (Cologne, 1982); Detlev Peukert, 'Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde: Die nationalsozialistische "Volksgemeinschaft" zwischen Propaganda und industriegesellschaftlicher Normalität', in Bernd Ogan (ed.), *Faszination und Gewalt: Zur politischen Ästhetik des Nationalsozialismus* (Nuremberg, 1992), 151–8.

developments began to dissolve,[43] largely under the influence of *Alltagsgeschichte* (the history of everyday life), which took off at this time and which created new lines of enquiry. Added to this, the cultural turn put a new set of thematic fields on the researchers' agendas.

First, the topic of 'race' moved to the centre of historiographical attention. As awareness grew of the crucial part biologistic thinking had played in the formulation and implementation of Nazi social policy, historians shifted their focus to the regime's policies of racial exclusion and extermination. Important studies came out on the Holocaust and its perpetrators. Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann proposed that the Third Reich was predominantly a 'racial state' and this featured as an overarching concept in the new thinking.[44] At the same time, specific Nazi programmes of social engineering were investigated for their significance.

Secondly, in the 1980s, the cultural turn encouraged the application of previously sidelined disciplines to historical fields and gave new life to the understanding of ideology, which was reappraised in multiple ways. An interest in patterns of meaning and order superseded the previous search for fixed programmes put down in written form;[45] the concept of 'milieu' replaced class theory;[46] understanding of politics was reconceptualized and the reach of politics was separated from its exclusive link with the state. While earlier historians had focused on a supposedly stark opposition between rulers and the ruled, the polarity was now questioned and power was instead seen as 'social practice'; categories such as generation, gender, and power moved to centre stage in historiographical analysis; and instead of scrutinizing power relations in industrial production, researchers shifted their attention to consumption and consumers.[47]

The new interest in *Volksgemeinschaft* as the National Socialist social utopia can therefore be attributed largely to changed emphases in theoretical and

[43] See Thomas Mergel and Thomas Welskopp (eds), *Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft: Beiträge zur Theoriedebatte* (Munich, 1997); Manfred Hettling, Paul Nolte, Frank-Michael Kuhlemann, and Hans-Walter Schmuhl (eds), *Perspektiven der Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Munich, 2000).

[44] See, for example, Michael Geyer, 'Krieg als Gesellschaftspolitik: Anmerkungen zu neueren Arbeiten über das Dritte Reich im Zweiten Weltkrieg', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 26 (1986), 557–601; Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann (eds), *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945* (Cambridge, 1991).

[45] On this see Geoff Eley's reflections on the social history of the Nazi regime, 'Rückkehr zur NS-Ideologie: Überlegungen zu einer möglichen Neukonzeptualisierung nach Lektüre des Buchs von Michael Wildt über die Männer des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes', *Werkstatt Geschichte*, 14/40 (2005), 93–101. In addition, see esp. Ulrich Herbert, *Best: Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft, 1903–1989* (Bonn, 1996).

[46] See, for example, Cornelia Rauh-Kühne, *Katholisches Milieu und Kleinstadtgesellschaft: Ettlingen 1918–1939* (Sigmaringen, 1991); Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann, *Nationalsozialismus und Arbeitermilieus: Der nationalsozialistische Angriff auf die proletarischen Wohnquartiere und die Reaktionen in den sozialistischen Vereinen* (Bonn, 1998); Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann (ed.), *Anpassung, Verweigerung und Widerstand: Soziale Milieus, Politische Kultur und der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus in Deutschland im regionalen Vergleich* (Berlin, 1997).

[47] See Christian Kleinschmidt, *Konsumgesellschaft* (Göttingen, 2008), 110–30; Hartmut Berghoff, 'Träume und Alpträume: Konsumpolitik im Nationalsozialistischen Deutschland', in Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Claudius Torp (eds), *Die Konsumgesellschaft in Deutschland 1890–1990: Ein Handbuch* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009), 268–88.

methodological approaches. The newer approaches are derived from pluralistic social models and have moved away from Marxist-inspired class analysis. Their adherents regard politics as a process of communication and social practice.[48] As the essays in this volume show, historians are particularly interested in local and regional contexts, and interactions in specific social milieux, groups, and networks. Such a focus enables them to observe the social dynamic initiated by the regime as if under a magnifying glass. But there is also an unmistakable trend towards seeing the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* as one that can potentially provide an overarching synthesis of the social history of Germany under Nazism.[49]

And this is where the criticism starts. Apart from the repeated claim that *Volksgemeinschaft* researchers have been taken in by a Nazi propaganda construct, the objections centre round five arguments. The first is epistemological in nature, and suggests that research on *Volksgemeinschaft* presupposes what it ultimately sets out to prove—in other words, that it is based on circular reasoning.[50] The second argument is ethical in its perspective. A moral judgement, the critics say, is implicit in the notion that people subscribed to the *Volksgemeinschaft* ideal, and they claim that, when historians view all everyday behaviour conforming with the system as fundamentally stabilizing it, they are failing to differentiate between crucially different types of behaviour. In this way, they fail to recognize resistance and opposition where it occurred, and ultimately declare that everyone who was not persecuted was a perpetrator.[51] Closely connected with this argument is a third objection. It is suggested that those who follow the *Volksgemeinschaft* approach tend to overemphasize consensus, and accord too little significance to the regime's use of terror which could bludgeon citizens into compliance.[52] Thus approaches

[48] On the development of a dynamic understanding of 'politics', see Ute Frevert and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (eds), *Neue Politikgeschichte: Perspektiven einer historischen Politikforschung* (Frankfurt am Main, 2005); Willibald Steinmetz, 'Neue Wege einer historischen Semantik des Politischen', in Willibald Steinmetz (ed.), *'Politik': Situationen eines Wortgebrauchs im Europa der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main, 2007), 9–40. On the view of politics as social practice, see Alf Lüdtke, 'Herrschaft als soziale Praxis', in Lüdtke (ed.), *Herrschaft als soziale Praxis*, 9–63.

[49] See the review by Kim Christian Priemel on a number of innovations in the history of National Socialism, in *H-Soz-u-Kult*, 23 Oct. 2008, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2008-4-070>; also Dietmar Süß and Winfried Süß, '"Volksgemeinschaft" und Vernichtungskrieg: Gesellschaft im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland', in Dietmar Süß and Winfried Süß (eds), *Das 'Dritte Reich': Eine Einführung* (Munich, 2008), 79–100; Bajohr and Wildt (eds), *Volksgemeinschaft*; Michael Wildt, *Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen, 2008); Hans-Ulrich Thamer and Simone Erpel (eds), *Hitler und die Deutschen: Volksgemeinschaft und Verbrechen. Eine Ausstellung der Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, 15. Oktober 2010 bis 6. Februar 2011* (Berlin, 2010); Schmiechen-Ackermann, *'Volksgemeinschaft'*.

[50] See Janosch Steuwer, 'Conference Report. German Society in the Nazi Era: *Volksgemeinschaft* between Ideological Projection and Social Practice', *German Historical Institute London Bulletin*, 32/2 (2010), 120–8, at 127.

[51] See Steuwer, 'Conference Report'; see the essay by Ian Kershaw in this volume.

[52] See Hans Mommsen, 'Hitler und der Mythos der Volksgemeinschaft. Zur Auflösung der bürgerlichen Nation', in Dan Diner, Gideon Reuveni and Yfaat Weiss (eds), *Deutsche Zeiten: Geschichte und Lebenswelt. Festschrift zur Emeritierung von Moshe Zimmermann* (Göttingen, 2012), 132–40; Hans Mommsen, 'Forschungskontroversen zum Nationalsozialismus', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 14/15 (2007), 14–21; Richard Evans, *'Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft': Zur Diskussion um Anpassung und Widerstand in der deutschen Arbeiterschaft 1933–1945* (Bonn, 2010). By contrast, a more differentiated assessment of the relationship between the workers and the Nazi regime can be found in

in *Volksgemeinschaft* research are equated with interpretations that see the National Socialist regime as a 'consensual dictatorship'.[53] A fourth argument casts doubt on the methodological value of concentrating on *Volksgemeinschaft*. Other tried and tested approaches are better suited to describing the regime's characteristics, some of these critics say. They recommend research on nationalism, for example, and structural-functional approaches that would reveal more clearly the destructive power of the political system and the logic that drove it.[54] The fifth and final argument questions the social changes *Volksgemeinschaft* research assumes. In its twelve-year rule, it is suggested, National Socialism failed to bring about any profound social transformation: changes in the lifestyles of Germans were determined primarily by economic factors that affected all industrial societies at the time. National Socialist policy, however radical it may have been, could have little impact against the forces of 'high modernity'.[55]

This debate has been conducted with great vehemence. Apart from its moral charge, this is partly due to the fact that it reinforces controversial positions that have been taken in the major research discussions. Thus the debate between 'intentionalism' and 'functionalism', whose protagonists met in Cumberland Lodge at a conference the German Historical Institute London organized in 1979,[56] still echoes in the present-day controversies surrounding *Volksgemeinschaft* research. But above all, renewed attention paid to processes of integration and the offer of participation addresses the central issue of research on the Nazi regime: the question of how the Holocaust was possible and to what extent the German people colluded or participated in the murder of the European Jews. Indeed, the question about the effects of the *Volksgemeinschaft* utopia takes us to the 'core of the problem'.[57] Leading protagonists of this 'process' approach see *Volksgemeinschaft* as a general mandate for

Timothy W. Mason, 'Die Bändigung der Arbeiterklasse im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland. Eine Einleitung', in Carola Sachse et al. (eds), *Angst, Belohnung, Zucht und Ordnung: Herrschaftsmechanismen im Nationalsozialismus* (Opladen, 1982), 11–53.

[53] See Götz Aly, *Rasse und Klasse: Nachforschungen zum deutschen Wesen* (Frankfurt am Main, 2003), 246; Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford, 2001); and Frank Bajohr, 'Die Zustimmungsdiktatur: Grundzüge nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft in Hamburg', in Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte in Hamburg (ed.), *Hamburg im 'Dritten Reich'* (Göttingen, 2005), 69–121.

[54] See Hans Mommsen, 'Amoklauf zur "Volksgemeinschaft"? Kritische Anmerkungen zu Michael Wildts Grundkurs zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus', *Neue Politische Literatur*, 53/1 (2008), 15–20.

[55] See Steuwer, 'Conference Report', 125–6; see also the essay by Ulrich Herbert in this volume; on the background, see Ulrich Herbert, 'Liberalisierung als Lernprozess: Die Bundesrepublik in der deutschen Geschichte. Eine Skizze', in Ulrich Herbert (ed.), *Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland: Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung 1945–1980* (2nd edn. Göttingen, 2003), 7–49; Ulrich Herbert, 'Europe in High Modernity: Reflections on a Theory of the Twentieth Century', *Journal of Modern European History*, 5/1 (2007), 5–20. Bernd Weisbrod places a different emphasis, arguing against the thesis that 'modernization' coalesced in the policies of *Volksgemeinschaft*. Bernd Weisbrod, 'Der Schein der "Modernität": Zur Historisierung der "Volksgemeinschaft"', in Karsten Rudolph and Christl Wickert (eds), *Geschichte als Möglichkeit: Über die Chancen von Demokratie. Festschrift für Helga Grebing* (Essen, 1995), 224–42.

[56] See Hirschfeld and Kettenacker (eds), *Der 'Führerstaat'*.

[57] Norbert Frei, '"Volksgemeinschaft"', in Norbert Frei, *1945 und wir: Das Dritte Reich im Bewusstsein der Deutschen* (Munich, 2005), 107–28, at 128.

'self-empowerment', allowing individuals to direct violence against those excluded from the racist-biologistic collective—violence that ended in programmes of extermination.[58] The group directly involved in anti-Semitic acts, or profiting from them, appears to have been much wider than historians previously accepted. If the Holocaust is no longer attributed exclusively to a cumulative radicalization inherent in the system, this challenges structural-functional explanations. Not least, in the controversy over *Volksgemeinschaft*, we see two different concepts of social history confronting each other. On the one hand we have a social history informed by theories of class, which sees social change as basically economically determined, regards politics as the acts of the state, and is based on a normative concept of modernization.[59] Against this and taking an altogether different path, we find a new social history methodologically shaped by the premises of the cultural turn. This enquires into processes of negotiation, room for manoeuvre, cultures of communication, and patterns of meaning and order, while being more interested in the full variety of individual actions than in class positions, and understanding political acts in terms of social practice.[60]

THE ESSAYS IN THIS VOLUME

The essays in this volume investigate how effective the promise held out by *Volksgemeinschaft* turned out to be, and they measure its significance for the regime. The contributors are interested in how the regime devised, introduced, and implemented this new ideal social order. They look into its material structure and how it permeated everyday life in the Third Reich, asking what consequences this had. The result is not to produce a levelling-out of individual ways of behaving, as some critics have complained. On the contrary, close study of the *Volksgemeinschaft* opens opportunities for precise and differentiated descriptions of individual behaviour. The *Volksgemeinschaft* concept was 'notoriously vague',[61] and because of this, it was open to relatively free interpretation by those who lived in the new German society. Ultimately, therefore, it reached a concrete form only in social practice. With its social perspective, the research presented here is able to pick up on this. It takes seriously the multi-layered, complex nature of everyday thinking and behaviour, and the essays describe the constant dilemmas individuals had to face. It soon becomes clear that the real core of the *Volksgemeinschaft* idea was

[58] Wildt, *Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft*; Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler's Community, 1918–1945* (Yale, 2010).

[59] See Jürgen Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte: Begriff—Entwicklung—Probleme* (2nd edn. Göttingen, 1986); Charles Tilly, 'Neuere angloamerikanische Sozialgeschichte', in Joachim Eibach and Günther Lottes (eds), *Kompass der Geschichtswissenschaft: Ein Handbuch* (Göttingen, 2002), 38–52; Paul Nolte, 'Historische Sozialwissenschaft', 53–68.

[60] See Mergel and Welskopp (eds), *Geschichte*; Hettling, Nolte, Kuhlemann, and Schmuhl (eds), *Perspektiven*.

[61] Peter Fritzsche, review of Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt (eds), *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009), in *H-Soz-u-Kult*, 15 Dec. 2009, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2009-4-226>, accessed 19 Mar. 2012.

the marking out of boundaries by violence. As Nicholas Stargardt has argued, the debate focusing on the opposition between consensus and terror therefore misses the main point.[62] It misunderstands both the nature of the Nazi social utopia and the strategies and practices of political action to which it gave rise. Consensus was inconceivable without terror, and terror without consensus. Moreover, projected ideas of order and specific acts stimulated each other. Action was derived from ideas, while practical experience gave these same ideas a sharper focus and stimulated new ones. At the same time, patterns of action developed within the concepts that had entered the ideological field. Practical research into the workings of *Volksgemeinschaft* can shed light on this reciprocal dynamic. Indeed, this is the special value of the current angle of research; in this way it enriches and supplements the findings of earlier research. The study of *Volksgemeinschaft* deals with National Socialist society as it contrived to function. It shifts the focus onto those who were *not* excluded—onto those who were daily confronted with the regime's demands, offers, threats, and violent practices, and who had to find their way through the maze this entailed. As we shall see, this research enables us to define the boundaries of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* project and the range of its utopian promise with extra clarity. It also enables us to capture individual behaviour more precisely, and assess the interplay between ideology and practice, utopia and social dynamic, individuality and collectivity.

What this approach cannot do is provide an overall interpretation of National Socialism. Nor, of course, can the essays collected here portray all conceivable, salient aspects of the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* project. However, by presenting examples, the essays explore the heuristic and analytical value of the *Volksgemeinschaft* approach for the social history of the National Socialist period, though naturally there are profound differences of view about how significantly the influence of *Volksgemeinschaft* is to be rated in individual cases.

The authors' various contributions are grouped together in five sections. As already mentioned, the first part of this volume brings together key controversial positions on the question of *Volksgemeinschaft*. The rest of the essays test the potential of the *Volksgemeinschaft* approach by taking in-depth probes in a range of fields, placing different levels of stress on the dimensions and modes of the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* idea and its appropriations.

The essays in Part II describe how the National Socialist authorities set new normative values and established a framework for communication and concrete action, using policies inspired by the *Volksgemeinschaft* idea. Officials were doing far more than merely developing and implementing political programmes. Armin Nolzen's concept of 'operational codes', used in his analysis of the NSDAP, conveys the impact of these attempts on organizations: strategy and aims, contingencies, and routine actions all coalesced. Lutz Raphael examines the ideological component, interpreting the Nazi worldview as a relatively open 'field' permitting a limited plurality of opinions, interpretations, and priorities. It contained six fixed and

[62] Nicholas Stargardt, 'Beyond "Consent" or "Terror": Wartime Crises in Nazi Germany', *History Workshop Journal* 72 (2011), 190–204.

immoveable ideological points of differing weights that could be interpreted and realized in a range of ways.

Part II also looks at the agencies involved in spreading *Volksgemeinschaft* practices throughout the Reich. The primary agencies were the NSDAP and its sub-organizations. The *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (German Labour Front), for example, saw itself as 'service provider' for the *Volksgemeinschaft*.[63] Various apparatuses and authorities of the National Socialist state decided which individuals could be part of the projected *Volksgemeinschaft* and what their status could be within it. Jane Caplan shows how civil registry offices could use bureaucratic procedures to manipulate identities in order to create hierarchies based on racist criteria and homogeneity within the group that 'belonged'. It is striking how well bureaucratic routines intermeshed with ideological targets.

Ernst Fraenkel famously saw rule in Nazi Germany as a duality, and contrasted the 'normative state' (with its legal controls) against what he called the 'prerogative state', where there was 'unlimited arbitrariness and violence unchecked by any legal guarantees'.[64] Official action to further the envisioned *Volksgemeinschaft* was by no means limited to the 'prerogative state', even when in the hands of the NSDAP. Rather, the 'prerogative state' and the 'normative state' converged, increasing the effectiveness and reach of *Volksgemeinschaft* policies at local and regional level. Thomas Schaarschmidt demonstrates this using the example of the NS-*Gaue*. The power-political interests of the *Gauleiters* coincided with Hitler's aim of mobilizing the whole of society for eventual war. The *Volksgemeinschaft* idea could assume many different forms as the result of differing bureaucratic routines and the need to fit specific social conditions. While the elasticity of the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept was not unlimited, its application in the Nazi arena of rule knew scarcely any limits. This is graphically illustrated by Gerhard Wolf in his investigation of the National Socialist occupation of Upper Silesia, where the Nazis used all the violence at their disposal to set about creating *Volksgemeinschaft*. In this project the contradictions inherent in Nazi ideology—and in the *Volksgemeinschaft* idea itself—became all too apparent. For the Nazi leadership in this multicultural region, it appeared imperative to define who was 'German' (and thus a *Volksgenosse*) and who was not. In the process, ideas of the nation based on cultural ethnicity and race came into conflict, and exposed a deep ideological division between the SS and the *Gau* leadership which underlined their political power struggles.

The essays in Part III deal with the tensions that arose between the individual and the National Socialist regime. These essays draw attention to the structure of promise contained within the *Volksgemeinschaft* idea and the expectations engendered. For many citizens, the promises and offers the Nazis included in their social policy made the notion of *Volksgemeinschaft* very attractive. Although actual achievements—for example, in providing goods for mass consumption—did not match up to the regime's stated aims, they were enough to make life in the Third

[63] See Rüdiger Hachtmann, *Das Wirtschaftsimperium der Deutschen Arbeitsfront 1933–1945* (Göttingen, 2012).
[64] Ernst Fraenkel, *The Dual State: A Contribution to the Theory of Dictatorship* (New York, 1941), xiii.

Reich compare very favourably with the hardship and misery Germans had experienced during the Great Depression.[65] And the regime was adept at exploiting the emotional value of consumption, as Birthe Kundrus shows. *Volksgenossen* could take pleasure in feeling they were part of a mass consumer society without being too concerned about the racial segregation on which it was based. The promise of consumer goods that were soon to be had long remained credible because the officials of the National Socialist state did all they could to reduce the tensions resulting from the lag in actual supply. The success of the regime in winning over citizens in this way was based on a paradox: the prospect of individual happiness, of a life of secure 'normality', appeared to emerge out of a state doctrine that elevated the welfare of the *Volk* above the concerns of the individual and insisted that privacy could only be realized through its politicization. Andreas Wirsching's essay shows how Nazi propaganda promised that private happiness would grow out of a community that was strong on the outside and purified on the inside. Such dreams were, of course, limited to *Volksgenossen*. Yet their privileges, too, depended on full commitment to the collective. How and where, we may ask, were life aspirations of a basically bourgeois kind reconciled with the demands of a radically anti-individual state doctrine? One answer to this question is provided by Rüdiger Hachtmann in his analysis of informal forums such as political gentlemen's clubs, where members of the bourgeois elites could meet the new power brokers.

All the essays of Part III make it clear that the different ways in which *Volksgemeinschaft* was appropriated—with differing degrees of enthusiasm—resulted in a pluralization of the concept. As the example of women on the home front shows, acting in the interests of the *Volksgemeinschaft* did not necessarily imply or instil approval of the regime. There was space for individuals to follow their own leanings, as Nicole Kramer's essay reveals. But although differences in values, attitudes, and opinions by no means disappeared, a particular kind of engaged community did form—a 'community of action', as Frank Bajohr puts it—which displayed only minor deviations from the National Socialist norms that *Volksgemeinschaft* enshrined. Different interpretations, different instrumentalizations were acceptable to the regime so long as no open dissent was expressed.

The essays in Part IV concentrate on the most striking feature of the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* project: its violence. Christopher Browning takes up the central question: how was the Holocaust possible? *Volksgemeinschaft* and the Holocaust, in his view, were closely related: the exclusionist dynamic of the former was an important precondition for the mass murder of the European Jews. Sven Keller, meanwhile, looks at the violence that core Nazi followers perpetrated at the very beginning of the regime and just before its downfall. They made their violence widely visible in public—and not only in the occupied areas or in persecution of 'community aliens': even *Volksgenossen* could not be sure of their safety. Both cases were firm attempts to create stability through violence, and in both

[65] See Shelley Baranowski, *Strength through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 2004); Jonathan S. Wiesen, *Creating a Nazi Marketplace: Commerce and Consumption in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 2011).

cases the borders that defined the reach of *Volksgemeinschaft* were forcibly adjusted. But violence was also omnipresent in everyday life under the Nazi regime, often assuming subtle forms. Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann's analysis of social control shows clearly that the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* project did not follow a top-down model, but was shaped by a large number of actors. There was immense pressure on citizens to conform, even if the loyalty created by such pressure had its limits. The essays of Part IV demonstrate vividly that violence was an integral component of the *Volksgemeinschaft* utopia; and that *Volksgemeinschaft*, conversely, was a fundamental principle of violence.[66]

The concluding group of essays, those in Part V, suggest limits both to the reach of the *Volksgemeinschaft* project and to how far historiographical approaches can be based on it. Johannes Hürter studies the Third Reich's military elites. To the field marshals and generals, the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* promise was attractive mainly because its integrative, socially harmonious elements suited them. They expected nothing more from it. From the Nazis' point of view, the generals represented a virtually alien element within National Socialist society, and they resisted any relaxing of social inequality by way of a Nazi meritocracy. The question why such national conservative figures should commit themselves to a National Socialist racist war and pursue it to the bitter end cannot, according to Hürter, be explained by reference to the *Volksgemeinschaft* idea alone. When the world of rural Germany is examined, investigation of social relations through the lens of *Volksgemeinschaft* likewise has its limits. The master planners of the new agrarian order were certainly inspired by *Volksgemeinschaft*, as Willi Oberkrome demonstrates, but when they used the concept as a blueprint, they developed their own very different versions, and these visions had little in common with either the interests or the worldviews of the rural population for whom their plans were made.

In May 1945, the National Socialist project crashed in nemesis. In the hopeless situation Germans found themselves in, the *Volksgemeinschaft* notion began to lose all vestiges of its appeal—or so Richard Bessel contends. In this he disagrees with Sven Keller, whose analysis of violence demonstrates that loyalty to a sensed *Volksgemeinschaft* still had power to shape individual behaviour even in the last months of the regime. Richard Bessel looks at the complex transformation the Nazis' idea of a social utopia underwent in Germany's post-war society. People's rejection of *Volksgemeinschaft* was ambivalent: on the one hand, Germans experienced an atomized world in which a sense of community seemed lost; on the other, they still saw themselves as having a kind of togetherness, but now in a 'community of victims' and of 'fate' (*Opfer- und Schicksalsgemeinschaft*). In these self-perceptions, the Nazi social utopia left traces in both the GDR and the FRG.[67]

[66] Similarly Birthe Kundrus speaks of the *Volksgemeinschaft*'s increasing self-referentiality of German society towards the end of the war, a process that accompanied the 'transformation into a society in permanent struggle internally and externally'. Birthe Kundrus, 'Der Holocaust: Die "Volksgemeinschaft" als Verbrechensgemeinschaft?', in Thamer and Erpel (eds), *Hitler und die Deutschen*, 130–5, at 134.

[67] Süß, *Tod aus der Luft*, makes a similar argument.

Reading Room Copying Services

FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE *VOLKSGEMEINSCHAFT* CONCEPT

Together, the essays in this volume illustrate that the promise held out by *Volksgemeinschaft* was a powerful force in Nazi Germany. So far, in this introduction, we have established the heuristic value and have laid bare the historiographical roots of *Volksgemeinschaft* as a research perspective. The findings of the essays deepen and enrich our understanding of the social dynamic that was instigated by the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* promise. They enable us to systematize the meaning, power, and impact of the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept in the Third Reich, providing a model for future research. Despite its flexibility, the concept was far from being arbitrary. It had five very clear features. These five features, we suggest, defined the framework for social change in Nazi Germany.

Volksgemeinschaft referred, and this is its first feature, to an imagined order. Nazi functionaries used it as their blueprint to describe the structure into which they intended to reshape German society. *Volksgemeinschaft* thus signified an ideal, while also providing a framework of legitimization for concrete political transformations. Here a crucial factor was the lack of a clear-cut definition of what the concept meant: the label could be applied to almost anything. There was, in fact, hardly a field of social action or cultural production during the National Socialist dictatorship in which *Volksgemeinschaft* did not play a part. This is why, for historians, the concept provides a useful overall template for describing the direction and scope of the changes affecting the whole of society.

Secondly, the concept held out the hope of a brilliant future. The notion of *Volksgemeinschaft* evoked a utopia that promised both material well-being and a sense of purpose in which individual existence could be transcended in an almost limitless mission. Many Germans hoping for a better standard of living could accept the implementation of *Volksgemeinschaft* policies as a prerequisite for individual happiness. The concept kindled cohesion, self-motivation, and dynamism: it offered a positive alternative both to parliamentary democracy—widely rejected in Germany—and the pluralistic notions of order the Western industrial nations advocated. National Socialist linguistic imagery drew on established visual topoi representing cohesion and the feeling of community, but ultimately aimed to promote merit and achievement.[68] The concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* outbid the present in two ways: it promised redemption in a secular utopia of renewal, purification, and salvation, where dedication was both demanded and rewarded;[69] additionally, it held out the conviction that there could be 'more *Volksgemeinschaft*' tomorrow than today, so that every success, however small, could be seen as a step

[68] See Christian Fuhrmeister, 'Ikonografie der "Volksgemeinschaft"', in Thamer and Erpel (eds), *Hitler und die Deutschen*, 94–103.

[69] See Michael Burleigh, 'Political Religion and Social Evil', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 3 (2002), 1–60; Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919–1945* (Cambridge, 2003); Manfred Gailus and Armin Nolzen (eds), *Zerstrittene Volksgemeinschaft: Glaube, Konfession und Religion im Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen, 2011).

on the way towards a greater goal. This twofold outbidding of the present was brought home to Germans in such symbolic enactions as Hot Pot Sundays, the *Mutterkreuz* honouring of mothers, and the mass festivals and Party rallies.[70]

Thirdly, the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept set the dividing lines for a system of dual ascription distinguishing between *Volksgenossen* and *Gemeinschaftsfremde* ('community aliens'):[71] it established the rules of inclusion and exclusion which decided who belonged and what people's opportunities could be. Above all, the NSDAP functioned as a 'machine of inclusion' while also arranging 'cumulative exclusion' from the projected new society.[72] Despite all the rhetoric of social equality and all appeals to a racially united community, the German populace lived, of course, in a profoundly 'unequal society'.[73] The inequalities were, to be sure, highly variable. National Socialism gave its followers chances for social advancement while abandoning its opponents to social ostracism. The status of every individual within Nazi society could be reversed—with the exception of those categorically excluded on biologistic and racist grounds—and the situation was repeatedly updated and, if necessary, reconfigured through social and administrative means. A person's status of inclusion in the community was never fixed and absolute:[74] everyone, in a constant effort, had to secure a position within the structure of Nazi society by discursive means and symbolic acts. And, because the criteria for full membership of the projected *Volksgemeinschaft* were, in many respects, incoherent and ambiguous, this situation gave rise to constant processes of negotiation, which, in turn, might open up room for manoeuvre.[75]

Fourthly, the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept served as a reference point that could be used to justify a whole range of actions and positions taken in many social and political spheres. Its ubiquity and the great capacity to forge consensus that it evoked made the concept an ideal bargaining point in strategy and communication. Regardless of any belief in the desirability of the National Socialist utopia or its capacity for realization, citizens drew on '*Volksgemeinschaft*' when arguing in support of their own interests or when they wanted to signal partial agreement.[76] This drew people in. Especially in the early days of the National Socialist regime,

[70] See Markus Urban, *Die Konsensfabrik: Funktion und Wahrnehmung der NS-Reichsparteitage 1933–1941* (Göttingen, 2007); Árpád von Klimó and Malte Rolf, 'Rausch und Diktatur: Emotion, Erfahrung und Inszenierung totalitärer Herrschaft', in Árpád von Klimó and Malte Rolf (eds), *Rausch und Diktatur: Inszenierung, Mobilitierung und Kontrolle in totalitären Systemen* (Frankfurt, 2006), 11–43; Christian Bunnenberg, '"Daher sieht es die Partei als ihre vornehmste Aufgabe an . . .": "Schulungen" als Instrumente der Differenzierung und Kontrolle', in Kramer and Nolzen (eds), *Ungleichheiten*, 139–54.

[71] Peukert, *Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde*; Kramer and Nolzen (eds), *Ungleichheiten*.

[72] Armin Nolzen, 'Inklusion und Exklusion im Dritten Reich: Das Beispiel der NSDAP', in Bajohr and Wildt (eds), *Volksgemeinschaft*, 60–77.

[73] Süß and Süß, '"Volksgemeinschaft" und Vernichtungskrieg', 81.

[74] See Niklas Luhmann, 'Inklusion und Exklusion', in Niklas Luhmann, *Soziologische Aufklärung, vi: Die Soziologie und der Mensch* (2nd edn. Wiesbaden, 2005), 121–36.

[75] See the essays by Jane Caplan and Gerhard Wolf in this volume, and Andrew S. Bergerson, *Ordinary Germans in Extraordinary Times: The Nazi Revolution in Hildesheim* (Bloomington, Ind., 2004).

[76] See John Connelly, 'The Uses of *Volksgemeinschaft*: Letters to the NSDAP Kreisleitung Eisenach, 1939–1940', *Journal of Modern History*, 68/4 (1996), 899–930.

the relative openness and plurality of the term allowed many who had originally been critical of National Socialism to find themselves sheltering under its roof.[77] Thus discursive practice had the power to change reality or, if we see the political primarily as a communicative construct, the power actually to 'create' a social reality that had not previously existed. However, the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept was not infinitely elastic. As the Nazi regime changed the range of meanings the term covered, increasingly narrowing it down to its racist core, its usage changed very noticeably. At the beginning of Nazi rule, those who spoke of *Volksgemeinschaft* were invoking a multilayered formula for national unity; from the mid-1930s they were positioning themselves on the side of Nazi ideology; and by the end of the war they were legitimizing the use of unrestrained terror to discipline the home front.

As a fifth and final feature, the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept contained within it a call to action. It emitted an appeal to the *Volksgenossen* to advance the realization of the Nazi social utopia in the tangible social environment. Getting citizens to shape their communities as they went along accorded fully with the Nazi functionaries' aversion to theory, and as each initiative was made, it created or recreated spaces for new developments.[78] One of the best-known propaganda slogans summing up the *Volksgemeinschaft* idea was 'socialism of practical action' (*Sozialismus der Tat*). *Volksgemeinschaft* was learned by practice,[79] which in turn made more and more participation possible. The National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* project was not just suffered or experienced; many people took an active part in shaping it.

The model we propose for conceptualizing the meaning and impact of the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept in Nazi Germany—and this needs to be stressed—does not reintroduce the notion of any sort of actually existing national community. Rather, it captures the dynamism of social change and the contradictions inherent in the Nazis' social project. The same is true for our claim about the particular efficacy of *Volksgemeinschaft*, which we trace in two distinct contexts: the realm of the regime and the lives of individuals. While the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept provided the Nazi regime with a device for political and societal management, it also invited individual appropriation and interpretation, and it was therefore susceptible to combination with a variety of practices.

For the regime, *Volksgemeinschaft* was a hold-all concept that proved a flexible and effective tool for social engineering. In propaganda it exerted an integrative

[77] See the essay by Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann in this volume, and Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann, 'Einführung'.

[78] See Armin Nolzen, 'Planung und Durchführung der "Freimachungen" an der westlichen Reichsgrenze 1939/40', in Jochen Oltmer (ed.), *Nationalsozialistisches Migrationsregime und 'Volksgemeinschaft'* (Paderborn, 2012), 243–63; Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (London, 2003); Szejnmann and Umbach (eds), *Heimat, Region, Empire*; Ariane Leendertz, *Ordnung schaffen: Deutsche Raumplanung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2008); Uwe Mai, *"Rasse und Raum": Agrarpolitik, Sozial- und Raumplanung im NS-Staat* (Paderborn, 2002).

[79] See, for example, Kathrin Kollmeier, 'Erziehungsziel "Volksgemeinschaft": Kinder und Jugendliche in der Hitler-Jugend', in Klaus-Peter Horn and Jörg-W. Link (eds), *Erziehungsverhältnisse im Nationalsozialismus: Totaler Anspruch und Erziehungswirklichkeit* (Bad Heilbrunn, 2011), 59–106; Bernhard Gotto, 'Die NSDAP in Fürstenfeldbruck', in Ferdinand Kramer and Ellen Latzin (eds), *Fürstenfeldbruck in der NS-Zeit: Eine Kleinstadt bei München in den Jahren 1933 bis 1945* (Regensburg, 2009), 117–73, at 143–61.

effect and, furthermore, defined the Nazi social utopia in a conveniently 'packaged' way. The public's familiarity with the concept meant that those in power could use it to direct political discourse in a specific direction and could refine the semantic field that evolved around it. Since it held together other central tenets of Nazi ideology, the concept only achieved its own specific contours in conjunction with them all.[80] In addition to its function legitimizing political developments, the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept was useful to the regime in the context of social control. Preserving the integrity of the *Volksgemeinschaft* justified surveillance, repression, and terror;[81] reference to *Volksgemeinschaft* guided such action, and the resultant community could itself be the instrument of control. We have already seen how open the concept was: the flexibility with which it could be developed and defined was of crucial importance to the authorities.

Although the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept was essentially collective in spirit, it was ultimately directed at the individual. Its demands were insistently addressed to ordinary people in their everyday lives. The most radical consequences were, naturally, felt by those who were excluded: many were denied the right to life. Yet *Volksgenossen*, too, found themselves caught up in the Nazi social experiment, even if they could decide to a limited extent how far they were willing to commit themselves to it. If they committed fully, the *Volksgemeinschaft* would give them a full National Socialist identity, and this could be highly self-affirming. It was not only orientation towards the *Führer* and the *Volk* and the ascription of racial and biological quality that made them feel they belonged; their political reliability was honoured, and, in addition, the regime provided offers of specific roles, some of which could seem very attractive. The war increased such opportunities: a 'militarized *Volksgemeinschaft*' generated a large number of new roles, especially for women.[82]

Quite aside from this, the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept offered a clear pattern of order that reassuringly reduced social complexity. During the Weimar Republic the world seemed to have been turned upside down; society seemed to be frighteningly fragmented; values were put in question, and, it was believed, hallowed 'German' norms and practices were being suppressed. By contrast, the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* concept offered unequivocal clarity and the chance of commitment. It encouraged active participation and held out the promise of recognition regardless of social status and privilege in a society differentiated by criteria derived from race, biology, and an ethic of achievement. When people took part in the timeless, existential utopia the National Socialists offered, when they gave it their total conviction, it seemed they could transcend individual existence.

[80] See Steber, 'Region and National Socialist Ideology'.

[81] See, for example, Kerstin Thieler, 'Gesinnungskontrolle in Göttingen. Die NSDAP-Kreisleitung und die Beurteilung der "politischen Zuverlässigkeit"', in: Kramer and Nolzen (eds), *Ungleichheiten*, 117–38.

[82] See Nicole Kramer, *Volksgenossinnen an der Heimatfront*; Sybille Steinbacher (ed.), *Volksgenossinnen: Frauen in der NS-Volksgemeinschaft* (Göttingen, 2007); Elizabeth Harvey, *Women in the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven, 2003); Franka Maubach, *Die Stellung halten: Kriegserfahrungen und Lebensgeschichte von Wehrmachthelferinnen* (Göttingen, 2009).

Reading Room Copying Services
Humanities, Rare Books & Mus
Science, Business & IP Centre,
Monday 10.00
Tuesday to Thursday 09.30
Friday and Saturday 09.30
Sunday and English Public Holidays Closed
Asian & African Studies, Maps
Monday 10.00
Tuesday to Saturday 09.30
Sunday and English Public Holidays Closed
Copy Counters
Humanities 1, Rare Books & M
Newsroom, Science – floor 2
Monday 10.00
Tuesday to Thursday 09.30
Friday and Saturday 09.30
Asian & African Studies
Monday 10.00
Tuesday to Saturday 09.30
Please note: collection items s
the Issue Desk before the adve
Ordering in the R
Most collection items can be
catalogue Explore the British
specific delivery information
• Collection items can be ord
via our free wi-fi or on a Lib
• Items can be ordered for the

The democratic promise of participation and equality had thus been deprived of its liberal core, and had come to be based on racism and biologism instead.[83] Individuality and individual identity were, paradoxically, to be gained through a form of collective identity.[84] It is in this setting that we need to imagine the healthy, happy National Socialist couple sunbathing in the picture on our book cover.

The ambivalence in people's attitudes and behaviour can be explained in terms of the tensions they felt over their identities. After all, alternative versions of identity—religious, bourgeois, or socialist—did not simply disappear in 1933. They continued to exert their pull on people, even if the growing power of the *Volksgemeinschaft*'s imperatives promoted competing concepts, and undermined or rebranded the old ones. The attempts at amalgamation and synthesis made in the Nazi regime's early years were doomed to fail because of the constant radicalization of its message. For individuals, this posed practical problems in everyday life, as new research on subjectivities in the Third Reich impressively demonstrates.[85] If a citizen tried to retain old convictions, keeping them within the narrow bounds of the private sphere, this became increasingly difficult as the rules and practices of *Volksgemeinschaft* inexorably took over. To maintain a true and coherent individual identity was a daily challenge.[86]

The essays assembled in this volume show what a diversity of political levers the Nazis applied to the transformation of society. The institutions of government, local administration, and social security all perfected the bureaucratic techniques of gathering, filing, and sorting information the *Volksgemeinschaft* project needed. Political propaganda was freely unleashed, using the slick marketing techniques of the new consumer industries. New mechanisms and institutions were created, and agencies and forums, previously part of civil society, were absorbed and transformed to carry out the social engineering the *Volksgemeinschaft* project demanded. Individual *Volksgenossen* were therefore confronted with the strategies of *Volksgemeinschaft* in the most diverse areas of life and at all kinds of levels. The interplay between propaganda and the changes people saw around them gave the National Socialists' promises credibility, so long as they seemed to have some chance of realization. And where persuasion failed, control, repression, and violence could take over.

Propaganda images of a classless *Volksgemeinschaft* were, in fact, mere propaganda images. But people could believe such images were designs for the future.

[83] For the intellectual history, see Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New Haven, 2011).

[84] Moritz Föllmer has also recently pointed to this tension. Moritz Föllmer, 'Was Nazism Collectivistic? Redefining the Individual in Berlin, 1930–1945', *Journal of Modern History*, 82 (2010), 61–100; now Moritz Föllmer, *Individuality and Modernity in Berlin: Self and Society from Weimar to the Wall* (Cambridge, 2013); see also Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death*.

[85] Peter Fritzsche, *The Turbulent World of Franz Göll: An Ordinary Berliner Writes the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 2011); Nicholas Stargardt, 'The Troubled Patriot: German *Innerlichkeit* in World War II', *German History* 28/3 (2010), 326–42; Nicholas Stargardt, 'Beyond "Consent" or "Terror"; Föllmer, *Individuality*.

[86] Theodor Heuss is a good example. See Elke Seefried, 'Einführung: Theodor Heuss in der Defensive: Briefe 1933–1945', in Elke Seefried (ed.) *Theodor Heuss: In der Defensive: Briefe 1933–1945* (Munich, 2009), 15–70.

It is well known that the regime had little interest in social levelling. But the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept did hold out the prospect of social mobility within a *völkisch* meritocracy, as Hans-Ulrich Wehler has recently pointed out, in work that builds on that of Martin Broszat.[87] When citizens saw those of their own number gain advancement within the Party or within National Socialist institutions and organizations it must have given the impression that the bright future promised by *Volksgemeinschaft* was just around the corner.

Above all, people were battered and bamboozled by assaults and appeals and formalities on all sides. Those who lived under the Nazi regime encountered *Volksgemeinschaft* in many, often contradictory, forms: in tempting promises; in well-worn arguments; in suggested means for protecting and implementing personal interests; in being spied on or denounced; in brutal violence; in contrasting acts of social charity; in intoxicating communal events like the rallies; in bureaucratic classification; in propaganda catchphrases; in symbols of harmonious national unity; in models of the racist order; both as an offer of integration and an inexorable tool of exclusion. The essays in this volume illustrate these pushes and pulls with vivid examples. They bring out the complexity and the paradoxes inherent in the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept. This many-sidedness was, for many, what made *Volksgemeinschaft* acceptable—it was so easy to emphasize some aspects while blocking out others. Likewise, the complexity made it difficult for contemporaries either to distance themselves from this Nazi vision of community or to attack it. Perhaps this complexity helps explain two major puzzles for historians of the period: why the omnipresent *Volksgemeinschaft* concept was and is, even today, so hard to grasp; and how this social utopia could unfold such an absorbing and destructive power, which ended in mass murder and total destruction.

[87] Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, iv 681 and 684–90. Wehler borrows the concept of 'egalitäre Leistungs-Volksgemeinschaft' (egalitarian meritocratic *Volksgemeinschaft*) from Martin Broszat, 'Soziale Motivation und Führer-Bindung des Nationalsozialismus', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 18/4 (1970), 392–409, at 396.

Reading Room Copying Services

3

Volksgemeinschaft

A Modern Perspective on National Socialist Society

Michael Wildt

In Germany since the nineteenth century, the term *Gemeinschaft* ('community') has often been contrasted with *Gesellschaft* ('society'). The two concepts are seen as radically different and they form an oppositional framework for critical discourse on the increasingly dynamic and pluralized social conditions that have developed from industrialization, secularization, market orientation, and political liberalism. 'The yearning for *Gemeinschaft*', we are told, 'always springs from a reaction against the present, which is seen as bad. Therefore, the reality of such *Gemeinschaft* ideals is not to be found in the past, which is frequently invoked, but in the present.'[1] The idea of *Gemeinschaft* is constantly invoked as an ideal in critiques of modern *Gesellschaft*, and is an essential component of the soul-searching discourse surrounding the crisis of modernity. No German scholar has written more prolifically on this tension than Ferdinand Tönnies, whose book *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, published in 1887, elucidated the spirit of his age and defined the social discourse on this theme that would follow.[2]

The concept of *Gemeinschaft* conveys a yearning to overcome alienation, through both revolution and restoration. This ambivalence, between the restoration of what appears to be lost and the instigation of a seemingly better future society, was inherent in the idea of *Gemeinschaft* from the very start. When using *Volksgemeinschaft* as a historiographical term, therefore, one would be mistaken in assuming that it refers to a social reality that actually existed. The political leverage gained from invoking the *Volksgemeinschaft* lay not in its ability to define any society that had already been achieved, but rather in its future promise and its power to mobilize.[3]

In this essay I will first show that the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* was not originally a National Socialist one. Well before 1933 it had become the 'dominant political interpretative formula' in Germany, as Hans-Ulrich Thamer has

[1] Gérard Raulet, 'Die Modernität der "Gemeinschaft"', in Micha Brumlik and Hauke Brunkhorst (eds), *Gemeinschaft und Gerechtigkeit* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993), 72–93, at 73.

[2] Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, ed. Jose Harris (Cambridge, 2001).

[3] See Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt (eds), *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009).

Copyright and Privacy

demonstrated (I).[4] With this background established, I will examine historiographical analyses of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (II). This will give us the perspective to view *Volksgemeinschaft* not as an achieved social reality, but rather as a social practice that drew ever-shifting borders between belonging and ostracism in everyday life (III). This view also suggests new lines of enquiry which are by no means exhausted, but demonstrate the fruitfulness of investigating the practices subsumed within this conception of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The practices include collectivity-building, ostracism, and self-empowerment (IV).

I

The notion of *Volksgemeinschaft* was promoted early on as a key concept within right-wing *völkisch* circles, oriented around the ethno-nationalist conception of *Volk* or 'people'. But its popularity was really established during the First World War, when the leadership needed to unite the German population behind the imperial war flag. The sentiment expressed by Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1914, that he no longer recognized political parties but simply Germans, was a simple but apt summation of the situation. It underlined not only the political necessity of mobilizing the entire population behind the war effort, but also the need to include and integrate individuals within a larger whole—and this was also the desire of the Social Democrats and German Jews. Even though class conflicts soon re-emerged in wartime society, and old anti-Semitic sentiments became common once again, the notion of *Volksgemeinschaft*, with its promise of a better future based upon a mythic past, never lost its magic.[5]

In the early twentieth century, use of the term *Volk* increasingly overtook references to the German *Nation* (nation). *Volk* has more flexible meanings, and this is precisely what made it more attractive than *Nation*, which was loaded with ambivalences connected with the 'nation-state' and the *Kulturnation* (cultural nation), and which unavoidably harked back to the archetypal French 'nation' with its birth through revolution. The idea of *Nation* was far more strongly connected to the idea of 'state' than the *Volk* concept was. And the term *Volk* was much better than *Nation* for conveying an agenda of ethnicization, biological determinism, and Social Darwinism. Eric Hobsbawm has pointed out that ethnic membership and semantic usage became central criteria for defining the nation at the end of the nineteenth century. In particular, special interest groups that declared themselves

[4] Hans-Ulrich Thamer, 'Volksgemeinschaft: Mensch und Masse', in Richard van Dülmen (ed.), *Erfindung des Menschen: Schöpfungsträume und Körperbilder 1500–2000* (Vienna, 1998), 367–88, at 367.

[5] See Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge, 2000); Steffen Bruendel, *Volksgemeinschaft oder Volksstaat: Die 'Ideen von 1914' und die Neuordnung Deutschlands im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 2003); and, still unsuperseded, George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York, 1964).

to be a *Volk* or *Nation* but had no separate state of their own generally based their claims on an ethnic argument.[6]

Unlike the French or the British, the Germans had long been divided into many small states and thus could not define themselves as a classical nation-state. This made them particularly susceptible to the ethnicizing ideology of the *Volk*. The concept of the *Volk* as *demos*, which is central to a civil society based on the ideals of constitutional solidarity and legal equality, was contrasted with the idea of *Volk* as *ethnos*, which combined imaginary shared genetic inheritances, mythic histories, and fantasies of shared blood and soil. With the emergence of biological determinism, alterity—the notion of the 'other'—was formalized as a fact of nature, so that simple genealogical details became inescapable genetic incompatibilities, which by definition could not be assimilated. As a result, the original project of assimilation was replaced by policies of segregation and elimination, which ultimately became genocidal.[7]

Carl Schmitt recognized these ambivalences and tried to bend them towards an anti-parliamentary, anti-liberal stance by insisting that every democratic constitutional order had to be founded upon a politically anchored *Volk* defined by identity and homogeneity.[8] German legal theorists who supported a strong state considered the civil state, as conceived by Hugo Preuß, father of the Weimar constitution, incapable of ever winning a majority; and while the Social Democrats, who were the leading power behind the November Revolution, may have been successful in installing a parliamentary republic (as opposed to the competing Soviet Republic system), they failed to create a constitutional theory of their own that could do more than simply call for parliamentarianism.[9] The idea of *Gemeinschaft*, especially *Volksgemeinschaft*, seemed to offer a semantic strategy for countering resentments against the unpopular Republic, without abandoning the republican principle of sovereignty vested in the people.[10]

Gemeinschaft was, as the sociologist Helmuth Plessner, an astute observer of the period, remarked in 1924, the 'idol of this age'.[11] Nearly all political parties advocated the *Volksgemeinschaft* as a political programme. Their respective concepts were, however, marked by differences that were sometimes fundamental, sometimes merely a question of degree. The Left Liberals proposed a conception of *Volksgemeinschaft* that was meant to negate notions of class struggle and encourage the social unity of the nation. In 1928, the German Democratic Party (DDP) stated in its election manifesto: 'The basic principle of our domestic policy will forever be the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, which we promote in contrast to those

[6] See Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1990).

[7] See Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge, 2005).

[8] See William E. Scheuerman, *Carl Schmitt: The End of Law* (Lanham, Md., 1999).

[9] See Peter C. Caldwell and William Scheuerman (eds), *From Liberal Democracy to Fascism: Legal and Political Thought in the Weimar Republic* (Boston, 2000).

[10] See Michael Wildt, 'Die Ungleichheit des Volkes: "Volksgemeinschaft" in der politischen Kommunikation der Weimarer Republik', in Bajohr and Wildt (eds), *Volksgemeinschaft*, 24–40.

[11] Helmuth Plessner, *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism* (New York, 1999), 65.

Handling the Collection
with care and
Reading Room Copying Service
Items in our collections can be copied, subject to UK
Humanities, Rare Boo
Science, Business &
Monday
Tuesday to Thursday
Friday and Saturday
Sunday and English
Public Holidays
Asian & African Studi
Monday
Tuesday to Saturday
Sunday and English
Public Holidays
Copy Counters
Humanities 1, Rare B
Newsroom, Science –
Monday
Tuesday to Thursday
Friday and Saturday
Asian & African Studi
Monday
Tuesday to Saturday
Please note: collection
the Issue Desk before t
Ordering in t
Most collection items
catalogue Explore the
specific delivery infor
• Collection items can
via our free wi-fi or o
• Items can be ordered
visit
• Some items are store
be delivered
• There is no delivery of offsite material on Saturdays
• If ordering items using Explore the British Library:

political parties that try to inflame conflicts between "nationalist" and Marxist, between urban and rural, and between races, religions, and classes.'[12] For the Left Liberals the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* was inextricably linked with democracy. According to Gustav Schneider, a trade union figure who spoke at the DDP party congress in 1924, the Weimar constitution represented a basic foundation, and 'the only one on which a true *Volksgemeinschaft* is possible'.[13]

Similarly, the German Centre Party (*Zentrum*), which represented Catholics, saw itself as a 'broadly based Christian party which explicitly stands for the German *Volksgemeinschaft*'.[14] However, the Centre Party resolutely opposed far-right, anti-Christian interpretations: 'We explicitly reject all divisive differentiations that divide our *Volk*. We defend ourselves against a new schism which is being precipitated by a so-called "neo-Germanic" spirituality that confuses our *Volk*.'[15]

Even the Social Democrats flirted with the notion of *Volksgemeinschaft*. The instability after the collapse of the old Reich, when the Social Democrats took up the political mantle but felt threatened by revolutionary leftists and their attempted rebellions, led to a rhetoric of domestic cohesion and unity, and to a rejection of any divisiveness. For the Social Democrats the working class had, in the course of its history, become the large majority. They juxtaposed that majority with an infinitesimally small—and unjustifiably powerful—minority of entrepreneurs and estate owners.

After his election as president in February 1919, Friedrich Ebert appealed for unity among *Volksgenossen* on his very first day in office.[16] Until his death in 1925, his speeches often included references to the *Volksgemeinschaft*, which he saw as essential for achieving unity, cohesion, and sovereignty. Within the Hofgeismar Circle, in many other Social Democratic youth groups, and especially in the Social Democratic paramilitary organization, the Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold, the notion of *Volksgemeinschaft* assumed central significance in the political discourse. The constitutional scholar Hermann Heller, whose democratic convictions were impeccable, attempted to formulate a Social Democratic answer to the nationalist challenge: 'By no means does socialism signify the end of the national *Gemeinschaft*, but rather its fulfilment; it is not the extermination of the national *Volksgemeinschaft* by class, but the extermination of class by a truly national *Volksgemeinschaft*.'[17]

[12] Quoted in Werner Schneider, *Die Deutsche Demokratische Partei in der Weimarer Republik 1924–1930* (Munich, 1978), 48 n. 82; see Eric Kurlander, *Living with Hitler: Liberal Democrats in the Third Reich* (New Haven, 2009).

[13] Reichsgeschäftsstelle of the DDP Berlin, *Staat und Wirtschaft: Rede von Gustav Schneider, Bundesvorsitzender des Gewerkschaftsbundes der Angestellten auf dem Reichsparteitag der Deutschen Demokratischen Partei in Weimar am 6. April 1924* (Berlin, n.d.), 3.

[14] 'Richtlinien der Deutschen Zentrumspartei, 16.1.1922', printed in Herbert Lepper (ed.), *Volk, Kirche, Vaterland: Wahlaufrufe, Aufrufe, Satzungen und Statuten des Zentrums 1870–1933* (Düsseldorf, 1998), 418.

[15] 'Wahlaufruf der Deutschen Zentrumspartei zu den Reichstagswahlen, 14.3.1924', in Lepper (ed.), *Volk, Kirche, Vaterland*, 430.

[16] Friedrich Ebert, *Schriften, Aufzeichnungen, Reden*, 2 vols (Dresden, 1926), ii., 159.

[17] Hermann Heller, 'Sozialismus und Nation' [1925], in Hermann Heller, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leiden, 1971), i, 468. See Franz Walter, *'Republik, das ist nicht viel': Partei und Jugend in der Krise des Weimarer Sozialismus* (Bielefeld, 2011); Stefan Vogt, *Nationaler Sozialismus und Soziale Demokratie: Die sozialdemokratische Junge Rechte 1918–1945* (Bonn, 2006).

This was not just lip service. Energized by the shared experience of serving in the trenches on the front line, where differences in social rank, education, and class had become irrelevant, many people after the war had a strong impulse to merge 'into the *Volk*'. This was especially so among young academics, as with the youth movement in general, and the tendency was closely linked to calls for a *Volksgemeinschaft*. Thus at the first German Students' Day in July 1919, the Catholic social reformer and student leader Carl Sonnenschein proclaimed: 'We need academics who love their *Volk* and stand by their *Volk*, whose gospel is not "detachment" but rather the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Down with snobbery and caste thinking! We want to belong to our *Volk*.'[18] Supporters of the popular education movement in the Weimar Republic took a similar stance. The Social Democrat Konrad Haenisch, who was Prussia's Minister of Education and Culture, justified the establishment of centres for adult education (*Volkshochschulen*) by underlining the need for a 'cooperative effort between all parts of the *Volk*. We need to build bridges between that small section of the *Volk* that does intellectual work, and the ever-growing section made up of *Volksgenossen* who may work with their hands, but are mentally hungry.'[19]

Young teachers and clergymen also heeded the call to build up the *Volksgemeinschaft*. In the Weimar Republic, some two thousand rural clergymen belonged to the village church movement (*Dorfkirchenbewegung*), bringing a new '*Volk* consciousness' to the villages. The aim was to lead the locals out of the narrow confines of village concerns into the greater mass consciousness of a liberated *Volk* nationwide. This vision of the *Volksgemeinschaft* 'bestowed a religious consecration; a secular subject was reframed as the great white hope of the village church'.[20]

In the political discourse of the Weimar Republic, a significant characteristic of the *Volksgemeinschaft* notion was clearly its potential for translating the supposed unity of the *Volk* (whether in political, social, or cultural terms) into homogeneity. This is why the concept resonated in so many ways for the political Right, which was similarly promoting its vision of *Volksgemeinschaft*. However, the Right's ideal of homogeneity was primarily geared towards eliminating any political diversity. It defined membership in the *Gemeinschaft* in racist categories and was ultimately prepared to achieve homogeneity by violent means.

[18] Quoted by Jens Wietschorke, '"Ins Volk gehen!": Zur kulturellen Logik der Volksfreundschaft im deutschen Bürgertum vor 1933', *Historische Anthropologie*, 18/1 (2010), 88–119, at 103.

[19] Quoted by Paul Ciupke, 'Diskurse über Volk, Gemeinschaft und Demokratie in der Erwachsenenbildung der Weimarer Zeit', in Paul Ciupke et al. (eds), *'Die Erziehung zum deutschen Menschen': Völkische und nationalkonservative Erwachsenenbildung in der Weimarer Republik* (Essen, 2007), 11–30, at 13. One of the most influential Weimar intellectuals on *Volk* and *Volksgemeinschaft* was Max Hildebert Boehm. See Ulrich Prehn, *Max Hildebert Boehm: Radikales Ordnungsdenken vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis in die Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen, 2013).

[20] Wolfram Pyta, *Dorfgemeinschaft und Parteipolitik 1918–1933: Die Verschränkung von Milieu und Parteien in den protestantischen Landgebieten Deutschlands in der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf, 1996), 247; Tanja Hetzer, *'Deutsche Stunde': Volksgemeinschaft und Antisemitismus in der politischen Theologie bei Paul Althaus* (Munich, 2009).

According to Hans-Ulrich Thamer, the notion of *Volksgemeinschaft* was of central significance in Hitler's worldview.[21] The Nazi Party presented itself as a youthful *Volkspartei*—a party that appealed to all classes—and Adolf Hitler took on the charismatic role of *Führer* for the entire *Volk*, dedicated to fulfilling people's yearnings for both continuity and change, and for unity and salvation within a future *Volksgemeinschaft*.[22] For example, in the politically liberal south-west of Germany, the Nazi Party was successful in taking over the stagnating local culture of clubs and associations. It persuaded local party branches to coordinate their activities with those of existing clubs and associations, and it rejected elitist membership regulations, thereby inviting all *Volksgenossen* to participate, whether Catholic or Protestant, farmer or tradesman, merchant or labourer, male or female. The Catholic petite bourgeoisie was especially eager to accept this invitation to join the mainstream, having been culturally excluded ever since the Second Reich's foundation under Protestant/Prussian dominance, followed by Bismarck's implementation of the anti-Catholic *Kulturkampf*.[23]

Despite all the rhetoric of inclusion propounded by the political Right, their version of the *Volksgemeinschaft* was, in fact, defined by limits and exclusions. The Right was less concerned about who belonged to the *Volksgemeinschaft* than with who could not belong, that is, those who were already being semantically ostracized as *Gemeinschaftsfremde* (community aliens), primarily the Jews. This was clearly not to be the civil society of the liberal nation-state. Here, anti-Semitism played a central part. The racist and anti-Semitic borderline became inextricably embedded in this construction of the *Volk* as a 'natural blood-based *Gemeinschaft*' striving to define its own political system. Anti-Semitism was the founding bedrock of the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft*, exacerbating its radical nature and destructive potential. The Nazi Party platform of 1920 explicitly stated that 'one can be a citizen only if one is a *Volksgenosse*. One can be a *Volksgenosse* only if one is of German blood, regardless of religious confession. Therefore no Jew can be a *Volksgenosse*.'

Anti-Semitism was the main feature differentiating this Nazi notion of *Volksgemeinschaft* from the competing one that harked back to the 'spirit of 1914'. The 'August experience' then was explicitly inclusive of all Germans, even Social Democrats and Jews, who had grounds to hope that a show of patriotism would ultimately lead to their acceptance into mainstream society.[24] Conversely, anti-Semitism and the National Socialist version of *Volksgemeinschaft* were so

[21] Hans-Ulrich Thamer, 'Nation als Volksgemeinschaft: Völkische Vorstellungen, Nationalsozialismus und Gemeinschaftsideologie', in Jörg-Dieter Gauger and Klaus Weigelt (eds), *Soziales Denken in Deutschland zwischen Tradition und Innovation* (Bonn, 1990), 112–28, at 122.

[22] See Ludolf Herbst, *Hitlers Charisma: Die Erfindung eines deutschen Messias* (Frankfurt am Main, 2010).

[23] See Oded Heilbronner, *'Freiheit, Gleichheit, Brüderlichkeit und Dynamit': Populäre Kultur, populärer Liberalismus und Bürgertum im ländlichen Süddeutschland von den 1860ern bis zu den 1930ern* (Munich, 2007), 82–92.

[24] This was still being expressed by trade unions in the spring of 1933, when the call for May Day included an appeal that the German worker should become 'a fully entitled member of the German *Volksgemeinschaft*'. Quoted in Thamer, 'Volksgemeinschaft: Mensch und Masse', 384.

inextricably intertwined that those who felt a resonance with the Nazi promise of inclusion and agreed with the Nazi regime's *Volksgemeinschaft* propaganda after 1933 necessarily supported anti-Semitic exclusion, even though they might not have been anti-Semites before.

This vision of *Volksgemeinschaft* with its anti-pluralistic yearnings that so rabidly rejected the existing Weimar democracy was strongly oriented towards the future. The *Volksgemeinschaft* was not a reality that already existed, but still needed to be achieved—it was *Volksgemeinschaft* as a 'politics of promise', as Thomas Mergel puts it.[25] This inspirational concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* combined a criticism of the existing situation with a 'will to change', ultimately, according to Martin Broszat, unleashing a powerful 'social impetus to the benefit of the Nazi Party, expressing itself as an unprecedented frenzy of activity, inventiveness, self-sacrifice, and energy among Nazi members and supporters, as could already be seen during the Party's pre-1933 struggle to power. It especially helps to explain the extraordinary motivation and dedication shown by large parts of the nation under the Hitler regime.'[26]

II

For a long time German historians treated the *Volksgemeinschaft* as merely a propaganda buzzword. Heinrich August Winkler spoke of its 'Mythos', while Bernd Weisbrod referred to its 'illusoriness'.[27] In particular, Hans Mommsen insisted that the notion of *Volksgemeinschaft* was only a pretence at supporting social integration, and that the middle classes were much more susceptible to its line of argument than the working classes. It is in this belief that, even today, Mommsen argues that the term *Volksgemeinschaft* should be avoided in analytical contexts, because it is too much coloured by Goebbels's propaganda.[28]

But it would be a mistake to think that the *Volksgemeinschaft* really did signify a social reality in Nazi Germany in which class differences, disparities of wealth, and property entitlements had been levelled out. As I have pointed out, the concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft* drew its political power not from a social reality achieved, but rather from its promise, and the mobilization it inspired. In the 1970s, Martin

[25] Thomas Mergel, 'Führer, Volksgemeinschaft und Maschine: Politische Erwartungsstrukturen in der Weimarer Republik und dem Nationalsozialismus 1918–1936', in Wolfgang Hardtwig (ed.), *Politische Kulturgeschichte der Zwischenkriegszeit 1918–1939* (Göttingen, 2005), 91–127.

[26] Martin Broszat, 'Soziale Motivation und Führer-Bindung des Nationalsozialismus', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 18/4 (1970), 392–409, at 396.

[27] Heinrich August Winkler, 'Vom Mythos der Volksgemeinschaft', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 17 (1977), 484–90, at 485; Bernd Weisbrod, 'Der Schein der Modernität: Zur Historisierung der "Volksgemeinschaft"', in Karsten Rudolph and Christl Wickert (eds), *Geschichte als Möglichkeit: Über die Chancen von Demokratie* (Essen, 1995), 224–42.

[28] Hans Mommsen, 'Forschungskontroversen zum Nationalsozialismus', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 14–5 (2007), 14–21; see also Hans Mommsen, 'Hitler und der Mythos der Volksgemeinschaft: Zur Auflösung der bürgerlichen Nation', in Dan Diner, Gideon Reuveni and Yfaat Weiss (eds), *Deutsche Zeiten: Geschichte und Lebenswelt* (Göttingen, 2012), 132–140.

ing Rooms
umanities, Rare Books & Music, Newsroom
cience, Business & IP Centr
Monday 10
Tuesday to Thursda
Friday and Saturday
Sunday and English
Public Holidays

Asian & African Stu
Monday
Tuesday to Saturday
Sunday and English
Public Holidays

Copy Counters

Humanities 1, Rare B
Newsroom, Science –
Monday
Tuesday to Thursday
Friday and Saturday

Asian & African Studi
Monday
Tuesday to Saturday

Please note: collection
the Issue Desk before th

Ordering in th

Most collection items c
catalogue Explore the B
specific delivery informa

- Collection items can be
via our free wi-fi or on a
- Items can be ordered fo
visit
- Some items are stored o
be delivered
- There is no delivery of o
- If ordering items using E
  - Online Help, printed
  are available
- You may order up to ten items per day (restrictions
apply in the Manuscripts Reading Room)
- Remember to change the

Please handle all collection items with care and
respect at all times and bear the following in mind:

Items in our collections can be copied, subject
copyright legislation and preservation guidelin

Broszat was already able to state that the 'insufficient clarity and dishonesty of the Nazi Party's social promises do not invalidate the social dynamics which actually underpinned the Party's success among the masses and were kept in motion by the Nazi regime'.[29] Broszat spoke of the 'appeal of both modernity and mobilization in the Nazi movement',[30] and stressed that the *Volksgemeinschaft* slogan was 'a call to sweep aside relics of the social hierarchies and norms that existed before the emergence of industrial civil society, and a call to build a modern, mobile, national civil society for the masses'.[31] Unless National Socialism's dynamic power to motivate society is taken into consideration, Broszat noted, 'neither the regime's character as a mass movement nor the extraordinarily ambitious energy it mobilized can be completely understood'.[32] Hans-Ulrich Wehler, in his social history of Germany, also emphasized that the *Volksgemeinschaft* was associated with the 'appeal of modernity' and a mobilization push, precipitating a broader transformational dynamic. This was decisive in legitimizing the regime, especially for the younger generation.[33]

Frank Bajohr's recent research on armaments production suggests that this economic upswing benefited certain industries and regions more than others. The armaments boom, in particular, produced many inequalities and disparities. Beyond the Ruhr, one of the biggest regional winners was central Germany, where new industrial centres were growing. In cities such as Magdeburg, Halle, Dessau, Halberstadt, and Bitterfeld the number of industrial workers doubled within a few years. Furthermore, the city of Rostock, with its shipyards and Heinkel aircraft factory, saw its population increase by one-third in just six years, from 90,000 in 1933 to 120,000 in 1939. Overall, the biggest boom took place in the aircraft industry, with an unprecedented increase in the workforce involved, rising from fewer than 4,000 workers in January 1933 to some 325,000 in 1939. The aircraft industry attracted workers with its wage premiums, modern production facilities, impressive performance statistics, newly built housing, and elevated social prestige as a 'high-tech' sector. In 1935, a Social Democratic union steward accused aircraft workers of being excessively self-centred because they had no appetite for political action, meaning union organization. As described by Frank Bajohr, these predominantly younger workers, with their strong individualism and ambitions, were no longer receptive to the message of the traditional workers' movement; instead, they opened themselves wholeheartedly to the efforts the Nazi regime made to integrate them.[34]

[29] Broszat, 'Soziale Motivation', 393.
[30] Martin Broszat, 'Zur Struktur der NS-Massenbewegung', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 31/1 (1983), 52–76, at 66.
[31] Broszat 'Zur Struktur der NS-Massenbewegung'; see also David Welch, 'Nazi Propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft: Constructing a People's Community', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 39/2 (2004), 213–38.
[32] Broszat, 'Soziale Motivation', 397.
[33] Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, iv: *Vom Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges bis zur Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten 1914–1949* (Munich, 2003), at 681.
[34] Frank Bajohr, 'Dynamik und Disparität: Die nationalsozialistische Rüstungsmobilisierung und die "Volksgemeinschaft"', in Bajohr and Wildt (eds), *Volksgemeinschaft*, 78–93.

The regime's efforts to pay symbolic tribute to the workforce should not be underestimated, especially in a society in which they had traditionally been seen as inferior to the middle class, not to mention the aristocracy. As early as May Day 1933, the 'honour of work' was frequently mentioned. In the following months there were numerous factory visits by Robert Ley, the leader of the German Labour Front, the National Socialist corporatist successor to the independent trade unions. During these visits, he always made a point of shaking hands with employees at the workbench.[35] The term '*deutsche Qualitätsarbeit*' (high-quality work from Germany), promoted by entrepreneurs and trade unions from the end of the nineteenth century, was still on the agenda during the National Socialist regime, instilling an element of pride in workers for their skill and competence. Moreover, German workers, who made up the majority of the German army, could go on to regard their murderous wartime duties as 'Qualitätsarbeit'. Alf Lüdtke quotes a letter written by Herbert Habermalz, a sergeant who had previously been employed as a clerk. After a flight from Cracow to Warsaw in June 1943, he wrote to his colleagues: 'We flew several circles above the city. And with great satisfaction we could recognize the complete extermination of the Jewish Ghetto. There our folks did a really fantastic job. There is no house which has not been totally destroyed. This we saw the day before yesterday. And yesterday we took off to Odessa. We received special food, extra cookies, additional milk and butter, and, above all, a very big bar of bittersweet chocolate.'[36]

Volksgemeinschaft did not mean socialist equality, as Götz Aly claims,[37] but deliberate inequality. Although National Socialist propaganda emphasized the elimination of class barriers and the unity of the *Volk*, in reality its version of *Volksgemeinschaft* was structured according to new inequalities, in which the inclusiveness of the *Volksgenossen* was accompanied by massive processes of exclusion. In the early 1980s, Detlev Peukert was already underlining this dualism between *Volksgenossen* and *Gemeinschaftsfremde*.[38] Norbert Frei has since highlighted the testimonies of contemporaries who, despite the continuing prevalence of material and social disparities, nonetheless experienced a 'perceived equality', which was an important factor in building loyalty.[39]

However, even *Volksgenossen* were not citizens with guaranteed civil rights; the system was not concerned with the legal equality of individuals. Instead, the

[35] Alf Lüdtke, 'The "Honor of Labor": Industrial Workers and the Power of Symbols under National Socialism', in David F. Crew (ed.), *Nazism and German Society, 1933–1945* (New York, 1994), 67–109, at 69–71.
[36] Alf Lüdtke, 'The Appeal of Exterminating "Others": German Workers and the Limits of Resistance', in Christian Leitz (ed.), *The Third Reich: Essential Readings* (Oxford, 1999), 151–78, at 175; see also Alf Lüdtke, 'People Working: Everyday Life and German Fascism', *History Workshop Journal*, 50 (2000), 77–92.
[37] Götz Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State* (New York, 2007).
[38] Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition and Racism in Everyday Life* (London, 1998).
[39] Norbert Frei, '"Volksgemeinschaft": Erfahrungsgeschichte und Lebenswirklichkeit der Hitler-Zeit', in Norbert Frei, *1945 und wir: Das Dritte Reich im Bewußtsein der Deutschen* (Munich, 2005), 107–28; see also Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, 1998).

Volksgemeinschaft focused on the *Volk* itself, particularly in the biological or organic sense of its collective body (*Volkskörper*). The regime's central slogan was: 'You are nothing, your *Volk* is everything'. The *Volksgemeinschaft* was not about egalitarian satisfaction, but about racial mobilization; not about socialism for the nation, but about increased performance towards the development of the German *Volkskörper*.[40]

In this context, it is worth considering Michel Foucault's thesis that after the end of the eighteenth century Europe saw the emergence of a new form of sovereign power that was no longer derived from the power to kill, but from the control of life processes through technologies of power, such as birth control, fertility rates, hygiene, and disease prevention. Foucault calls this new style of sovereign power 'biopolitics'. 'One might say that the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live was replaced by a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death.'[41]

There is no doubt that this concept was a central component of National Socialist propaganda. At the same time, it cannot be denied that for large sections of the German public, the *Volksgemeinschaft* really did represent a worthwhile social aspiration, although different groups may have applied very different meanings to the term. In whatever way it was understood, it offered a possible point of contact or of sympathetic alignment with the Nazi regime, and this is a significant aspect for analysing the nature of authority and society under National Socialism. According to Norbert Frei, 'the question of the *Volksgemeinschaft* lies at the heart of the problem'.[42]

III

Everyday life saw the drawing of borders between those who did and those who did not belong to the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Beate Meyer tells the illuminating story of a boy who, as a 'Jewish half-breed', was not yet excluded by his classmates in the pre-war years. But when they decided to imitate the novels of Karl May by conducting a blood-brother ritual like the one performed by Winnetou and Old Shatterhand, the act of exclusion took place. As skins were nicked and blood was mixed, his friends drew a line he could not cross. Later, in a 1993 interview, he recounted: 'Then they told me: "That's not allowed." They explained it to me and were a bit ashamed, but they stuck to it. They had already learned this much.'[43] This anecdote supports Ian Kershaw's contention that the concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft* could prove especially valuable 'as a conceptual device to explore the ways in which ordinary Germans gradually committed themselves to a trajectory of escalating persecution ending in the death camps'.[44]

[40] See also Ute Planert, 'Der dreifache Körper des Volkes: Sexualität, Biopolitik und die Wissenschaft vom Leben', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 26 (2000), 539–76.
[41] Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality* (London 1990), i., 138.
[42] Frei, 'Volksgemeinschaft', 128.
[43] Beate Meyer, 'Erfühlte und erdachte "Volksgemeinschaft": Erfahrungen "jüdischer Mischlinge" zwischen Integration und Ausgrenzung', in Bajohr and Wildt (eds), *Volksgemeinschaft*, 144–64, at 151.
[44] Kershaw, in this volume, p. 35.

Putting it even more explicitly than Kershaw, I want to emphasize that this border between inclusion and exclusion was not a given fact. Such borders did not simply exist; they had to be actively drawn. After coming to power, the National Socialists took the cultivation of the *Volksgemeinschaft* as their primary mission, to be pursued even out in the provinces, villages, and smallest communities. This meant drawing a racist border through local populations, trampling on civil society's existing legal system, and implementing the grassroots expulsion of Jews as a first step towards the ultimate 'removal of the Jews' altogether. *Volksgemeinschaft* policies were first and foremost policies directed against the Jews in the local neighbourhood, along with Roma, Sinti, other *Gemeinschaftsfremde* and *Fremdvölkische* (members of foreign races).

The boycott of Jewish businesses on 1 April 1933 was suspended after just one day in the big cities, which had police and foreign observers to exercise control; however, out in the provinces, small towns, and villages, the boycott opened up a political arena in which the local chapters of the SS and the Nazi Party could influence the social, cultural, and political patterns of the community. The boycott allowed experimentation with various forms of activism, such as putting up street posters and banners, standing guard outside Jewish shops, directly asking customers not to enter such businesses, and even using insults and violence.[45]

In addition to these aggressive boycotts, the summer of 1935 saw more campaigns to denounce marriage or sexual relations with Jewish partners as 'race defilement' (*Rassenschande*). This was several months before the decree in the Nuremberg Laws was issued in September. Accusations were made all across the Reich, with constant attacks in newspapers, flyers, and demonstrations, and the alleged 'race defilers' were forced to march through the streets. These marches passed through busy streets in broad daylight. Looking at the photographic documentation, one notices the crowds, including women, children, and teenagers, who walked alongside the victims, laughing, teasing, insulting, and spitting at them. Their voyeuristic pleasure, over and above collusion and participation in punishing this transgression against 'racial honour', is unmistakeable. With these 1935 campaigns against *Rassenschande*, the National Socialists had found another field of everyday life in which they could effectively draw a border around the *Volksgemeinschaft*.[46]

Everybody could join in and take part, without needing to assume individual responsibility or leadership. Even the most cowardly could punch, kick, and otherwise exercise violence, without fear of retaliation from the victim. The backing of the community of perpetrators ensured that violence against the victim was multiplied and minimized any perpetrator's fear of being hurt himself, or of suffering injuries to his own body. This collective act of violence against the Jews was not only a brutal way of excluding the 'other', but also served to build the

[45] Cf. Hannah Ahlheim, *'Deutsche, kauft nicht bei Juden!': Antisemitismus und politischer Boykott in Deutschland 1924 bis 1935* (Göttingen, 2011); Michael Wildt, *Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft and the Dynamics of Racial Exclusion: Violence against Jews in Provincial Germany, 1919–1939* (New York, 2011), 105–32.
[46] See Alexandra Przyrembel, *'Rassenschande': Reinheitsmythos und Vernichtungslegitimation im Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen, 2003).

Reading Rooms
Humanities, Rare Books & Music, Newsroom,
Science, Business & IP Centre
Monday
Tuesday to Thursday
Friday and Saturday
Sunday and English
Public Holidays
Asian & African Stu
Monday
Tuesday to Saturday
Sunday and English
Public Holidays
Copy Counters
Humanities 1, Rare B
Newsroom, Science –
Monday
Tuesday to Thursday
Friday and Saturday
Asian & African Studies
Monday
Tuesday to Saturday
Please note: collection it
the Issue Desk before the
Ordering in the
Most collection items can
catalogue Explore the Brit
specific delivery informati
• Collection items can be or
via our free wi-fi or on a Li
• Items can be ordered for th
visit
• Some items are stored offsi
be delivered
There is no delivery of offsit
If ordering items using Explo
• Online Help, printed gu
are available
• You may order up to ten items per day (restrictions
apply in the Manuscripts Reading Room)
• Remember to change the date required, if you are
not ordering for the current
Please handle all collection items with care and
respect at all times and bear the following in mind:
Reading Room Copying Servic
Items in our collections can be copied, subject to UK
copyright legislation and
lines.
ppying
elf-servi
gital boo
film scan
aterial,
be crec
sks in
re
have
ervatio
oses
s is
as,
g
een
usin
nd
d
se
Copyright and

Volksgemeinschaft that Nazi propaganda had otherwise only talked about. This was a community that defined itself not through laws, which could have strict limits—rather, it was a community that only created itself through action. The Nazi regime communalized the violence, allowing its fellow *Volksgenossen* to participate. Every act of violence broke psychological barriers and shifted the rules of the system, since things previously forbidden could now be done without fear of legal penalties; it was a system in which new options for action that had never been conceivable before now became available. The violent campaigns against the Jews did not in themselves create the *Volksgemeinschaft*, but the exercise of violence anticipated its realization, even if this was limited in time and space. The practice of exclusionary violence gave self-empowerment concrete form, and even made it physically tangible, by suspending the old order and allowing the establishment of a new political order of racist inequality.

The abrogation of the Weimar Republic's constitutional status quo in 1933 offered numerous elites the 'enabling space' they had long desired. The Law for the Prevention of Genetically Defective Offspring, enacted in July of that year, finally permitted doctors to 'heal' the German *Volkskörper*. For the first time in Germany, the sterilization of patients against their will was authorized. Newly convened 'genetic health courts', each consisting of a judge and two doctors, examined some 224,000 cases in the first three years alone, and ordered sterilization in some 199,000 cases (around 90 per cent of those examined). Police officers, finally freed from legislative and judicial limitations, believed they could now achieve a society without criminals, and eagerly accepted theories of criminal biology that defined certain social groups in racial terms as 'anti-social elements', justifying their internment in concentration camps and, ultimately, their elimination. Local welfare officers no longer classified their clients according to neediness, but instead rated them according to employability, on the premise that those who cannot work, need not eat. Here, too, racist criteria were soon used to differentiate between those 'useful' to the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and those 'alien' to it. With the new tax law of 1934, whose first paragraph bluntly stated that tax regulations must conform to National Socialist principles, even tax collectors were freed from the rule that all citizens should receive equal treatment before the law: they could now dispense arbitrary and unequal treatment, imposing additional tax burdens, especially on Jews. Thus *Volksgemeinschaft* also signified individualized self-empowerment, opening up new possibilities for action amongst the favoured.

An intellectually productive analysis of the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* needs, therefore, to examine its practical application, and should not simply accept it as a *fait accompli*. The important thing is to investigate the practices associated with its active construction, in short, the process of communalization. The focus of such an approach, to borrow a phrase from Alf Lüdtke, would be 'the forms in which people have "appropriated", while simultaneously transforming, "their" world'. This world, and thus its conditional framework, was simultaneously predefined and actively constructed. It therefore provided an ambiguous, multilayered setting, offering diverse options for individual and collective action. For, as Lüdtke reminds us: 'Individuals and groups do not construct the profile of the modes in

which they perceive and act in some sphere *removed and beyond* that of social relations—no, such a profile is generated *in* and *through* that very web.'[47] People do not simply conform to the codes and representations of meaning and reality they are given, but instead utilize images, words, and practices to orient themselves; they vary them, and when rubbing against the rough edges of real life, they change them as well as the surrounding social conditions. In this analytical framework, the *Volksgemeinschaft* is not to be analysed as a rigid social construct, but as the making of community, focusing on social practice instead of a societal status quo.

In this analysis, supposed dependents turn into active protagonists, becoming both subject and object, experiencing powerlessness and subjugation to authority figures, political leaders, and economic forces, and yet also modifying these experiences through individualized, contrasting, and even contradictory modes of appropriation, which can also result in non-conforming behaviours. Furthermore, experiences of pleasure, participation, and prosperity can certainly be intertwined with repression, exploitation, and dominance. During the Second World War, members of the German *Volksgemeinschaft* could acquire slave labourers from the occupied territories for farm or factory work, and thereby experience a feeling of power and superiority. At the same time, they remained within the National Socialist terror system, where any lapse in conformity could lead to their own persecution. This simultaneity of acquiescence and dissociation is constantly emphasized by Alf Lüdtke.

Ian Kershaw, therefore, misses the mark with his central critique, maintaining that the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept presumes one single identity to be 'completely predominant'.[48] He is in danger of overlooking, or even ignoring, the cracks in consensus. The analysis of the *Volksgemeinschaft* as a dynamic process of active social practice is concerned precisely with this diversity of behavioural strategies, with joining in and turning away, willingness and reluctance, enthusiasm and the ability to adapt, distancing the self and 'working against the *Führer*'. The point is to deconstruct the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept's very suggestion of homogeneity.

IV

The *Volksgemeinschaft* was not based on inclusion alone, despite romanticized memories which recall the communal spirit produced under National Socialism as a 'good thing'. This kind of emphasis isolates the experience of belonging from its dark side, the persecution and extermination of Jews, Roma, Sinti, Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, the mentally and physically disabled, the chronically ill, and a host of others. In reality, both aspects were inextricably intertwined—communalization with ostracism and extermination, inclusion with genocidal exclusion.

[47] Alf Lüdtke, 'Introduction: What is the History of Everyday Life and Who are its Practitioners', in Alf Lüdtke (ed.), *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton, 1995), 3–40, at 7 (italics in original).

[48] Kershaw, in this volume, p. 38.

Humanities, Rare Books & Music, Newsroom,
Science, Business & IP Centre, Social Sciences
Monday 10.00 – 20.00
Tuesday to Thursday 09.30
Friday and Saturday
Sunday and English
Public Holidays

Asian & African S
Monday
Tuesday to Saturday
Sunday and English
Public Holidays

Copy Counters

Humanities 1, Rare
Newsroom, Science
Monday
Tuesday to Thursday
Friday and Saturday

Asian & African Studie
Monday
uesday to Saturday

ease note: collection it
e Issue Desk before the

rdering in the

t collection items can
logue Explore the Brit
fic delivery informati

lection items can be or
our free wi-fi or on a Lib
s can be ordered for th

e items are stored offsit
livered
is no delivery of offsite
ering items using Explo
rline Help, printed guid
available
may order up to ten i
ly in the Manuscripts
ember to change the date required, if you are
ordering for the current day
equests can be reserved

Please handle all collection items with care and respect at all times and bear the following in mind:

Reading Room Copying Servic

Items in our collections can be copied, subject to UK copyright legislation and preservation

opying

self-servic
igital boo
film scan
aterial,

be credi
sks in
e

ave
ervation

oses

ens,

sing

So an analysis of the *Volksgemeinschaft* must always incorporate the gaze of those ostracized at those included, the gaze of the *Gemeinschaftsfremden* at the *Gemeinschaft*. This is why Saul Friedländer (in particular) called for an 'integrated historiography' of the Holocaust, one that does not assume the position of the omniscient narrator, but instead makes the voices of many protagonists audible.

> From the very beginning, all efforts made by Jewish individuals and groups to disrupt the plans of the National Socialists, no matter how slight they might have been, represented an obstacle on the road towards utter annihilation: regardless of whether it meant bribing officials, police officers, or informers, paying families to hide children or adults, escaping to the forests or mountains, retreating into small villages or major cities, changing religion, joining resistance groups, stealing food, or anything else that might have led to survival. This micro-level was the location of fundamental and ongoing interactions between Jews and the authorities who were working towards achieving the 'Final Solution'. It is on this micro-level that Jewish reactions and initiatives must be researched, and thereby integrated into a comprehensive historiography. On this micro-level, events largely revolve around the stories of individuals.[49]

By including these borders, definitions, and actions in our analysis of questions of belonging and ostracism, we can cast a more searching light on the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and avoid succumbing to its claims of unshakeable and unambiguous homogeneity. When talking about *Volksgemeinschaft*, one must also talk about inclusion and exclusion, as well as about social mobilization, participation, and selection; about owning a share and empowering the self, but ultimately, too, about violence, eradication, and murder.

Birthe Kundrus and Gerhard Wolf have researched the administrative disputes that occurred in occupied Poland, where it was necessary to decide who could be classified as German and who as Polish; this led to negotiations between public authorities, SS officials, and the individual subjects themselves.[50] Here, Kershaw's contention that not all perpetrators of the Holocaust were German, and that the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept is therefore not useful for analysing the genocide of European Jews,[51] brings up an important point but still misses the mark. Kershaw correctly maintains that the *Volksgemeinschaft* should be considered primarily in the specific context of National Socialist society, even when this was extended into the annexed territories of western Poland and eastern France. However, the idea of *Gemeinschaft* as a vision of society in opposition to the actual society (*Gesellschaft*) was not a specifically German political construct, but was a common notion all over Europe in the first half of the twentieth century—in Italy and

[49] Saul Friedländer, *Den Holocaust beschreiben: Auf dem Weg zu einer integrierten Geschichte* (Göttingen, 2007), 14; see also Neil Gregor, Nils Roemer, and Mark Roseman (eds), *German History from the Margins* (Bloomington, Ind., 2006).

[50] Gerhard Wolf, *Ideologie und Herrschaftsrationalität—nationalsozialistische Germanisierungspolitik in Polen* (Hamburg, 2012); Birthe Kundrus, 'Regime der Differenz: Volkstumspolitische Inklusionen und Exklusionen im Warthegau und im Generalgouvernement 1939–1944', in Bajohr and Wildt (eds), *Volksgemeinschaft*, 105–23.

[51] Kershaw, in this volume, p. 41–2.

Spain as much as in Poland, Lithuania, and Social Democratic Sweden.[52] We still need comparative studies that investigate the commonalities and differences in how these *Gemeinschaft* concepts were politically realized in Europe, and how the varying degrees of violent radicalization can be explained—a radicalization that in Germany led to systematic genocide.

Without the acceptance, complicity, and assistance of the resident populations, including both elites and 'ordinary' people, the German occupying forces would not have been able to achieve the ghettoization and deportation of the local Jewish minorities. Beyond terror, murder, and ruthless acts of plunder, beyond expulsion, deportation, and forced labour, there were also opportunities for participation and collaboration. And the local populations developed their own strategies for dealing with the occupying regime, finding ways to survive, even to get ahead and prosper, within the repressive framework. Finally, there were also home-grown political efforts to create 'Jew-free', ethnically homogenous *Volksgemeinschaften*.[53]

In his insightful analysis, Richard Evans describes the network of Nazi Party functionaries within the Third Reich. The terror apparatus of the Nazi regime reached into even the smallest niches of everyday life and the working world. The Nazi Party included some 200,000 leading officials known as *Politische Leiter* and some 2 million *Blockwarte* (Party Wardens), all charged with supervising the general population; workplaces were similarly monitored by officials of the German Labour Front, foremen, and other representatives.[54] That the regime had such an immense pool of functionaries, assistants, and helpers reflects a high degree of participation. In addition to the 5.3 million card-carrying members of the National Socialist Party in late 1939, there were 22 million in the German Labour Front, 14 million in the National Socialist People's Welfare Organization (NSV), around 9 million young people in the Hitler Youth and League of German Girls, and 1.4 million women in the National Socialist Women's League. Armin Nolzen estimates that by the time war broke out, around two-thirds of the German population were members of either a National Socialist Party organization or one that was controlled by the Nazi Party. Ninety per cent of the functionaries worked on a voluntary basis.[55] It would be difficult to interpret this huge number of supporters as simply part of a governmental terror network for the repression of society. It seems more plausible to consider this multiplicity of posts, positions, and sinecures as a system enabling people to take part in a regime which, conversely, could count on the assistance and participation of so many of them to maintain the established political order. Several years ago Robert Gellately pointed out that the

[52] See Thomas Etzemüller (ed.), *Die Ordnung der Moderne: Social Engineering im 20. Jahrhundert* (Bielefeld, 2009); Norbert Götz, *Ungleiche Geschwister: Die Konstruktion von nationalsozialistischer Volksgemeinschaft und schwedischem Volksheim* (Baden-Baden, 2001).

[53] Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in the Ukraine* (Chapel Hill, 2005); Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44* (Basingstoke, 2001); Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London, 2008).

[54] Richard Evans, *The Third Reich in Power: 1933–39* (London, 2005), 108–9.

[55] Armin Nolzen, 'Inklusion und Exklusion im Dritten Reich: Das Beispiel NSDAP', in Bajohr and Wildt (eds), *Volksgemeinschaft*, 60–77.

Gestapo was by no means an all-powerful, all-encompassing terror organization. Instead, he suggests, it focused its efforts mainly on the denunciation of wayward *Volksgenossen*.[56]

The term *Volksgemeinschaft* shows that 'the political' does not emerge solely from the sphere of the state, but also develops *within* the social sphere and emanates *from* it. It makes clear that political systems can derive their foundations from social phenomena such as social experiences and expectations; and that scholarly research into the constitution and transformation of politics should focus not only on the context of state power, but also on the social order.

Our new treatment of the *Volksgemeinschaft* concept accordingly entails an epistemological shift in perspective in the historiography of National Socialism. It moves it towards a cultural history of 'the political' derived from a social history of National Socialism that is itself new. It no longer contrasts society and state in the manner of Hegel, but interprets the political order (and state framework) as what Pierre Bourdieu calls a 'structuring structure', which is not simply predefined by institutions or by a constitution, but is created and altered as a power matrix under continual renegotiation. In their research on the *Volksgemeinschaft* during the aerial attacks of the Second World War, Dietmar Süß and Malte Thießen, among others, have presented new insights into the diverse faultlines within a German society that was not at all homogenous and yet was constantly re-expressing its desire for homogeneity; but questions concerning the people's willingness to endure and the erosion of loyalty towards the Nazi regime have not yet been adequately settled.[57]

This by no means negates the numerous and worthwhile works of the functionalist school which are based on Weber's model of a rational, bureaucratic state and thus see the Nazi regime in terms of destruction and chaos. On the contrary, without the works of Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen, the question of the *Volksgemeinschaft* could not be analysed today. Nonetheless, the enquiry now extends beyond the functionalist perspective, and the focus is no longer on the state as the sphere of the political, but rather on the political order of broader society: the human protagonists are placed at centre stage. The concepts of social experience and expectation concern themselves less with institutions, structures, and administrative processes, and more with emotions, the media, and collectivizing experiences, with symbolic representations, rituals, and performative actions. This new perspective looks at the political practices of everyday life, and the creation, stabilization, and transformation of political systems by the people themselves.

This means that the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* does not represent or explain any fixed, static reality, and it certainly does not reveal the internal self-image of

[56] Robert Gellately, *Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1933–1945* (Oxford, 1992).

[57] Jörg Arnold, Dietmar Süß, and Malte Thießen (eds), *Luftkrieg: Erinnerungen in Deutschland und Europa* (Göttingen, 2009); Dietmar Süß, *Tod aus der Luft: Kriegsgesellschaft und Luftkrieg in Deutschland und England* (Munich, 2011). See also Nicole Kramer, *Volksgenossinnen an der Heimatfront: Mobilisierung, Verhalten, Erinnerung* (Göttingen, 2011).

National Socialism. Rather, it invites us to understand National Socialist society as something actively manufactured: a 'work in progress'. While not disputing the power of the structural framework, we can thus analyse ongoing social practice with an emphasis on the protagonists, looking at their options for action and strategies for appropriation.

8

Registering the *Volksgemeinschaft*

Civil Status in Nazi Germany 1933–9*

Jane Caplan

The German civil registrars have been entrusted since 1933 with ever new and ever more significant and responsible tasks. In their hands lies first and foremost the implementation of Germany's racial legislation. It is in large measure to their prudence and diligence that we owe the implementation of the German state's genetic measures.[1]

Civil registrars in small rural districts are . . . not in a position to clarify descent from specific tribes (*Volksstämme*), if one were to think of leaving them to decide whether a person is of German blood or else perhaps of genetically related (*artverwandt*) blood.[2]

Was a country civil registrar (*Standesbeamte*) capable of distinguishing between 'German' and 'genetically-related' descent in 1943, so that he could make the appropriate entry for a betrothed couple in the register of marriages and fulfil the high expectations laid on his shoulders? Knowing the level of training of its local officials even after almost a decade of racial legislation, the Thuringian Interior Ministry voiced its doubts on the matter, and went on to observe that, in any case, 'in war, all civil registrars will try as far as possible to avoid undertaking any precise checks of racial descent for lack of time'. Whether the happy couple was likely to have had any better notion of these subtle distinctions is left unremarked, but the question illustrates both the expanded reach of civil status registration in Nazi Germany and the potential limits to its effectiveness. It is also a reminder that this largely disregarded apparatus of state registration was one of the foundations for the practical implementation of racial as well as social sorting in Nazi Germany. In this essay, I want to look directly into its status and role in this period, to expose

* Research for this essay was funded by the History Faculty of the University of Oxford; the Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung, Potsdam; the Max-Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin; and the Leverhulme Trust (grant F/08 100/A, 2008-10), whose support I acknowledge with gratitude.

[1] Franz Massfeller, *Die Führung der Personenstandsbücher in Musterbeispiele* (Berlin, 1940), 1.

[2] Thüringian Interior Ministry to Reich Interior Ministry, 29 May 1943. Copy in Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (hereafter ThHStA) Weimar, Thür. Ministerium des Innern E. No. 1571, p. 43.

the structures of everyday politicization in a realm in which state, citizen, and *Volksgemeinschaft* met and intersected to transact the routine business of individual and official lives. My evidence is taken from two contrasting locations: Berlin, with its large-scale and professionalized civil status administration and great political visibility; and Thuringia, a state which had a characteristic network of non-professionalized rural civil registry offices (*Standesämter*) staffed on a voluntary basis, but with a highly politicized and interventionist state leadership.[3] If we were to confine our attention to Berlin and other large cities alone, we might be struck by the efficiency with which they carried out their work, and it takes the evidence of a more rural area to see how the situation could look less impressive in practice.

Civil status (*Personenstand*) is one of the fundamental components of the modern state. It stabilizes the core elements of individual identity that are acquired and/or certified in the civil register at birth: name, forename, sex, date of birth, parentage, and, possibly, nationality. It is, in the words of a French lawyer, a kind of 'corset' composed of 'elements of the legal order, which encases our biological existence, so defining the legal individual subject on the basis of his corporeal materiality'.[4] Awkward as the language is, this definition captures the complex character of civil status as a site of exchange between the law, the legal subject, and the physical body. Juridical status is soldered to the body—it is inaugurated at birth and terminates at death—and it also expresses a relationship between the individual and the state as well as among individuals. The registration of civil status is both a prerequisite to the functioning of a complex polity, and a service performed by the state for its citizens. The state claims the right to know and police its population, while the gain for the individual is that the state not only vouchsafes him or her a provable legal and public identity but also guarantees the system of proof itself.[5] Without the corset of civil status, one has no legal personhood; this essential fact is recognized in the legal principle that civil status as such is immutable and, like the body itself, non-alienable.

This account of civil status as legal subjectivity emphasizes its fundamental juridical dimensions, but it also indicates that civil status is intimately tied to the social and biological relationships contained in marriage, reproduction, and the family, to the state's stake in these, and to the individual's subjective sense of self. Civil status registration is also one of the prime fields within which the written ousts the oral, substituting the tablets of church or state for the more fluid demotic systems of kinship and naming. These conventions coexist more often than they directly clash, but in the civil status regime, the state and its documentation take

[3] For the status and objectives of Thuringia as *Gau* and *Land* under the leadership of Fritz Sauckel, see Markus Fleischhauer, *Der NS-Gau Thüringen 1939–1945: Eine Struktur- und Funktionsgeschichte* (Cologne, 2010). I am grateful to Jörg Filthaut of the ThHStA Weimar for this reference.

[4] Claire Neirinck, 'Les caractères de l'état civil', in Claire Neirinck (ed.), *L'état civil dans tous ses états* (Paris, 2008), 41; for further details of the history of civil registration in France, see Gérard Noiriel, 'The Identification of the Citizen: The Birth of Republican Civil Status in France', in Jane Caplan and John Torpey (eds), *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World* (Princeton, 2001), 28–48; also Jacqueline Pousson-Petit (ed.), *L'identité de la personne humaine* (Brussels, 2002). See also Keith Breckenridge and Simon Szreter (eds), *Registration and Recognition: Documenting the Person in World History* (Oxford, 2012).

[5] Maryline Bruggeman, 'Les principes de l'état civil', in Neirinck (ed.), *L'état civil*, 23–5.

precedence. Unlike the census, which aims to fix a population at a frozen moment of time, civil status registration captures people successively in the circuit of their lives from birth to death.

It is not possible to discuss here the history of civil status and civil registration in Germany, where a national system of compulsory civil registration was introduced in 1875,[6] but one must at least note its mixed origins in the constitution of the liberal subject on the one hand, and the stabilization and secularization of marriage and family law as foundational components of the social order on the other. Under National Socialism the system of civil status, despite a surface continuity in its forms and procedures, underwent a deliberate, rapid, and far-reaching lurch towards communalization, making it into a flexible instrument for embedding individuals in the prevailing concept of community, the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The greatest vector of change after 1933 was the new racial and eugenic/health legislation, which not only sponsored the new genealogy bureaucracies and industry explored in compelling detail by Eric Ehrenreich, but also implicated every civil registry office in its operations. Indeed, for a time, representatives of the new political regime tussled over whether the entire system of civil registration should be reconstituted as a system of kinship offices (*Sippenämter*).[7] Although this never came into existence, civil registration now took place in a field crowded with new state and Nazi Party bureaucracies which were charged with administering new eugenic and genealogical policies. All of them were involved in the immense task of putting into practice, person by person, the new political principles powering the public reconstitution of the relationship between individual and community. The civil registry offices had to work especially closely with local state health offices (*Gesundheitsämter*) and Nazi Party health and welfare organizations in the eugenic regulation of marriage and in providing data for the support of families and children.[8] But life events were no longer recorded primarily to regulate legal civil status or for the benefit of their subjects, but were to be occasions for celebrating and reinforcing the racial and communal identity of German *Volksgenossen*, and for inscribing the rejection and exclusion of everyone else.

The work of the civil registry offices was not only heavily politicized after 1933 but also substantially expanded as their records acquired new and vital significance in national policy, as racial status and fitness to marry and procreate shot to

[6] *Gesetz über die Beurkundung des Personenstandes und die Eheschliessung*, 6 Feb. 1875 (RGBl 1875, 23); for details of the law and its emergence, see Paul Hinschius, *Das Reichsgesetz über die Beurkundung des Personenstandes und die Eheschliessung vom 6. Februar 1875* (Berlin, 1876), 1–20; and see also Ernest Glasson, *Le mariage civil et le divorce dans l'antiquité et dans les principales législations modernes de l'Europe* (Paris, 1880), 329–80; Inken Fuhrmann, *Die Diskussion über die Einführung der fakultativen Zivilehe in Deutschland und Österreich seit Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998), 41–72. The provisions of section 3 of the *Personenstandsgesetz* concerning the conditions for marriage, and some other clauses regulating the status of children, were replaced by §§1303ff of the 1900 Civil Code (*Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch*).

[7] Eric Ehrenreich, *The Nazi Ancestral Proof: Genealogy, Racial Science, and the Final Solution* (Bloomington, Ind., 2007).

[8] See Gabriele Czarnowski, *Das kontrollierte Paar: Ehe- und Sexualpolitik im Nationalsozialismus* (Weinheim, 1991), 66–72 and 142–53.

prominence on the ideological, political, and legislative agendas. The civil registry offices were intimately and inescapably involved in the implementation of racial and eugenic policies from the early days of the Nazi regime, with the provisions of the *Berufsbeamtengesetz* in April 1933 only the first in a flood of regulations that required the attestation of 'racial' descent (*Abstammungsnachweis*) for numerous purposes, from education to employment, from welfare eligibility to military service.[9] At some point in their lives, and in fact repeatedly, virtually every person of German nationality—all 60 million of them in pre-1938 Germany alone—had to prove their ancestry back to their grandparents' birth, others even further back, in a national project of genealogical reconstruction that required prodigious amounts of research in the parish and civil registers.[10] Much of this work, routine but at the same time often quite intricate, fell to the civil registrars, who were, of course, themselves subject to the provisions of the *Berufsbeamtengesetz* and subsequent regulations (in some cases, it seems, to their own discomfort).[11] Among the major legal enactments in racial and eugenic policy that brought new tasks to the civil registry offices before the war were the *Reichserbhofgesetz* (1933), the *Blutschutzgesetz* and *Ehegesundheitsgesetz* (1935), the new marriage law of 1938, and changes in the laws on divorce, legitimization, adoption, and choice or change of name.

The implementation of these and other regulations required not only extensive record searches but entirely new registration procedures, along with the need to keep up to date with the changing regulatory scenario. After some provisional amendments, the civil registration law itself was revised and reissued in November 1937, coming into force in July 1938 to coincide with the implementation of the new marriage law.[12] Following the centralization of German administration and abolition of *Länder* sovereignty from 1933–4, the new *Personenstandsgesetz* imposed uniform rules on a system that was now placed administratively under the supervision of the Reich Interior Ministry. It was adopted only after a period of indecision about the relationship between NSDAP and state offices dedicated to the development of racial and genealogical standards and procedures. These included the attempts made by the Reich Interior Ministry to replace the civil registry office system with the renamed and reorganized system of kinship offices, mentioned above, which was scotched only after Hitler explicitly vetoed this in January 1937.[13]

[9] Ehrenreich, *Nazi Ancestral Proof*, 58, citing Joseph Walk, counts 2,000 such regulations. The *Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums*, 7 Apr. 1933 (RGBl 1933 I, 175) was the first to require an *Abstammungsnachweis*; see Jane Caplan, *Government without Administration: The Civil Service in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (Oxford, 1988), 141–9.

[10] As well as Ehrenreich, *Nazi Ancestral Proof*, see also Manfred Gailus (ed.), *Kirchliche Amtshilfe: Die Kirche und die Judenverfolgung im 'Dritten Reich'* (Göttingen, 2008).

[11] In 1935 Thuringian *Standesbeamten* serving in an honorary capacity complained at new demands on them to provide racial data on their own grandparents and those of their wives; see ThHStA Weimar, Thür. Ministerium des Innern E, No. 1650, pp. 126–45, 332–43.

[12] *Personenstandsgesetz*, 3 Nov. 1937 (RGBl 1937 I, 1146); it came into force on 1 July 1938; and see also the extensive implementing regulations, 1. VO zur Ausführung der Personenstandsgesetzes, 19 May 1938 (RGBl 1938 I, 533).

[13] Documentation on the inter-ministry negotiations about the legislation is in Bundesarchiv (hereafter BA) Lichterfelde R 3001/10134. For a brief summary see Cora Ciernoch-Kujas, *Ministerialrat Franz Massfeller 1902–1966* (Berlin, 2003), 87–99; for the scope of genealogical research in general and brief comments on the law see Ehrenreich, *Nazi Ancestral Proof*, ch. 5.

The new law had manifold effects on organization and procedures, but the most publicly visible was the introduction of the family book (*Familienbuch*) in place of the marriage register. All registers were now renamed 'books', and the family book was also substantively altered compared with the register it replaced. It was not (unlike the French *livret de famille*) a book handed out to a couple on marriage, and it must also be distinguished from the *Ahnenpass* (certificate of 'racial' descent) or *Familienstammbuch* in which citizens maintained the officially ratified record of their ancestry required for the purposes already mentioned. Rather, the family book was a register consisting of two parts: Part I as the register of the marriage itself; and an additional page (Part II) on which was entered not only data, including religion, nationality (*Staatsangehörigkeit*), citizenship (*Reichsbürgerrecht*), and 'racial status' (*rassische Einordnung*) on the spouses and their parents, but also the subsequent history of the family, that is, the birth (or adoption etc.) of their children. This created a family record that would be maintained until the children's civil status changed, by marriage (in which case their own *Familienbuch* was initiated) or by death.

Like some other provisions of the law designed to cross-reference the scattered data of birth, marriage, and death, the family book had a certain administrative logic in connecting civil status data that was otherwise dispersed across different registers, and indeed these innovations were retained after 1945. Nevertheless, its primary purpose was to serve the construction of a racial *Volksgemeinschaft* in practice and in public consciousness, built out of a racially and eugenically acceptable marriage and its subsequent offspring. In the words of the official statement of reasons for the law, the aim was 'to strengthen the individual's sense of family and the feeling that he is a connecting link in a long chain of generations. This will also arouse in him the sense of his own responsibility for the maintenance of his line and thus at the same time for the future of the German people'; and the collection of data on racial status was expected to ensure that 'within some 30 years the racial classification of by far the majority of all the people living in the German Reich is apparent from the family books'.[14]

One other revision, the abrogation of a reform introduced in the Weimar Republic, deserves mention here: the return to noting religious belief in the cases of partners to a marriage, an infant's parents, and deceased persons, which had been dropped in 1920.[15] This satisfied conservative sentiment, but more importantly, it played a role in the control of Jews and their excommunication from the national community, since designation as Jewish or *Mischling* (Jew of mixed race) depended partly on the religious affiliation of an individual and his or her forebears.[16] Given the hiatus between 1920 and 1937, the implementing regulations to the 1937 law also required the civil registry offices to note prior membership of the

[14] Ernst Brandis and Franz Massfeller, *Das neue Personenstandsgesetz vom 3. November 1937* (Berlin, 1937), 44–5. Brandis was a *Senatspräsident* at the Reichsgericht, Massfeller a well-known jurist and the Justice Ministry's expert on civil status law: see Ciernoch-Kujas, *Ministerialrat Franz Massfeller*.

[15] *Gesetz über den Personenstand*, 11 June 1920 (RGBl 1920 I, 1209).

[16] Namely the designations under §§ 2 and 5 of the 1. Verordnung zum Reichsbürgergesetz, 14 Nov. 1935 (RGBl 1935 I, 1333).

Jewish community even when it had been renounced, thus providing unbroken evidence of religious affiliation.[17]

Technical as some of the 1937 law's other revisions were, they served purposes that were either intentionally or effectively ideological. The most important common denominator was the retreat from handling civil status as a quality of individuals in favour of building up its social and racial dimensions—its dependence on a new concept of the communal and the common good which pushed individual rights into the legal outfield.[18] The words of the principal commentators on the law convey the extent to which the concept of civil status was stretched into new territory after 1933: 'In the National Socialist view, the civil status of a person, i.e. the essence of the factors that determine his being and his position in the community, is also comprised of his racial classification, his nationality, his possession or non-possession of Reich citizenship, name including all forenames and, as already in the 1920 amendment, his religious confession.'[19] Each of these elements was now also subject to explicit political pressures. The identities recorded in them were recoded and re-legitimated for official purposes, and in many cases were stretched to the limit of the subject's self-recognition, and beyond. A power of the state which Gérard Noiriel has characterized as 'soft', because it generates facilitation and entitlement as well as imposing regulation, revealed just how 'hard' its regulatory effects could be.[20]

Many civil registrars were predisposed to welcome the Nazi regime and to become active participants in its social and racial projects. The expansion of the genealogical and communal dimensions of registration was something for which the Reichsverband der Standesbeamten had already campaigned in the 1920s, under its leader Edwin Krutina, who remained prominent and active in the *gleichgeschaltet* (coordinated) Reichsbund der Standesbeamten until 1945.[21] The scope of their activities varied, and what the small district registrars lacked in expertise, experience, and effective oversight could be compensated by their intimate knowledge of their local populations. Thuringia, for example, had 1,005 *Standesamt* districts in 1941 for a total population of 1,743,624 (1939). The average of one office per 1,734 inhabitants belies the fact that forty districts had fewer than twenty inhabitants and 180 fewer than 200.[22] Such operations were on a totally different scale from those in urban areas like Berlin, where in 1933 a 'large office' was

[17] 1. VO zur Ausführung des Personenstandsgesetzes, 19 May 1938, § 12(3).

[18] See in general Michael Stolleis, *Gemeinwohlformeln im nationalsozialistischen Recht* (Berlin, 1974).

[19] Brandis and Massfeller, *Das neue Personenstandsgesetz*, 16.

[20] Cited in Agnès Fine (ed.), *États civils en question: Papiers, identités et questions de soi* (Paris, 2008), 10; and Noiriel, 'The Identification of the Citizen'.

[21] Siegfried Maruhn, *Staatsdiener im Unrechtsstaat: Die deutschen Standesbeamten und ihr Verband unter dem Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 2002), 18–41; Diana Schulle, *Das Reichssippenamt: Eine Institution nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik* (Berlin, 2001), 112–22; Edwin Krutina, *Chronik eines guten Bundes* (Berlin, 1941).

[22] These numbers given in a draft letter from the Staatssekretär und Leiter des Ministeriums des Innern Thüringen to Reich Interior Ministry, June 1941 (ThHStA Weimar, Thür. Ministerium des Innern E, No. 1617, p. 26). The maximum size of a district was set nationally at 100,000 residents. See 1. Verordnung zur Ausführung des Personenstandsgesetzes, 19 May 1938 (RGBl 1938 I, 533, §91).

defined as one that had processed 5,000 records in a nine-month period.[23] Again in contrast to the cities, 90 per cent of Thuringia's civil registrars at this time held their posts on a volunteer basis, against a small annual capitation payment based on the number of district residents.[24] Of the 423 officials who were not at the same time the local mayors, the greatest number (249) were peasants or farmers, along with thirty-nine teachers, forty-two master artisans, and a sprinkling of other rural trades and miscellaneous occupations. The majority lacked any kind of advanced education, were barely distinct from the people around them, and were accordingly said to be not much respected, the more so as most of their activities were seen as imposing an annoying burden of paperwork on their fellow-citizens who also, if several villages were combined into a single registration district, might have to travel some distance to reach it. Personalizing the official seal after 1938 to read 'Der Standesbeamter' instead of 'Das Standesamt' was hardly enough to convert the job from an arm of the state to an expression of the local community.

From this evidence, at least, it is not surprising to learn that the job was not much sought-after and that officials who retired, often after long years of service, were hard to replace. Whereas in smaller registration districts the tiny number of registrations each year were too few even to keep the official's hand in, elsewhere the burdens were regarded as considerable. The civil registry office of Eisfeld, a Thuringian district with no more than 1,600 residents, was already complaining in 1934 that the new demands for 'filling out documents for Aryan purposes' were overburdening it.[25] Complaints of overwork and understaffing were not confined to rural areas and were in any case part of the eternal gavotte danced between subordinate and higher offices in most bureaucracies, but the great increase of work after 1933 cannot be gainsaid. After 1939, too, the war brought additional pressures on diminishing resources, as officials were conscripted into the armed services or pressured to volunteer to staff civil registry offices for the German population in the newly annexed territories in the east. One response in Berlin was to license junior personnel to do the more routine jobs; another was to modernize procedures, especially by permitting typed loose-leaf sheets and carbon copies to be used in place of the normal handwritten bound registers.

The reluctance to introduce this apparently labour-saving new technology elsewhere demonstrates the constant battle between time and accuracy: typing with carbons was faster than writing by hand and ensured both legibility and an exact match between the entries in the main and duplicate registers, but loose-leaf filing was a recipe for potential chaos and misuse in the hands of the unprofessional, and was permitted only in districts staffed by a full-time civil servant. The Thuringian Interior Ministry had a record of resisting pressures to approve the use of typewriters in small localities, and the petitions submitted by one particularly overburdened

[23] Oberbürgermeister Berlin to Bezirks[standes]ämter, 6 Nov. 1933; Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB) A Rep. 001-02, No. 2694 (M-Film 3383, frame 513).
[24] Memo 'Die Standesbeamten in Thüringen', 1940; ThHStA Weimar, Thür. Ministerium des Innern E, No. 1651, p. 139 (evidently the basis for the 1941 document cited in n. 22 above).
[25] Standesamt Schmölln to Amtsgericht Schmölln, 20 Nov. 1934 (copy in ThHStA Weimar, Thür. Ministerium des Innern E, No. 1640, p. 20).

civil registrar, in Flurstedt (Kreis Apolda), give an insight into the staffing of this kind of small-scale civil registry office in the 1930s. This man had taken on the office in 1932 on top of his teaching job, and by 1936 he had become, in addition, leader of the local group of the *Reichsbund der Standesbeamten*, NSDAP cell leader, propaganda leader, local branch leader of the *NS Lehrerbund* (National Socialist Teachers' Association), race warden (*Rassewart*), and local representative in the *NS Kulturgemeinde* (National Socialist Cultural Association). The Ministry was unimpressed by this trail of volunteer positions, and despite the fact that he had bought at his own expense a '*Schwabacher Fraktur*' typewriter equipped with special characters, it refused his requests. That the Ministry was probably right to be cautious is supported by the evidence of incompetence that reached it from time to time, underlining the problems of inadequate training and lax supervision.[26]

The registration of marriages was probably the most public of civil registration offices' functions, and it was also the most heavily burdened after 1933 by the new racial and social legislation noted above. No one was troubled about the conditions under which Jews might register a marriage; here efforts were entirely directed to ensuring that Jews and *Mischlinge* did not scrape into an illicit union by virtue of any deception or unclarity about their parentage. Because the implications of the racial and eugenic laws for marriage have been substantially researched, I will not discuss them in full here, except to note that the civil registry offices were locked into the processes of investigation and verification of racial identity and eugenic capacity. Individuals would fall foul of the eugenic laws if it was discovered that one or other partner to a marriage had failed to notify the other that he or she had been sterilized on eugenic grounds.[27] Racial obstacles to marriage were typically revealed when an individual discovered his or her Jewish ancestry for the first time, and not infrequently as a result of a previously concealed (or claimed) illegitimacy; or when the betrothed were confronted by the normal priority of racial (that is, ancestral) over religious definitions of 'Jewish identity', together with the specific cases of the *Geltungsjude*, that is, 'Mischling 1. Grades' (two Jewish grandparents) who had also been a member of a Jewish community or brought up as Jewish—one of the cases in which religious affiliation intensified a negative racial classification. The typical cases for correction of the records were brought by people of mixed Jewish and non-Jewish ancestry (basically, no more than two Jewish grandparents) who, under the Nuremberg Laws, were in theory eligible to be granted official permission (by

[26] For issues of staffing and the introduction of loose-leaf files in Berlin, see documentation in LAB A Rep. 001-02, No. 2964, especially a circular issued by the Oberbürgermeister Berlin to the Bezirksbürgermeister, 27 June 1938; for Thuringia 1932–41 see ThHStA Weimar, Thür. Ministerium des Innern E, No. 1640 and 1585; for national conditions on approval of typewriters, see the correspondence in Sept.–Oct. 1940 between the Thuringian Interior Ministry and the Reich Interior Ministry (ThHStA Weimar, Thür. Ministerium des Innern E, No. 1585, pp. 99–100) and the instructions in the official *Dienstanweisung für die Standesbeamten und ihre Aufsichtsbehörden* issued by the Reich Interior Ministry (Berlin: Verlag für Standesamtswesen, 1938), § 110; for the *Standesbeamte* in Flurstedt see correspondence in ThHStA Weimar, Thür. Ministerium des Innern E, No. 1640, pp. 24–7; and for evidence of incompetence, ThHStA Weimar, Thür. Ministerium des Innern E, No. 1585, e.g., pp. 169, 277–9.
[27] See e.g., the case of Gerda W. in 1940, who had allegedly connived with her fiancé to conceal the fact that she had been sterilized (LAB A Rep. 001-02, No. 2963, pp. 224–44, a file containing similar cases).

the Reich Interior Ministry) to marry an 'Aryan'.[28] Although the health offices were responsible for determining medical status, the civil registry offices dealt with questions of descent when *Mischling* status was being contested: for example, when one of the parties applied for the deletion of an earlier register entry of a parent's or grandparent's religion as 'mosaisch'.[29]

It is arguable that the restrictions on marriage for racial and eugenic reasons could be assimilated into the routine of civil registrars as counterparts to the familiar rules of prohibited degree, quite apart from the ideological preferences that led some of them to apply racial criteria even in advance of legislative requirement.[30] Routinization is the bureaucratic primrose path: one has to credit this at the same time as noting the less frequent expressions of explicit racial ideology, and using the distance of the historian to restore a sense of shock.

Selected examples from the voluminous case files of the Berlin civil registry offices will illustrate the kind of cases handled on a daily basis—some of them already routine before 1933, others inflected with the new political priorities of the Nazi regime, others again wholly the result of new departures in the law. An application in 1935 for the name Klara to be spelled with a 'C' was rejected, on the grounds that 'K' was now the correct way of writing the name.[31] Also rejected, in 1940, was an application to record the occupation of a mother in the birth register not as 'housemaid' (*Dienstmädchen*) but as the more genteel 'household assistant' (*Hausangestellte*) or 'household help' (*Stütze*), on the grounds that 'In the Third Reich it is not a question of *what* job one has but *how* one performs that job.'[32] Another decision rejected a request to change the job description 'gunpowder worker' (*Pulverarbeiter*) to 'technical career civil servant in public service, pyrotechnics' (*technische Beamtenlaufbahn im Staatsdienst [Pyrotechnik]*).[33] In 1936 an application to change the surname of a woman with a Polish name, Zielinski, to the female form (Zielinska) was rejected on the grounds that the spelling of the surname was valid under German law. In 1938 a surname was corrected from Brossmann to Broßmann, on the grounds that 'The letter "ß" is an autonomous German letter, which is also subject to grammatical rules regarding its modification.'[34] Similarly, an application to change the spelling of the surname

[28] See e.g., Beate Meyer, *'Jüdische Mischlinge': Rassenpolitik und Verfolgungserfahrung 1933–1945* (Hamburg, 1999); Maris Hetzel, *Die Anfechtung der Rassenmischehe in den Jahren 1933–1939* (Tübingen, 1997); also Jürgen Matthäus, '"...im öffentlichen Interesse": Staatsanwaltschaftliche Abstammungsklagen im Kontext der NS-Judenpolitik', in Jürgen Matthäus and Michael Mallmann (eds), *Deutsche, Juden, Völkermord: Der Holocaust als Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Darmstadt, 2006), 123–40, using the records of the Berlin Landgericht.

[29] e.g., Frieda S., 1940–3; Gertrud H., 1940–1; LAB A Rep. 001-02, No. 2971 (MF B3384).

[30] See documentation of a case in 1935, in LAB A Rep 001-02, No. 3109 (M-film A5129, frame 1172ff.), in which it is clear that a *Standesbeamte* had declined to marry a man with one Jewish grandparent and who had converted to Judaism to an 'Aryan' woman, in advance of the Nuremberg Laws; his position was backed by the court in November, despite the fact that no detailed regulations had been issued by then.

[31] Amtsgericht Berlin Beschluss, 29 Aug. 1935; LAB A Rep. 001-02, No. 3109 (MF A5129).

[32] Amtsgericht Berlin Beschluss, 6 Dec. 1940; LAB A Rep. 001-02, No. 3109 (MF A5129).

[33] Amtsgericht Berlin Beschluss, 10 Jan. 1939; LAB A Rep. 001-02, No. 3109 (MF A5129).

[34] LAB A Rep 001-02, No. 2937.

'Jänke' to 'Jaenke' was granted, although a similar case had generated a negative decision based on a lengthy opinion as to whether using an umlaut created a new name or was simply a phonetic alternative.[35]

Germans are unlikely to be as bemused by this level of pedantry as citizens of common-law countries, because the principle in Germany since the mid-nineteenth century (as in other continental states) was that it was a matter of legitimate state and public concern that personal names should be stabilized for official use. Registered names could be officially changed only by procedures which, except for a brief period in the Weimar era, were the subject of administrative and political discretion, and which had always required the submission of a reason for the change requested—for example, to Germanize a foreign name, to change an embarrassing or vulgar name, or to resume a traditional family name that had been lost down the line of descent. In a regime where the stability of the personal name was thus legally enforced, spelling assumed a significance it might not otherwise have had. If the registers were not accurate and held to similar standards, this principle was shaken (although in practice small spelling discrepancies between, for example, a birth and marriage certificate would not invalidate the documents). And, unsurprisingly, given the intimate bond between a person and his or her name, people themselves were often stolidly committed to their case for correction, and both forenames and surnames generated more than their fair share of cases and complaints. Mothers discovered belatedly that the midwife had recorded the wrong forename, or parents changed their minds or protested an official's refusal to register an allegedly non-German forename.[36] The transliteration of foreign names was another minefield.[37]

After 1933 the personal name became fraught with additional significance, as the issue of so-called 'Jewish' names rose to prominence, or perhaps it would be more correct to say rose to prominence once again. As has been amply documented, the Nazi regime intensified a long-standing anti-Semitic tendency of the German and Prussian name laws in order to ensure that Jews were immediately identifiable as such by their names, and to place the whole procedure within the sphere of administrative discretion.[38] Notoriously, under new regulations issued in 1938, Jews were restricted to a list of so-called Jewish forenames, and anyone who did not already bear one of these was required to insert the name 'Sara' or 'Israel' into their registered name.[39] These additional compulsory names had to be

[35] Amtsgericht Berlin Beschluss, 31 Mar. 1937; LAB A Rep 001-02, No. 3109.

[36] e.g., registration of the name Astrid, initially refused by the *Standesbeamte* as a non-German name, was approved on appeal (LAB A Rep. 001-02, No. 3109); see also Winfried Seibert, *Das Mädchen, das nicht Esther heißen durfte* (Leipzig, 1996) and Michael Wagner-Kern, *Staat und Namensänderung: Die öffentlich-rechtliche Namensänderung in Deutschland im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen, 2002) for full discussions of Nazi name law and practice.

[37] e.g., a 1941 case in which the transliteration produced the vulgar German name 'Schindelarsch' (LAB A Rep. 001-02, No. 2967), pp. 281ff. (MF B3384).

[38] See Dietz Bering, *The Stigma of Names: Antisemitism in German Daily Life 1812–1933* (Ann Arbor, 1992) and Wagner-Kern, *Staat und Namensänderung*.

[39] 2. Verordnung zur Durchführung des Gesetzes über die Änderung von Familiennamen und Vornamen, 17 Aug. 1938, RGBl 1938 I, 1044; see *Gesetz über die Änderung von Familiennamen und Vornamen*, 5 Jan. 1938, RGBl 1938 I, 9; and RuPrMdI RdErl., 23 Mar. 1938, RMBliV 1938, 545.

inserted into the margins of the civil status registers in each case. In fact, in Berlin the regulation was the occasion for the introduction of a new rubber stamp, to save officials from having to handwrite the boilerplate text on each occasion. The new regulations inevitably provoked some of those affected to protest their liability under the new law, and the level of indignation at this humiliating procedure is palpable from many cases.[40] New surnames approved before 1933 could also be withdrawn 'if the name change is to be seen as undesirable' (§7), a provision adopted solely in order to force Jews to abrogate recently adopted surnames which appeared to disguise their Jewish identity.[41] These regulations were morally and politically outrageous, yet to the register officials they would almost certainly have seemed consistent with long-standing policies of state intervention in the conferral and change of personal names.

The rigidity with which the Berlin civil registry offices applied the new standards can be illustrated by the case of a Jewish woman, Charlotte K., who was obliged to take the additional name Sara in 1939 but then went on to marry a Swiss national in Berlin. She thereby forfeited (what was left of) her German nationality, and since Jews of foreign nationality did not fall under the law, she applied to have the compulsory name removed from the register. The Berlin mayor's office took the view that 'Sara' was and remained part of her legal name on marriage, and refused to correct the register. Although the court proposed a different view of the matter, the mayor would not budge and her application was turned down in January 1941.[42] Other cases involved claims that the individual concerned had never adopted the Jewish faith and had no connections with the community (and was thus not a *Geltungsjude*).[43]

The effects of these provisions should not be judged merely by the fact that we know that far worse was to come for many of the people involved or was already happening for people much like them. Each application for a name correction or a rectification of the records required for a marriage licence represented a felt injury by the person concerned, and possibly exposed them to unwelcome further effects of administrative attention.[44] The personal correspondence that fills these files is replete with the bewilderment and distress experienced by the individuals concerned, whose lives and ordinary assumptions were being thrown out of kilter.

[40] See the extensive file on the case of the well-known cellist and baptized Protestant Eduard Rosé in Weimar who, at the age of eighty-two, was harassed by the Gestapo and sentenced in 1941 for his refusal to wear the yellow star or take the compulsory 'Jewish' name; ThHStA Weimar, Amtsgericht Weimar No. 139.

[41] These proceedings were initiated in 1939 but suspended under the general suspension of name-changes for the duration of the war. Case files are in BA Lichterfelde R 1501/127443-127447 (Ministry of Interior), where examples include Sittig/Itzig; Goetze/Schmul; Löning/Löwenthal. See also Wagner-Kern, *Staat und Namensänderung*, 322–8.

[42] Case of Charlotte K.; LAB A Rep. 001-02, No. 2971, pp. 289–92 (MF B3384). Under the new regulations transferring decision-making powers to the executive, the *Amtsgericht* could not overrule the administrative decision of the Berlin *Oberbürgermeister*.

[43] e.g., the case of Harry M.; LAB A Rep. 001-02, No. 2958, pp. 299–313 (MF B3384).

[44] e.g., the case of Albert M., whose fiancée's Jewish racial identity was confirmed, which then exposed her to penalties for not having taken the compulsory additional name of 'Sara'; LAB A Rep. 001-02, No. 2693 (MF B3383).

One's sympathy may wear a little thin in cases where part-Jewish petitioners made much of their support for the regime or even pointed to their membership of the NSDAP, yet these protestations were themselves forced on them by the terms of the racial laws through which the stark operation of racial categories could, in theory, be mitigated by evidence of 'national' consciousness.[45] And, of course, there is not a single uniform experience here. For every Jew forced to adopt an alien forename, we can find so-called 'Aryans' keen to rid themselves of Jewish-sounding surnames (for example, from Schlesinger to Schlesier, Weinberg to Köhler, Jude to Jade), to give their children some absurd forename confected from the family name of a Nazi leader or hero ('Hitlerika'), or to launch themselves enthusiastically into the new national pursuit of racial genealogical research.[46]

The evidence presented here is the tip of a much larger iceberg of policy-making and practice in the field of civil status registration that includes not only the proliferating complexities of marriage law but also important issues not touched on here, such as the procedures for adoption and legitimization; public complaints against register officials; wartime policies regarding the status of servicemen abroad and of foreign workers resident in Germany; and not least the registration of death. As well as the impact of directly war-related mortality, the latter included the establishment of civil registry offices in the major concentration camps for the purpose of concealing the telltale mortality figures—and even so these did not escape the eagle eye of a particularly observant civil registrar in Thuringia in 1943.[47] But this short review already suggests the extent to which the civil registry offices were a wheel in the machinery for the manufacture of identity and community in Nazi Germany.

'Community' in this sense is not synonymous with consent, but represents rather the projection of the Nazi vision of the reconstruction of political, legal, and social life under an umbrella of social solidarity on the one hand and racial and eugenic exclusions on the other. The conversion of 'community' into *Volksgemeinschaft* drew on reservoirs of meaning and practice that were as much repetitively routine and technical as they were stridently ideological or rhetorical. The civil registrars were on the front line of this less noisy project, intimately involved in the daily

[45] See e.g., the petition of Heinrich G. in 1941, LAB A Rep 001-02, No. 2956, pp. 143ff.; see also Meyer, '*Jüdische Mischlinge*', who points out that the loophole was a cynical diversion since applications were virtually never accepted; and Matthäus, '"…im öffentlichen Interesse"'.

[46] The files of the Reich Interior Ministry (BA R 1501) contain extensive documentation of the final decision-making process, and examples of how these cases were handled at the local level can be found in LAB A Rep 047-08, nos. 145/1 and 145/2: Bezirksverwaltung Lichtenberg; on Nazi leaders' names, see the bans issued in 1933, 1937, and 1940; RMdI RdErl. 3 July 1933, MBliV 1933, 801; RMdI RdErl. 8 June 1937, MBliV 1937, 971; RMdI RdErl. 23 Dec. 1940, RMBliV 1941, 21). *Standesbeamten* were instructed by these directives to tell parents to choose another name, and to submit a report if they refused. For racial genealogy, see Ehrenreich, *Nazi Ancestral Proof*.

[47] Raya Kagan, 'Das Standesamt Auschwitz', in Hans Günther Adler, Hermann Langbein, and Ella Lingens-Reiner (eds), *Auschwitz: Zeugnisse und Berichte* (Hamburg, 2003), 145–58; Thomas Grotum, *Das digitale Archiv: Aufbau und Auswertung einer Datenbank zur Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Auschwitz* (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), 220–6. For registrations by Berlin Standesamt I of deaths of German citizens in Auschwitz in June and July 1941, before the establishment of Auschwitz Standesamt II, see LAB A Rep 001-02, 2960 (MF B3382).

processes of allocating Germany's citizens and nationals to the inside or outside of this community by means of the foundational instrument of their identity. Their work also functioned as a system of formal communication, instructing people about their status in the community and inviting them to locate themselves in a longer-term vision for remaking the nation. Like the registers themselves, the inked and stamped pages of the *Familienstammbuch* were also supposed not only to ratify the reassuring ancestry of the 'Aryan' family, but to gesture towards the generations yet to come, who would live in a more perfect community thanks to the efforts of this founding generation. *Volksgemeinschaft* here could be as much an invitation to a re-envisioned future as a statement about the political present, and one soldered to the apparently 'natural' cycles of birth, marriage, and death.

Yet, in the end, this account may have been more persuasive for the officials than for their clients, flattering their own self-image as guardians of the nation's future without impressing anyone else. How ordinary people responded must have varied considerably. Perhaps presenting the racial paperwork for a marriage in a larger city office, staffed by professionals and decked out with Nazi imagery, conveyed something of the required political message. But the Thuringian peasant who had to take time off work to amass the same paperwork in order to certify a genealogy that everyone local already knew, or to register a birth in a relatively distant civil registry office housed in someone's front parlour, may have drawn a different conclusion: that these procedures were not the promise of a new order, but just another unwarranted intrusion of officialdom, something that produced reluctant compliance rather than active engagement.

12

Volksgenossinnen on the German Home Front

An Insight into Nazi Wartime Society

Nicole Kramer

Women are back. In current research on Nazi society, many studies are now zoning in on the female side of the population. This focus on the activities of women is not a return to the emerging 'women's history' of the 1970s, however. Gender has become a permanent category in historical analysis, and it is valid for the investigation of the Nazi state, where the bipolarity of female and male spheres was an essential part of social engineering.[1] Far from regarding women as general victims of male Nazi leaders, recent studies explore the active involvement of the female population in Nazi policies. In doing so, they shed light on core questions of the history of the Third Reich, such as the implementation of racial policy as well as the mobilization of the population during the war.[2] This renewed interest in women actors chimes with a general shift in research towards looking at social history in terms of the attitudes and actions of individuals within the frame of a Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*.[3] Is it a coincidence that such a 'social history of experiences',[4] as Konrad Jarausch once called it, gives such prominence to women? This essay will show that the answer is 'no'.

In what follows, I examine the mobilization of the *Volksgenossinnen*, the women of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, during the Second World War, in order to gain an insight into Nazi society. With its focus on the German home front, the essay deals with groups of women whom historians have often overlooked in their researches. Most of these women were married with children and were too old to be a target

[1] For details, see Leonie Wagner, *Nationalsozialistische Frauenansichten: Vorstellungen von Weiblichkeit und Politik führender Frauen im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), 122–8.

[2] See, for example, Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven, 2003); Sybille Steinbacher (ed.), *'Volksgenossinnen': Frauen in der NS-Volksgemeinschaft* (Göttingen, 2007); Franka Maubach, *Die Stellung halten: Kriegserfahrungen und Lebensgeschichten von Wehrmachthelferinnen* (Göttingen, 2009); Jutta Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps: Ausbildung, Einsatz und Entnazifizierung der weiblichen Angehörigen der SS, 1942–1949* (Hamburg, 2011).

[3] See esp. Michael Wildt, *Hitler's* Volksgemeinschaft *and the Dynamics of Racial Exclusion: Violence Against Jews in Provincial Germany, 1919–1939* (New York, 2011); Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt (eds), *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009).

[4] Konrad H. Jarausch, 'Towards a Social History of Experience: Postmodern Predicaments in Theory and Interdisciplinarity', *Central European History*, 22/3–4 (1989), 427–43, at 430.

group for the service schemes of the Wehrmacht, the SS, or the Labour Service. Nevertheless, even before the war had started, the Nazi leaders were keen to involve them. The female population was seen not only as a reserve of labour for industry, but also as a source of personnel for Party work. With war on the horizon, Nazi leaders were concerned that the women should not become alienated from the regime and lose faith, as they had in 1918.[5] Hence, there was an ongoing effort to draft women into carrying out publicly useful work; and, once war began, welfare measures were introduced, on their behalf, to ameliorate the hardships it caused. In the name of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, many were mobilized for air raid protection and assumed tasks within Nazi women's organizations. Others, like war widows and evacuees, benefited from the relief work of the Party and the National Socialist People's Welfare Organization (NSV).

In speeches and letters Nazi leaders used the term *Volksgenossinnen* when they addressed or referred to women loyal to their aims. They only recognized those women they regarded as 'valid' according to their racist and eugenic way of thinking:[6] Jews, Roma, Sinti and others regarded as biologically inferior were persecuted as *Gemeinschaftsfremde* or 'community aliens'. In Nazi ideology, the term *Volksgenossinnen* accorded the chosen women their place as members of a productive national community. Referred to in this way, women were reminded that they belonged to a racially defined collective.[7] This influencing of the attitudes and beliefs of the female population was not just an element of Nazi propaganda, but also drove policies of mobilization, pushing women to negotiate their coexistence with the Nazi regime. In responding, each woman was challenged as an individual, and, for this reason, a subjective approach to this aspect of social history promises to shed new light on the structures of German wartime society.

This essay examines the mobilization of women in two steps. First it offers an account of the female activism undertaken to stabilize the German home front. Next, it turns its focus on women as recipients of the welfare programmes that eased the burdens caused by the war. Concentrating on these areas, the essay examines how the institutions and organizations of the regime interacted with the female population. Its aim is to explore the shaping of the *Volksgemeinschaft* during the war and to ask how far individual women participated in this process.[8]

[5] See Timothy Mason, *Social Policy in the Third Reich: The Working Class and the 'National Community'*, ed. Jane Caplan (Providence, RI, 1993), 15–17.

[6] See, for example, 'Die Kundgebung des Gaues Berlin der NSDAP im Berliner Sportpalast am 18. Februar 1943: Die Rede des Propagandaministers Joseph Goebbels', quoted from Iring Fetscher, *'Wollt ihr den totalen Krieg?': Joseph Goebbels im Berliner Sportpalast 1943* (Hamburg, 1998), 63–103; for the history of the concept, see Cornelia Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 1998), 660–4.

[7] Ernst Rudolf Huber, 'Die Rechtsstellung des Volksgenossen: Erläutert am Beispiel der Eigentumsverordnung', *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft*, 96 (1936), 438–74, at 446.

[8] See the Introduction to this volume by Bernhard Gotto and Martina Steber.

FEMALE ACTIVISM DURING THE WAR

The first thing we learn when looking at the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* and how women were mobilized for its purposes is how much the contribution of the female population has been underestimated by those who have narrowed it down to wage labour alone. As Tim Mason and other historians have pointed out, the new labour reserve that could be drawn from women without work and without young children was never fully mobilized. According to an estimate by the Reich Ministry of Labour, the number of women without either dependents or employment stood at 3.5 million. But Nazi leaders hesitated to announce a programme of civil conscription forcing women into work, as they were afraid of the unpopularity of such a measure. Indeed, once the war started, the employment rate amongst women actually declined, because of the generous separation allowances given to the wives of soldiers.[9]

However, the documents of Nazi women's organizations like the Reich Air Raid Defence League (RLB) tell a different story and highlight the activism of millions of women throughout the war. Air raid protection then relied heavily on women for fire guard duty in apartment blocks and public buildings. Moreover, this mobilization of women was not a war phenomenon dictated by the mere necessities of a nation under attack, but was a decision made by the Nazi rulers long before 1939. The RLB had been established as early as 1933 to teach the population air raid defence measures in advance. Under the overall authority of the Air Ministry, headed by Hermann Göring, the RLB had 12 million members in 1939, and by the end of the war more than 22 million.[10] The majority of these members were women and many of them filled positions as Party Assistants (*Blockhelferinnen*) and even as Party Wardens (*Blockwarte*). A different formation, the Air Raid Protection Squads (*Luftschutzgemeinschaft im Selbstschutz*) depended too on female participation. These were established in private homes and public buildings such as hospitals, convents, and old people's homes. Each unit was staffed by at least five people: an air raid warden, two fire guards, a fire guard messenger, and a first aider.[11] All positions were available to women. As men had to work or were conscripted during the war, adult women were the only ones left to protect homes.

Unlike the members of the RLB, the staff of the Air Raid Protection Squads did not volunteer, but were conscripted by the police to take on positions as air raid wardens or house fire guards.[12] Nevertheless, many women refused to fill positions in air raid protection, claiming health problems or responsibilities for the care of young children

[9] Timothy Mason, 'Women in Germany 1925–1940: Family Welfare and Work', *History Workshop*, 2 (1976), 5–32; Stefan Bajohr, *Die Hälfte der Fabrik: Geschichte der Frauenarbeit in Deutschland 1914–1945* (Marburg, 1979), 251–4; Dörte Winkler, *Frauenarbeit im Dritten Reich* (Hamburg, 1977), 61.

[10] Olaf Groehler, *Der Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland* (Berlin, 1990), 239.

[11] Reichsluftschutzbund (ed.), *5 Jahre Reichsluftschutzbund* (Berlin, 1938), 37; report on the formation of air raid protection, Gemeindegruppe Füssen of the RLB, Jan., Feb., Mar., May, and June 1943, StA Augsburg, RLB-Ortsgruppe Kempten-Füssen 2/6.

[12] 1. Durchführungsverordnung zum Luftschutzgesetz vom 4.5.1937, RGBl. I (1937), 559–61.

Science, Business & IP Centre, Social Sciences
Monday 10.00 – 20.00
Tuesday to Thursday 09.30 – 20.00
Friday and Saturday 09.30
Sunday and English
Public Holidays
Asian
Copy C
Humaniti
Newsroo
Monday
Tuesday to
Friday and
Asian & Afr
Monday
Tuesday to Sa
Please note:
the Issue Desk
Ordering
Most collection
catalogue Explo
specific deliver
Collectio
via our
Items
visit
Son
be
Please care and
at all times and bear the following in mind:
Items in our collections can be co

or elderly relatives. It is important to appreciate that there was no universal compulsory military service demanded from women as there was for men. Despite the passing of an Air Protection Law in 1935, which obliged male and female citizens to take on duties in this field, women had various avenues for opting out.[13] Moreover, if they left, they did not have to face as severe consequences as those that befell the men who tried to quit military service.

When women took over air raid protection positions—and millions actually did—they were trained by the RLB. Even before 1939 they were made mentally ready for Germany to be once again at war—a total war in which air raids would be a major threat. This 'war of the future' (*Zukunftskrieg*), as some deaconesses termed it in their reports of a training course in the Reich Air Raid Protection school located in Berlin, would demand that women take on duties just as much as the men.[14] As the deaconesses worked in hospitals and other community facilities, their training was of some importance. Their course notes, written down for the use of the Protestant Inner Mission, show how *Volksgemeinschaft* had became a point of reference for them and framed their activism in the context of the air raid protection schemes. The deaconesses had evidently enjoyed joining the group of trainees and being accepted by the female office-holders of the RLB alongside whom they were trained. Carrying out tasks like air raid protection was seen by most of them as a key way of belonging to the *Volksgemeinschaft*. They carefully readied the institutions they worked in for a looming air war.[15]

While mobilization for air raid protection was concentrated in urban areas, two Nazi women's organizations, the National Socialist Women's League (*Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft*, or *NSF*) and the National Socialist Women's Welfare Organization (*Deutsches Frauen-Werk*, or *DFW*), were open to all women, even in small villages. Eight million women joined the NSF and the DFW before the beginning of the war; another two million followed after it broke out in 1939. These organizations employed millions of women, mostly on a voluntary, part-time basis.[16]

In the mid-1930s the Auxiliary Service (*Hilfsdienst*) was founded as a new section within the NSF and the DFW. It acted as a personnel pool.[17] The foundation of the Auxiliary Service marked a shift in the development of Nazi women's organizations because its coverage moved away from purely female issues (baby care and

[13] Franziska M. to the mayor of Trier, 24 Dec. 1941, BA-MA Freiburg, RL 41/28; Maria K. to the mayor of Trier, 21 Jan. 1943, BA-MA Freiburg, RL 41/28.

[14] Report of Gertrud W., Martin-Luther-Krankenhaus, Archiv des Diakonischen Werkes Berlin, CA/G 673.

[15] Report of Edith S., Haushaltungsschule Elbingerode, 6.3.1937, Archiv des Diakonischen Werkes Berlin, CA/G 673.

[16] For details, see the annual statistical report of the Reich Women's Leadership 1938, IfZ-Archiv MA 130, fo. 86261; Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, *Die Frau im Dritten Reich: Eine Dokumentation* (Tübingen, 1978), 80–5.

[17] Monthly reports of the Reichsfrauenführung, Mar.–Apr. 1936, in Helmut Heiber and Peter Longerich (eds), *Akten der Partei-Kanzlei der NSDAP: Rekonstruktion eines verloren gegangenen Bestandes. Sammlung der in anderen Provenienzen überlieferten Korrespondenzen, Niederschriften von Besprechungen usw. mit dem Stellvertreter des Führers und seinem Stab bzw. der Partei-Kanzlei, ihren Ämtern, Referaten und Unterabteilungen sowie mit Heß und Bormann persönlich* (Munich, 1983–92), Regest 21799.

household management) to providing wider services. At the beginning of the war, many more tasks emerged for its members to do, and the Auxiliary Service became one of the most important channels for women's efforts.

Women from the Auxiliary Service were mainly deployed in three particular areas.[18] The first of these was sewing for the *Wehrmacht*. In all local units, members of the NSF and DFW met at least twice a month to sew clothing for soldiers. In smaller villages, these meetings turned into social gatherings, almost in the style of coffee mornings or tea parties. For example, the women of Stockheim, a village near Würzburg, met regularly right through 1943. One would bring tea, others cookies; and then, while they sewed, another would entertain them playing the piano.[19] The *Wehrmacht* appreciated the sewing service that groups like this offered throughout the course of the war, and this resulted in more orders being awarded to Nazi women's organizations. To meet these demands, the NSF and DFW started running sewing centres in schools and factory buildings. The centres were equipped with sewing machines and women worked in shifts to increase the output.[20]

Yet most help was needed on the home front, especially when Allied strategic bombing started in 1942.[21] Once a bombing raid had ended, people needing assistance could go to special reception points (*Auffangstellen*). These were help stations located in closed taverns and school buildings throughout the cities. The NSV,[22] the NSF, and officials from the local state administration worked together to help people carry on with their lives after the disruption of these attacks. The NSV, which was supported by members of the Auxiliary Service, distributed food, water, and clothes to people who had been affected by the air raids. They also responded to special needs, for example providing baby bottles, teats, and baby milk. Moreover, when homes had been destroyed, women and children were sent to stay outside the cities. The paperwork needed to prepare such evacuations was done at the reception points.[23] The local NSF and NSV groups had a great impact on the creation of this relief scheme, as did the local female social workers. The support these women provided during the air raids relied substantially on already existent structures: the Neighbourhood Assistance (*Nachbarschaftshilfe*) wing of the NSF had been formed to help women manage their households, brew

[18] For details see Nicole Kramer, *'Volksgenossinnen' an der 'Heimatfront': Mobilisierung, Verhalten, Erinnerung* (Göttingen, 2011), 69–77.

[19] Monthly report of the Ortsgruppe Stockheim of the NSF and DFW, Jan. 1943, StA Würzburg, NSDAP 1059.

[20] Monthly report of the Kreisfrauenschaft Herford, Mar. 1942, StA Detmold, M 15/48.

[21] For an overview of Allied bombing, see Ralf Blank, 'Wartime Daily Life and the Air War on the Home Front', in Jörg Echternkamp (ed.), *Germany and the Second World War, ix pt. 1: German Wartime Society 1939–1945: Politicization, Disintegration, and the Struggle for Survival* (Oxford, 2008), 371–476, at 375–95. For recent research on war society and the impact of air raids, see Dietmar Süß, *Tod aus der Luft: Kriegsgesellschaft und Luftkrieg in Deutschland und England* (München, 2011).

[22] For the NSV and its role during air raids, see Armin Nolzen, '"Sozialismus der Tat": Die Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt (NSV) und der Luftkrieg gegen das Deutsche Reich', in Dietmar Süß (ed.), *Deutschland im Luftkrieg: Geschichte und Erinnerung* (München, 2007), 57–69.

[23] NSF-Kreisleitung Herford, branch 'Organisation und Personal', to NSF-Ortsgruppe Stedefreund, 28 June 1943, StA Detmold, M15/110; Reports of the social family service Hamburg, district 5a, Nov. 1940, StA Hamburg, VG 30.69, vol. 2.

coffee, and distribute meals, whilst the larger sewing centres had started to repair clothes.[24]

A third area of the Auxiliary Service's war-related activity was help with evacuation. Railway stations became important locations during the war. In order to assist evacuees on their way to safer places, the NSV opened facilities in many stations.[25] Service points had been run by the churches before, but these were closed and the NSV took over. Members of the NSV were helped by Auxiliary Service members. Together they ran the new service points and provided assistance such as carrying baggage, caring for the elderly, helping pregnant women and women with young children, distributing food, and organizing overnight accommodation.[26] It was this kind of relief work that created the bright image of the NSV and the Nazi women's organizations the population generally held.[27] Staffing by the *Volksgenossinnen* shaped the character of the railway station service points in both a positive and a negative way. On the one hand, the women were able to manage the flexibility of the relief work structures: when evacuation trains were scheduled, they could be called up to serve in the stations. On the other hand, because the work was voluntary, there could be no guarantee of reliability. Despite taking on an assignment, some women failed to show up and when this happened there was little the organization could do about it.

The women who participated in the war-related work of the NSF and DFW dealt not only with native German *Volksgenossen*, but were also involved with others, and therefore took their part in processes of exclusion. Those in the NSV were in attendance at the railway stations when forced labourers arrived by train.[28] In carrying out their allotted tasks, the women made a small but relevant contribution to the exploitative policy of forced labour.

Since forced labour was a part of racial policy, almost all women on the German home front came across it constantly in their day-to-day routines. The Nazi women's organization played a crucial role watching foreign forced labourers and reporting them to the authorities. Though the office-holders of the women's organizations held limited power to sanction behaviour they regarded as detrimental to the *Volksgemeinschaft* generally, they could force expulsions of their own members. Also, they decided whether to grant or to withhold benefits. The documents indicate that, aside from decisions on race questions, there was some elbow-room for NSF-functionaries to define where the *Volksgemeinschaft* ended. A family in Berlin, for example, was excluded from the care of the DFW, although both man and wife had joined the RLB and other Nazi organizations. The man, a severely disabled war veteran, was accused of faking his condition,

[24] Report of a NSF-Ortsgruppe of the Gau Essen, 21.10.1940, BA Berlin, NS 44/92.
[25] Circular no. 171/43 of the Hauptamt für Volkswohlfahrt, 20 Sept. 1943, StA Münster, Gauleitung Westfalen-Nord, Gauamt für Volkswohlfahrt 630.
[26] Minutes of the meeting of the chiefs of NSV-Bahnhofsdienststellen, 18.3.1943, StA Münster, Gauleitung Westfalen-Nord, Gauamt für Volkswohlfahrt 630.
[27] See also Herwart Vorländer, 'NS-Volkswohlfahrt und Winterhilfswerk des Deutschen Volkes', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 34/3 (1986), 341–406, at 380.
[28] Special report of the Bahnhofsdienst at Löhne, Nov. 1942, 7 Dec. 1942, StA Detmold, M 15/48.

and the daughter was said to suffer from a venereal disease. In another case, a sixty-eight-year-old women did not receive any help because the leader of the NSF-Ortsgruppe regarded her as 'impatient' and 'a gossip'.[29] As we learn from John Connelly's research on letters written by citizens to the Eisenach *Kreisleiter*, people 'used *Volksgemeinschaft* in solving day-to-day-problems' and in doing so, gave it a meaning.[30] This seems to have been especially true with members and officials of the local units of the NSF. Their actions not only gave *Volksgemeinschaft* meaning but shaped its development too.

INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATION: OPPORTUNITIES AND NECESSITIES

What kinds of women responded to recruitment efforts from the NSF, the DFW, and the RLB? Unlike the *Wehrmacht*, the Red Cross, and the various bodies involved with the Nazi Germanization policy, these organizations mobilized a large number of married women in their thirties, forties, and fifties. Serving for six months or more far from home was not a feasible option for them, but the Nazi women's organizations we have been examining offered a broad framework of opportunity for public service right on the women's doorsteps. An additional advantage in volunteering for this female activism was that, compared with regular employment, it guaranteed considerable flexibility in terms of time. Of course, middle-class women who were not obliged to earn money had the best opportunities to spend time working for the Auxiliary Service, but it is not quite correct to speak of the organization as a middle-class phenomenon. As Tim Mason has pointed out, the housebound wife and mother had become a very popular 'role model' during the 1930s.[31] The promotion of domesticity, Mason claims, resulted more from a general reaction to modern processes of industrialization and bureaucratization than from any specific idea of 'a woman's place' the Nazi regime chose to promote. As the number of women without employment grew, the number available for voluntary work rose.[32] There was an important relationship between responsible public activity and labour market employment here.

This last point leads right to the heart of the question why so many women joined the NSF and DFW to carry out war work. Some women, especially those with leadership roles, expressed an ideologically fuelled enthusiasm and sense of

[29] NSF-Ortsgruppe Lichtenberg-Nord an Gaufrauenschaftleitung Berlin, 5.4.1941, BA Berlin, NS 44/92; NSF-Kreisfrauenschaftsleitung an Gaufrauenschaftleitung Berlin, 13.11.1941, BA Berlin, NS 44/92.
[30] John Connelly, 'The Uses of *Volksgemeinschaft*: Letters to the NSDAP Kreisleitung Eisenach, 1939–1940', *The Journal of Modern History* 68 (1996), 899–930, at 929.
[31] Mason, *Women in Germany*, 190.
[32] Leader of the NSF-Ortsgruppen Herne-Baukau to NSDAP-Kreisleitung Herne, 22 Oct. 1943, StA Münster, NSDAP-Kreis- und Ortsgruppenleitungen no. 57; see also Gausachbearbeiterin, branch 'Organisation und Personal' to NSDAP-Gauleitung Mainfranken, Gaupersonalamt, StA Würzburg, NSDAP 1020.

duty towards the Fatherland. Serving in voluntary organizations enabled them to contribute to the war effort, just as husbands, fathers, or brothers were doing, but in their own way. And idealism could be combined with self-interest. The great majority of official positions were held on an honorific basis; but having an office offered a woman a good reputation, respect, and advantages such as the prospect of professional advancement.[33] For some it became the starting point for a later career within the Nazi regime—as it was in the case of Maria R., who lived with her parents, working in their household and gaining some extra money as a piano teacher, but who found that this was not enough to enable her to start up in a life of her own. In 1934 she assumed a position as leader of the music group of the NSF-*Ortsgruppe* in Königshofen. This voluntary activity served her well when in 1942 she applied for the position of leader of the children's group of the *Kreisfrauenschaft* in Würzburg. Her income in this post was 160 RM—four times what she was earning in 1934.[34] The Nazi organizations and the Party apparatus provided a labour market for women. Sections such as children's groups, 'mother schools' (*Mütterschulen*), and the Auxiliary Service offered opportunities also to those women who had no professional training.

Office-holders and their families received rewards, such as radios. However, non-material privileges had far more impact on the lives of women. As the war dragged on, a position as Women's League Local Leader (*Ortsfrauenschaftsleiterin*) actually enabled some women to avoid being conscripted for work in factories. Some of them also tried to make their commitment count in order to keep daughters or trainees out of the Labour Service.[35] In 1942 a thirty-year-old woman who was managing her parents' farm near Hildesheim and raising three sons on her own applied for a *Pflichtjahrmädchen* post (doing mandatory work for a year). She was told by an acquaintance that she would only be considered if she was active in a Nazi organization. So she became a member of the DFW and later the NSF, and soon gained a position as head of the *Hilfsstelle Mutter und Kind* (assistance service for mothers and children).[36] Working within the party or within a Nazi organization could be personally advantageous, especially during war.

Indeed, in the National Socialist regime, having an honorary appointment within these organizations could have even more personal significance. It could entitle a woman to privileges. The most important advantage such involvement brought, however, was the chance to safeguard individuals from the Nazis' policy of persecution. (In dictatorships it can be important to watch your back in this way.) Alma W., for instance, was a married woman from Herne. In 1942 she was

[33] Personnel records of Maria R., born 1914, member of the NSF since 30 Apr. 1934, StA Würzburg, NSDAP 1023; evaluation of Kreiskindergruppenleiterin Maria R. by Gaukindergruppenleiterin Paula A., 16 Feb. 1943, StA Würzburg, NSDAP 1023. See also personnel records of Else T., born 1901, member of the NSF since 14 May 1940, StA Würzburg, NSDAP 1023.

[34] Stammbuch von Maria R., born 1914, since 30.3.1934 member of NSF, StAWürzburg, NSDAP 1023; request for employment by Maria R. sent to Gaufrauenschaft Mainfranken, Abteilung Organisation und Personal, StA Würzburg, NSDAP 1023.

[35] See, for example, the report of Kreisfrauenschaft Herford, August 1942, StA Detmold M 15/48.

[36] Letter from Margarete Spangenberg, September 1987, Archiv des Deutschen Frauenrates Berlin, Frauenschicksale in Kriegs- und Nachkriegszeit.

accused of believing in communist ideas, but was able to defend herself by referring to her work at the NSF and DFW.[37] Memberships and positions became powerful categories of distinction and hierarchy, strongly affecting life opportunities.

For ordinary members of the NSF and DFW contributing to wartime work, other explanations are needed as to why they undertook their tasks. Especially in small villages, simply getting together to fulfil duties had a strong social dimension women found very important. Those who were on their own because husbands, children, and other relatives had been conscripted for war service joined the NSF and DFW to meet others in the same situation. Despite the expectations of their leaders, wartime patriotism probably played a much smaller part. Instead, a sense of solidarity towards family and friends largely lay behind their willingness to get involved. Serving in the sewing centres, for example, repairing clothes for soldiers, made some women believe that they were helping their fathers, husbands, and brothers.[38]

Finally, many of the war-related activities of the Auxiliary Service dealt with problems women had to face every day, especially in the bombed cities. Involvement in the relief work of Nazi organizations was therefore a way in which they could help themselves and care for their surroundings. This applied particularly to women involved in air raid protection. In order to keep family members safe and preserve homes, women felt a strong need to take on positions as air raid wardens or fire guards. As a forty-seven-year-old woman from Lübeck pointed out during an interview conducted on behalf of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey:

> At the time of the big attack I was house warden, and I had to stay at my place of duty. My husband is an invalid, and he couldn't stand the bad air in the bunkers. So we stayed at home… I proceeded to extinguish the fires so as to save our own dwelling. For I thought: Oh dear Lord! If this goes, and since we have no children, they will give us only a single room. I wanted at least to save our home. To live with strangers with a sick husband is not pleasant.[39]

WELFARE IN WAR

During the war, the Nazi regime also expressed its stance towards women through its welfare measures. In contrast to the years before 1939, promoting motherhood and a population policy was not the main reason for welfare. War brought hardships like the conscription of husbands and sons, relatives who were soldiers being injured or killed, and, of course, the air raids, which were a direct threat to the

[37] Declaration by Alma W. to the NSDAP-Ortsgruppe Herne, 23 Oct. 1942, StA Münster, NSDAP Kreis- und Ortsgruppenleitungen no. 43. See also statement by the Gauschlichtungsstelle Mainfranken concerning the case of Elisabeth C., 12 Feb.1944, StA Würzburg, NSDAP 1018.

[38] Report 'Der Dank der Heimat' by the Ortsfrauenschaftsleiterin Liesel K. of the Kreis Herford, Jan. 1942, StA Detmold, M 15/94; Interview with Irmgard T., 26 Nov. 1984, Archiv Deutsches Gedächtnis Lüdenscheid.

[39] Interview no. 89 with woman, 47 years old (washerwoman), Lübeck, Schedule A, 20 July 1945, NARA RG 243/190/62/24/04 Entry 6 Box 527.

female population. The social risks of wartime gave rise to new welfare measures. As in the past, though, the Nazi regime also used these welfare programmes to put their racist and eugenic ideologies into effect, and to maintain loyalty.[40]

One of the most important sectors of Nazi welfare during the war, and one which was long neglected in later historical research, was care for the dependants of soldiers killed on active service. Some preliminary remarks need to be made about the structure of this welfare sector. Care for surviving family members of war casualties was assigned to the *Wehrmacht* administration by law in 1938.[41] The *Wehrmacht* High Command had asked for this assignment in order to control all areas that concerned soldiers, even those dealing with their relatives. At the end of the war the administration of these matters reverted to the Ministry of Labour, which again handled all bereavement issues.[42] The SS was in charge of its own men and had a separate welfare administration. Its structure, however, was quite similar to that of the army. In addition, the Nazi Party and its affiliated organizations, especially the National Socialist War Victims' Charity (*Nationalsozialistische Kriegsopferversorgung*), offered non-institutional services. In the case of the death of husbands or sons, bereaved women received help from more than one side. From the perspective of the welfare recipients, this polycracy could be positively useful.

Benefits and services were enhanced during the war. Rates were increased and, more importantly, the group of recipients expanded. Parents who had been dependent on the income of sons who had died could receive a pension. Fiancées were entitled to pensions and other benefits if their betrothed had fallen in action and they could prove that a marriage had been planned.[43] The Nazi regime provided pensions and bereavement payments as well as non-material services such as helping with paperwork, finding new accommodation, making donations of furniture, and so on. Care measures began right from the moment when the notification of a soldier's death arrived. Nazi leaders were afraid that grieving women would lose faith in their political leadership, and so they tried very hard to control grief, not only at a symbolic level (especially through official grieving ceremonies) but also by ensuring that surviving relatives did not run into financial troubles. An additional reason for the regime's efforts was a desire to contain the influence of the church on women who had lost loved ones.

The majority of adults receiving some form of welfare were women. Mothers, the widowed, and the divorced were in an especially difficult economic situation,

[40] Christoph Sachße and Florian Tennstedt, *Geschichte der Armenfürsorge in Deutschland, iii: Der Wohlfahrtsstaat im Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart, 1992), 275–6.

[41] Fürsorge- und Versorgungsgesetz für die ehemaligen Angehörigen der Wehrmacht und ihre Hinterbliebenen (Wehrmachtfürsorge- und -versorgungsgesetz) vom 26. August 1938, RGBl.I (1938), 1077–9; Fürsorge- und Versorgungsgesetz für die ehemaligen Angehörigen der 'Wehrmacht bei besonderem Einsatz und ihre Hinterbliebenen (EWFVG) vom 6. Juli 1939, RGBl. I (1939), 1217–23. 'Aufzeichnung des Reichsarbeitsministeriums für eine Besprechung zwischen den Herrn Reichsministern Hess und Seldte', circa 1939 in Akten der Partei-Kanzlei, Regest 21034.

[42] 'Erlass des Führers über die Wehrmachtsfürsorge und -versorgung vom 11.10.1943', in Heiber and Longerich (eds), Akten der Partei-Kanzlei, Regest 14041.

[43] 'Talk on 'Elternversorgung' (circa1941), BA-MA Freiburg, RW 16/228.

and a growing number of fiancées also applied for benefits and services. Welfare officers of the *Wehrmacht* and SS, as well as officials from the National Socialist War Victims' Charity were all advised on how to deal with women.[44] The documents relating to this subject reveal the emergence of a notion of womanhood based on comradeship. Women were to act as comrades to the men. The construct of comradeship was not intended to strengthen domesticity among the female population; on the contrary, the idea of comradeship suggested that women had a patriotic duty. Female relatives of the fallen should be proud of their man's sacrifice, and they were urged to grieve silently, without questioning the Nazi regime. Following the death of a husband or son, they were to be reminded of their own duty towards the state and Party. Policy for the care of widows and other bereaved relatives was affected by gender in a second way: the National Socialist regime introduced measures to retain the loyalty of men just as much as to appease the women. It was reassuring for soldiers to know that, if they were to be killed, their wives and other relatives would be taken care of by the state, army, and the Party.

Archival sources may provide a clear insight into the intentions of the Nazi regime, but social reality involves much more complex considerations. One thing is certain: the churches defended and maintained their position as experts in acknowledging the grief of the bereaved. Religious ceremonies were much more popular than those put on by the Party. Catholic and Protestant clergy became very creative in inventing new ceremonies and symbols to replace what was missing, for during the war it was not possible to bury the dead in their home communities: transferring the body of a soldier was forbidden. During church services, therefore, candles symbolized the lives of the soldiers and, when the priests read out the names of the dead, children blew out the lights. In some churches there were memorials at the cemetery shaped like graves, and women could mourn there.[45]

When it came to material needs, the regime's measures were more successful. Unlike other welfare benefits, benefits and services involving the care of the bereaved were not cut back by the Nazi regime. The welfare division of care for widows and other bereaved relatives had a considerable impact, thanks to many reforms made during the Second World War. Parents and fiancées of dead soldiers were entitled to benefits such as had never been seen before (or since). The economic situation of farmers' widows, in particular, improved greatly when they applied for pensions and other services. The same can be said for young unmarried women expecting a child from a soldier whose death prevented him from taking responsibility. As letters of complaint indicate, some of the potential recipients—for example, brides—had to be proactive.

Although these benefits and services eased the situation of many women, gratitude towards the regime was rare and there was not much feeling of solidarity with

[44] Talk by the Fürsorge- und Versorgungsabteilung des Wehrkreiskommandos VI, 6 May 1940, BA-MA Freiburg, RH 53-12/101.

[45] Extract from a report of the Gaupropgandaleitung Köln-Aachen, 18.3.1942, BA Berlin NS 18/474; Meldungen aus dem Reich (Nr. 363), 1.3.1943, in Heinz Boberach (ed.), *Meldungen aus dem Reich: Die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS*, xiii (Herrsching, 1984), 4869–86.

it. Because problems and criticisms are recorded much more often than acquiescence, the documents tell us a good deal about disappointment and anger within the population. Women complained about payment rates, but more often about the process of applying for benefits and services and accessing them. This was an intrinsic problem caused by Nazi propaganda, which created an expectation of easy procedures. The Nazi leaders had promised to provide welfare in an unbureaucratic manner, unlike the welfare administration of the Weimar Republic which they accused of having forgotten the people's needs.[46] Even if this ideal did affect how welfare was managed in practice, provision was still carried out by bureaucratic institutions that had to go through the administrative process of reviewing and approving claims.

Nonetheless, this disappointment and anger never sparked any acts of mass protest. Some women complained about the way they were treated in petitionary letters and reminded the Nazi regime of its duty to care for the relatives of dead soldiers.[47] Letters like this were very successful in enforcing individual claims. Although petitionary letters gave citizens opportunities to participate in dictatorships, they also prevented criticism. They were a means of making some sort of collective protest, but the communication was kept between rulers and individuals.[48] In a society with nothing uncontrolled in the public sphere, protest was unable to evolve.

Under Nazi rule, welfare was not only an instrument for integration, but also a means of disciplining and marshalling people. Apart from the demand for good political behaviour, the female population was pressured when it came to issues of love and sexual relations outside marriage. The welfare administration was able to withdraw pensions and benefits if women were declared 'unworthy', as they were cases of alleged adultery. In order to formalize the process of withdrawal, a law as passed in March 1943 to make such action legal.[49]

Analysis of this particular piece of marital legislation shows that women were not just passive recipients. When it came to the withdrawal of benefits, the administration did not act without corroborating evidence. Welfare officers needed confirmation of their suspicions—perhaps a newborn child that could not be the offspring of the dead soldier. More often relatives, particularly the parents of the soldier, accused the widow of adultery and sued for an *ex post* divorce.[50] By doing so, parents had a better chance of entitlement to bereavement payments. An *ex post*

[46] Talk delivered by the chief of section 3 of the Wehrmachtsfürsorge- und -versorgungsamt Nürnberg, 6 Jan. 1941, BA-MA Freiburg, RW 16/228; instruction no. 1 for the SS-Fürsorgeoffiziere, Fürsorge- und Versorgungsamt der Waffen-SS München, 1 June 1940, BA-MA Freiburg, RS 5/216.

[47] See, for example, Frieda L. to OKW, 12 July 1942, BA-MA Freiburg, RW16/116.

[48] Thomas Lindenberger, 'Diktatur der Grenzen. Zur Einleitung', in Thomas Lindenberger (ed.), *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur: Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Köln et.al., 1999), 13–44, at 32.

[49] 5. Durchführungsverordnung zum Ehegesetz vom 18 März 1943, in RGBl. I (1943), 145.

[50] Frau Hirsch to Partei-Kanzlei, 1 Feb. 1943, BA Berlin, R 3001/466; minutes of the session of Zivilkammer 3 b, LandgerichtMünchen I, 19 Jan. 1944, StA München, Landgerichte 10457; minutes of the session of Zivilkammer 3 b, Landgericht München I, 2 Mar. 1944, StA München, Landgerichte 17381.

divorce also affected questions relating to inheritance. The social reality of caring for widowed women thus turned out to be much more complex than it seemed in the legislative blueprints.

For civilians, the Second World War was quite unlike the First World War. During the Second World War, German women were not solely anxious about the lives of their husbands and male relatives, but were themselves exposed to danger. Air raids put the populations of cities (where women often were in the majority) right in the middle of the battlefield. Those who lost their homes or suffered injury needed help, and not everyone could count on family and friends when looking for food, drink, clothing, and a place to stay. The reception points were therefore much frequented after air raids, especially by people who were home-based. In the meantime, factories and other places of work looked after their employees, and became important for organizing daily living under the conditions of war. It could be said that the reception points had the same function for non-workers. Bombed-out people received not only food and clothes, but replacements for documents such as identity cards, and also ration stamps. Furthermore, the NSV made evacuation arrangements for those who had no occupation within the city.[51] A study of the testimonies of women from Kassel who experienced the major air raid of 22 March 1943 reveals that they had to make use of the Party's relief work in order to ensure their survival and that of their families. These testimonies were collected by a community office searching for missing people. Some made their way to the archives and were later edited as survivors' accounts.[52] Even though they were produced for a different purpose, they show clearly the efforts made by women to get on after air raids, and to what extent they needed the assistance of the reception points.

In post-air raid relief work, however, by far the most challenging task was to manage evacuations. Official programmes were started in September 1940, sending children from Berlin, Hamburg, and the Ruhr area to rural regions.[53] Children under the age of six had to be accompanied by their mothers, who therefore had a chance to leave the bombed cities themselves. It was not until the bombing became especially severe in 1942 that the Nazi leadership agreed to proceed with the evacuation of adults living in the cities. Women and the elderly with no work obligations had to go to 'non-threatened reception areas' where bombing was not yet a part of everyday life. When the numbers of damaged homes rose and the disruption to essential services (electricity, gas, and water) increased, evacuation became not only a question of safety, but a necessity: there was overwhelming

[51] Report on 'Die kriegsbedingte Tätigkeit der NSV auf dem Gebiete der Evakuierung und Sofortmaßnahmen nach Luftangriffen' by Karl H., 19 May 1945, NARA RG 243/190/62/24/04, Entry 6, Box 562.

[52] See the statement by Luise G., 29 Mar. 1944, in 'Überlebensberichte: Der 22. Oktober 1943', Magistrat der Stadt Kassel (ed.), *Protokolle der Vermißtensuchstelle des Oberbürgermeisters der Stadt Kasel* (Kassel, 1993), 76–7; statement by Lotte G., 17 Mar. 1944, Magistrat der Stadt Kassel (ed.), *Protokolle*, 66–7; statement by Auguste B., 12 Apr. 1944, Magistrat der Stadt Kassel (ed.), *Protokolle*, 85–7.

[53] Circular from Stabsleiter des Stellvertreters des Führers, Martin Bormann, to Reichs— und Parteistellen, 27 Sept. 1940, in Gerhard Kock, *"Der Führer sorgt für unsere Kinder…": Die Kinderlandverschickung im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Paderborn, 1997), 353–8.

deprivation within the cities. In January 1945 the number of evacuees reached 9 million. According to official statistics, 1.8 million people arranged their own evacuation, but the majority joined the NSV's evacuation programme.[54]

A fifty-three-year-old woman from Karlsruhe, interviewed by the United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS), recalled how she and her daughters left the city after a big raid in 1944:

> The office of the local Nazi branch told us to leave Karlsruhe. Hundreds of people left. We had been put up in the vocational school for 14 days. So we were sent to a small town, Demmingen near Effingen. It's about two hours by train. Everything was arranged for and paid for. We got a slip of paper and were told where to go and when to leave. We were put up in the house of a woman who had a big farm.[55]

Since there were plenty of women who had no family to go to when their own homes were destroyed, care for evacuees became one of the most important tasks undertaken by the NSV and other Nazi organizations. In spite of difficulties and confusions in the evacuation programme (especially towards the end of the war), the morale division of the USSBS, in its summarizing report, stated that 'the advantages had outweighed its disadvantages'.[56]

When the USSBS interviewers asked about evacuation experiences, they were very surprised by the respondents' answers: they showed much less dissatisfaction than they had expected. The official German intelligence reports had pictured a high degree of discontent, but the morale division of the USSBS came to a different conclusion. In hindsight, we may suspect that the majority of evacuees valued their general reception and forgot about the difficulties. Furthermore, even if women were unhappy with their circumstances away from home, this does not mean they condemned the whole system or questioned the legitimacy of the regime.

Unhappy or not, many evacuated women relied on the NSV or the NSF while travelling to their reception areas, and also when they arrived. Their needs, for furniture and a place to cook, and their troubles, perhaps friction with their hosts, gave them reasons to get in touch with the Nazi organizations, or else with the churches (which were also very concerned). The women used this help to solve the problems they faced while settling down and learning to get along in unfamiliar surroundings. The stories they told later about muddling through after the air raids testify not only to individual achievements, but also to a collective enterprise and a high degree of mutual support.

Conversely, broad criticism from the evacuees could make the regime rethink parts of its evacuation policy. Julia Torrie shows that its attitude towards family

[54] For the statistics, see Michael Krause, *Flucht vor dem Bombenkrieg: 'Umquartierung' im Zweiten Weltkrieg und die Wiedereingliederung der Evakuierten in Deutschland 1943–1963* (Düsseldorf, 1997), 182.

[55] Interview no. 45 with woman, 53 years old, housewife, Karlsruhe, Schedule A, 12 July 1945, NARA RG 243/190/62/24/04, Entry 6, Box 525. See also interview no. 17 with woman, 19 years old, student, Hamburg, Schedule A, 9 June 1945, NARA RG 243/190/62/24/04, Entry 6, Box 518; letter from Luise W., 10 Aug. 1987, Archiv des Deutschen Frauenrates Berlin, Frauenschicksale in Kriegs- und Nachkriegszeit.

[56] The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, i. 71.

separations changed during war. Sending women and children far from home while their husbands and fathers had to stay in the cities was a significant element of German evacuation policy. By contrast, the French authorities at this time kept families together.[57] In the German Reich, women who returned without permission not only increased railroad traffic, which was overloaded anyway, they also challenged the regime by ignoring official orders. As the authorities took measures to enforce the evacuation policy, for example by denying ration cards, small-scale protests arose. Perhaps the best known of these is the one that occurred in Witten, when on 11 October 1943, three hundred people, most of them wives of workers, protested against the threat of being evacuated. In the end, protests like this, combined with the steady flow of returnees, made the Nazi leaders modify their evacuation policy. They realized they could not force adults into evacuation. And programmes were started up to enable men to visit their families in the reception areas at least twice a year.[58] As Torrie shows, this change of policy arose from a negotiation process in which women, as members of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, had their claims recognized.[59]

CONCLUSION

It is no coincidence that research interest in the roles of women in Nazi society grew just when historians began to reassess the social history of Nazi Germany, and were arguing that *Volksgemeinschaft* was more than just a propaganda slogan, but had some reality. Until recently, the terms *Volksgenossen* and *Volksgenossinnen* were understood as being synonymous with 'persecutors',[60] but the picture we now gain is far more refined. Study of the *Volksgenossinnen* offers a way of describing women's behaviour, action, and involvement beyond traditional categories such as 'persecutors', 'bystanders', and 'victims'. These categories revolve around Nazi crimes and the question of how far the female population was complicit in them. There were many areas in which women did not participate in the persecution policy, but nevertheless interacted with the Nazi regime. Until now, in historical research, these areas have remained more or less 'out of focus'; but current investigations of the *Volksgenossinnen* reveal 'non—or semi-public actions of women' and relate them to new points of reference: the cohesion of wartime society, mobilizing structures, and the practice of Nazi welfare.

[57] Julia S. Torrie, *"For Their Own Good": Civilian Evacuations in France and Germany 1939–1945* (New York, 2010), 94–127.

[58] Julia S. Torrie, '"If only family unity can be maintained": The Witten Protest and German Civilian Evacuations', *German Studies Review* 29/2 (2006), 347–66. Many have written about the Witten protests and there are different approaches to this event: see also, for example, Richard J. Evans, 'German Women and the Triumph of Hitler', *Journal of Modern History* 48/1 (1976), 123–75.

[59] Torrie, '"If only family unity"', 356.

[60] See the contribution of Ian Kershaw to this volume. Kershaw criticizes the practice of using 'Volksgemeinschaft' synonymously with 'Tätergesellschaft'.

A 'social history of experience', as claimed at the beginning of this essay, 'focuses on people as the central subject of social history'.[61] The challenge in this discipline lies in avoiding getting lost in the huge variety of individual experiences and instead finding patterns of behaviour and evidence through which individual actions shaped structures. Thus, when exploring the mobilization of women in National Socialist Germany, it was my aim to examine the areas the women could participate in and see where top-down processes evolved into processes of interaction between rulers and the individuals who were active in society. Exploration of the agency of women shows how they met the demands of the Nazi leadership while setting their own terms, satisfying their own interests, and sometimes offering opposition. It becomes clear too that the attitudes and actions of the *Volksgenossinnen* could shape Nazi policies as well as affect the life chances of others in a negative way. This is what was going on when the leader of a local NSF branch denied benefits to those she regarded as outside the *Volksgemeinschaft* and when the mother of a fallen soldier accused his widow of adultery in order to increase her own chances of getting welfare entitlements.

However, it is very important to avoid the traps of correlating all the actions of women with the political aims of the Nazi regime and of overestimating the cohesive force within Nazi society. If we did that, we would be returning to the concepts of totalitarianism in a history-from-below perspective. It is essential to see that the politics surrounding the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft* not only aimed to achieve consent, but also created differences, and even conflict.

Finally, researchers should pay attention to unintended developments which may have had an influence beyond the Nazi period. A crucial concern of social historians is to detect long-term shifts and currents. How the Nazi regime (which lasted only twelve years) affected later social and cultural developments is one of the most interesting questions. Tim Mason once expressed some striking thoughts on the 'modern form of domesticity as a specific reaction to modernization and bureaucratization'.[62] Following his suggestion, this essay ends by raising a significant query: What role did the period of Nazism play in launching or assisting long-term developments in the history of women and gender relations? An exploration in depth would be necessary to find satisfying answers. But one essential thing stands out: there is a continuity in the way women's activism during the war has been valued. Nazi propaganda praised the efforts made by women workers in the wartime industrial sector, in Nazi organizations, in agriculture, in air raid defence, and in their own households. After the war, politicians, women's organizations, and women themselves continued to commend this work, but now separated it from the political dimension that had been present. In stark contrast to how men who had had an involvement with the Nazi regime had to face their pasts, this separation was possible and could be done quite smoothly.

[61] Jarausch, 'Towards a social history of experience', 442.
[62] Mason, *Women in Germany*, 205.