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German man or Latvian Dvina? National self-perceptions and identities of Hugo Wittrock and Harry Marnitz in Riga 1941–1943/44

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ABSTRACT

Taking the concept of national indifference of Tara Zahra as a starting point, the article examines the national self-perception of two Baltic German officials within the Nazi administration in occupied Riga during the Second World War on the basis of their memoirs. While Hugo Wittrock, who had lived most of his prewar years in independent Latvia, was more inclined toward a conservative German nationalism, Harry Marnitz, who had become a Nazi member already in 1926, depicted himself as an admirer of the Latvian culture. Both enthusiastically described the nature as the crucial part of their beloved homeland.

KEYWORDS Baltic Germans; national indifference; hybridity; Second World War; Nazi occupation; civil administration of Riga

Introduction

Considering various concepts of deconstructing national approaches in historical writing, such as *histoire croisee*, transnational history, or entangled history, the historian Tara Zahra convincingly makes the point that most of these concepts suffer in trying to deconstruct the national category, while at the same time referring to national thinking (Zahra 2010). She presents the term ‘national indifference’ as a methodological tool for understanding the absence of national thought, not as a failure or omission but as a framework for discussing the incentives of individuals who ‘failed to bark’ (Gellner 1983, 43). According to Zahra, the pressure to choose between national options occasionally caused the opposite—the refusal to accept the national category altogether. It is fundamental to understand that this refusal of choice must not be interpreted as the backward appearance of allegedly lower social strata in underdeveloped Eastern Europe, as the nationalists tended to depict the phenomenon. Instead, it was an active pronouncement of political importance—the deliberate decision for indecisiveness or the active dimension of passiveness (Zahra 2010, 113). The following considerations aim at relating Zahra’s thoughts to case studies of the Baltic German community during the Second World War. Zahra herself uses examples mainly originating from regions in Central and Eastern Europe, like the Bohemian lands or Silesia, where national settings were struggling to take root until late into the

twentieth century. Similarly, different national groups have shaped the Baltic region; intermarriage and bilingualism were common; therefore, it seems worthwhile to apply the concept of national indifference to the Baltic German case.

At the beginning of the Second World War, following the Hitler-Stalin-Pact, the Baltic German population of Estonia and Latvia almost entirely left the region. In total, a number of roughly 70,000 relocated to the so-called *Wartheland*, a region in occupied Poland (Feldmanis 2012; Loeber 1972; Müller 2012; Neander 2010). After the occupation of the Baltic states in 1941, approximately 1,000 Baltic Germans took the chance to return to their homeland, which was now being incorporated as a part of the occupational regime (Kangeris 2008). How did these Baltic Germans perceive themselves in terms of their cultural identity and the task of their return? Where did the returnees locate their national loyalty between the conceivable options of Nazi racial policies, conservative German nationalism, and local regionalism? Did they regard themselves as a distinct group somewhat different from the so-called *Reichsdeutsche* (Germans from the Reich) within the occupational regime? What was their relation with the national ambitions of the local population of Latvia? To what extent did they feel mentally obliged to an occupational policy resting on racially justified concepts of Germanization, deportation, or even extermination of the local population, as manifested and expressed in the *Generalplan Ost* (Master plan East) (Gräfe 2010; Lehmann, Bohn, and Uwe 2012; Myllyniemi 1973; Plath 2012)?

Since it is an impossible task to discern the personal motives and political perceptions of all Baltic German returnees collectively, I will concentrate on just two personalities—Hugo Wittrock and Harry Marnitz. It is valuable to scrutinize their fates closely because they both wrote detailed personal memories after the war—the only published memoirs of Baltic Germans working for the occupational regime. They also both stayed in Riga, the capital of the *Reichskommissariat Ostland* (Reich Commissariat Ostland), which encompassed the territory of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the western part of Belarus (Marnitz 1991; Wittrock 1979). Moreover, they both had significant appointments within the occupation regime, Wittrock as the mayor of Riga and Marnitz as the director of the health department for the Latvian territory in the *Generalkommissariat Lettland* (General Commissariat Latvia). Both were influential and ambitious and left remarkable legacies, which in turn enable us to verify their memoirs by means of archival documents. However, as we will see, their attitudes differed significantly.

Another Baltic German, who could be considered a comparable case to Wittrock and Marnitz, is Walter von Medem, the *Gebietskommissar* (District Commissar) of nearby Mitau/Jelgava who produced some personal testimonials and is mentioned often by both Marnitz and Wittrock. But his publications differ insofar as they were already published at the outset of the war and detailed his experiences during the fighting and the aftermath of the First World War in the vicinity of Riga (Medem 1935, 1942). Finally, it is well known that Alfred Rosenberg, the chief architect of Nazi ideology and Minister of the Occupied Eastern Territories, was himself of Baltic German origin. But his case has already been well researched and, due to his exceptional position within the Nazi hierarchy, it is not appropriate to perceive him as a representative of the Baltic German community (Piper 2007).

The main sources to be used—personal testimonies—bear some well-known perils. However, with regard to the testimonies of Wittrock and Marnitz, it is safe to say that while their reports need to be read carefully when it comes to the topic of Nazi crimes

and their personal inflections with those crimes, they are less misleading in terms of national self-perception. However, a reasonable awareness of possible alterations in their reports is still appropriate.

Historical background—the ‘resettlement’

For some scholars, the very fact that almost all Baltic Germans left Estonia and Latvia following the Nazi campaign, calling them ‘home to the Reich,’ serves as a strong indicator for the significant attractiveness which the Nazi German Reich possessed under the given political circumstances (Bosse and Garleff 2001; Feldmanis 2012, 33–36). Determining the reasons for this historical process may lead to the following general considerations: the aftermath of the First World War and the unfortunate clashes between Baltic Germans and Estonians and Latvians are of crucial importance, as well as the controversial issue of the early 1920s, the Agrarian Reforms. The latter severely deteriorated the mutual relations between Baltic Germans and Estonians and Latvians (Garleff 2001a, 111–14). Despite these grievances, the interaction improved considerably over the course of the interwar period, a period that is associated with names like Paul Schiemann and Werner Hasselblatt by Baltic Germans (Hiden 2004; Hackmann 2008). However, the world economic crisis, the inauguration of nationalistic authoritarian regimes under Konstantin Päts and Karlis Ulmanis, and the Nazi movement itself proved sufficient to undermine the hopeful partial successes of minority politics. The menace of war and Soviet Occupation finally convinced the overwhelming majority of the Baltic Germans to leave the Baltic states and to settle in the German Reich. So, in what ways were Baltic Germans destined to contribute to the ideal of Nazi Germany?

Baltic Germans and the return to the Baltic region

To understand the fate of the Baltic Germans under Nazi rule and their position within Nazi Germany, it is essential to point out that the mutual relationship was not without difficulties. Although the Nazi ideology had gained a considerable number of followers among the Baltic Germans before the Second World War, it was Hitler himself who had some serious reservations toward the Baltic Germans. This was due to the fact that he suspected a strong aristocratic attitude among them, which naturally did not fit well to the ideology of a *Volksgemeinschaft* (people’s community). Hitler’s assessment of Baltic Germans reads as follows:

With Baltic [German] families I often got uneasy. They tend to be quite negative and generally behave as if they were superior in a way, which I have hardly ever encountered elsewhere in my life, especially the tendency to master everything. ... On the other hand, there is this wonderful spirit of community, a readiness of mutual assistance – unbelievable! But as a consequence of several centuries of hegemony over an inferior people, a mentality has evolved as if all mankind would consist only of people like Latvians, who demand leadership. Of course they all knew each other. ... The Balts [Baltic Germans] tend to assess other people on the basis of what they know about a certain Count So-And-So and his family relationship with a certain princess Princess Such-And-Such. (Jochmann 1980, 357)

In order to avoid a revisionist Baltic German policy in the Baltic region, which would strive to impose the old conservative Baltic German privileges, Hitler, Himmler, and Rosenberg decided to prohibit Baltic German resettlement in the occupied Baltic

states (Plath 2012, 445). Even Rosenberg conceded to this matter despite the potential use of Baltic German's local knowledge for the German Occupational Regime:

Due to psychological and historical reasons, it does not seem suitable to put the political responsibility in the hands of the Balts [Baltic Germans]. Even if it has to be admitted that they know the circumstances best and that they command the languages; the numerous historical traces and constellations create a situation, in which it seems counterproductive for the achievement of our goals to let the old enemies of the Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians appear in predominant positions again. (BA-R-43.2.684a 1941)

Taking these considerations into account, Nazi German authorities decided Baltic German resettlement would need special permission by the SS and the *Ostministerium* (Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories) and should be limited to a very confined group of specialists (Bundesarchiv BA-R-92.1140 u.p. 1942). By settling the Baltic Germans in occupied Poland, two Nazi goals could be reached simultaneously: the Germanization of Polish territory and an interference with the social structure of the Baltic Germans by means of involving them in agricultural preoccupation. However, approximately 1,000 Baltic Germans returned to Nazi occupied Estonia or Latvia and worked for the occupational regime, the SS, or in the economic sector (Kangeris 2008, 401). Special attention had been paid to members of the younger generation, who showed a strong affinity toward Nazism and who, due to their language skills, were welcome in the *Einsatzgruppen* (special task forces) of the security police (Lenz 2008; Schröder 2003).

Hugo Wittrock—the (Baltic) German?

Hugo Wittrock came to occupied Latvia as a specialist of the civil administration. Born on the island of Saaremaa/Ösel in 1873 in the Estonian part of the Russian Empire, he went to study in Riga, where he got caught up in the Baltic German cultural life. Most important was his membership in the student corporation Rubonia. Later, he opened his own insurance company but left Riga after the First World War. Wittrock returned in 1925, only to retire in 1936, and moved to Königsberg until the war finally gave him the possibility to return once again to Riga. Getting a permission for his return as a Baltic German was facilitated by the fact that he had worked for the German military governor of Riga already in 1917/1918 during the German occupation (*Deutsche Zeitung im Ostland* 1943). After the conclusion of the Second World War, Wittrock lived in the Federal Republic of Germany and died in Lübeck as a result of a car accident in 1958. Wilhelm Lenz Sr. and Wilhelm Lenz Jr., of Baltic German ancestry, published Wittrock's memoirs after his death in 1979 (Wittrock 1979, 7–9).

His position in Riga from 1941 to 1944 was extraordinary for several reasons. First of all, he was a personal friend of Rosenberg, which ensured him a good deal of support for his sometimes-controversial attitudes. Secondly, as a reinvigorated pensioner he felt somewhat independent or at least not in a position that required him to achieve the approval of his superiors. Most strikingly, however, he attained a special position with far-reaching objectives in terms of a projected Germanization, as Riga was planned to become the first German and simultaneously the most important city of the region. Likewise, he was the only official of the rank of a *Gebietskommissar* (District Commissar) completely independent from the Latvian Administration of *Generaldirektoren* (General Directors). In the remaining five districts of Latvia, the

German District Commissars were obliged to communicate more closely with their Latvian colleagues (Evarts 2005).

But how did he depict his role in Riga in light of the question of national self-perception? First of all, it has to be stated that Wittrock's memoirs bear a strong apologetic bias, in contrast to the more self-critical Marnitz. Others, he claims, committed all of the crimes and mistakes, whereas he adhered to the rightful objective. The contrast between the 'malicious others' and the 'righteous self' particularly apply to his account of the Holocaust in Riga where tens of thousands of Jews were killed while Wittrock was in charge of the local civil administration of the city. Only in one very short paragraph does he mention the killings at Rumbula at the end of 1941 (Angrick and Klein 2006). It is very unlikely that he had not seen or heard anything about the mass killing earlier that year in Riga and its vicinities, Rumbula and Biķernieki. Right after this obscure and vague passage about Rumbula, he starts to discuss, in detail, the important issue of celebrating Christmas in 1941 (Wittrock 1979, 38). While this matter may not surprise, it entails an important feature that characterizes not only Wittrock's account but also Marnitz's and others. It is the legend of the 'innocent civil administration,' which is usually contrasted with the image of a cruel and inhuman SS (Danker 1997, 2004). Not coincidentally are the chapters of Wittrock's memoirs called *Kampfjahre* (Years of fighting). But it is not the fight against the Soviet Union that this expression refers to (Jüngerkes 2010): the term 'fight' refers to the constant battle against the allegedly almighty SS in all fields of his political life.

Keeping in mind that such argumentation has to be interpreted as a postwar apologetic strategy, it is still quite revealing, since it provides us with a glimpse of his political thinking. It shows how he depicted the political opponent and also how he glorified his own deeds. In this perspective, his reservations toward the ideology of the SS do not so much derive from the Holocaust and the crimes committed by the SS, but rather from the circumstance that, in his view, the SS pursued the wrong cultural goals.

Furthermore, the apologetic separation in his narrative is not confined to the SS and the Holocaust alone. While writing about his opponents within the civil administration, Wittrock gives us an idea of a special Baltic German mission he felt obliged to accomplish. Although he generally seemed to be (and had to be) a loyal Nazi, he felt free to regard himself as imbued with a somewhat special task, being a Baltic German with a special relation to Riga and the Baltic region that other Germans did not possess. Wittrock summarizes his 'fight' during 1941 as follows:

Pushing forward impetuously, the first year of the battle for the rights of Riga came to an end. ... The much stronger means of power lay on the opposing side, but on our side were the law of morality and the by far greater devotion for the matter, the love to our homeland (*Heimatliebe*). Relying on this confidential perspective we optimistically entered the second year of fighting. (Wittrock 1979, 20)

Again, it is the aspect of 'fighting' that deserves attention here. Additionally, it is important to comprehend his concept of '*Heimat*' (homeland) as crucial to his argument (Applegate 1990, 4–19). It is the 'love for the homeland' which distinguishes him, a Baltic German, to possess a privileged relation to the occupied land in contrast to other Germans. In turn, the regional 'love for the homeland,' as an essential guideline for Wittrock's policy, caused him a number of serious troubles with other institutions of the German occupational regime, which favored more

nationalistic German concepts. Since he devoted himself heavily to the promotion of Baltic German cultural values in Riga and envisioned a revival of Riga as a city dominated by traditional Baltic German values, he faced vicious accusations. For example, one of his cultural initiatives was the installation of a German pastor at the main cathedral in Riga. This was an old controversial issue of the interwar period between Baltic Germans and Latvians, and therefore not a sensible measure for improving German-Latvian relations (Cerūzis 2004, 108–10). Another major cultural initiative was his dedication to the traditional Baltic German singing culture. In ongoing disputes with other German institutions about accommodation and prestigious housing in the city center, he organized choir events, which were attended almost exclusively by Baltic Germans.

Even more dangerous for Wittrock was his proclivity to appoint old friends within his city administration, especially from his times in the student fraternity Rubonia. As a matter of fact, nowhere else was the concentration of Baltic Germans in the Nazi Occupation regime higher than in Wittrock's Riga city administration, despite the fact that resettlement of Baltic Germans was explicitly forbidden (Kangeris 2008, 408). His administration came to be known as a '*Deutschbaltische Brutstätte*' (Baltic German hotbed), and he himself was labeled an '*alter bigotter Reaktionär*' (old bigoted reactionary) (Wittrock 1979, 53). Only his close relationship with and constant backing by prevented Wittrock's dismissal. Defending himself against accusations, Wittrock pointed out that only the Baltic Germans had the necessary knowledge to conduct local affairs. He further alleged that Baltic Germans made up for their lack of high service grades with their practical knowledge and pragmatic attitude: 'The Baltic German colleagues in the city council possess the demanded theoretical and practical knowledge, even though they omitted the great titles, which are highly esteemed in the German Reich' (Wittrock 1979, 73).

However, all of the aforementioned accusations turned out to be all the more dangerous for Wittrock since he had kept his Latvian citizenship, even during his years in Königsberg, and had therefore not become a member of the Nazi party (Wittrock 1979, 7). Nevertheless, the fostering of Baltic German culture, and his hesitation to become a German citizen and a member in the NSDAP, does not contradict the fact that he had strong sympathies for the Nazi movement and a vision of a Great Germany within a New Europe (Bundesarchiv BA-R-91.288 u.p. 1942). He certainly endorsed the ideas of German racial and political superiority in Europe—not least with regard to the Latvians (Jüngerkes 2010, 270). However, he seemed to merge these Nazi ideals with his own perceptions, which were framed by a good deal of conservative inclinations, like the idea of the preservation of traditional cultural values in the Baltic region. This can be seen in his heavy approval of church matters and religion, which is particularly remarkable in the last sentences of his memoirs, where he stresses once again that it is God alone who decides the fate of mankind. These sentences are instructive because they clearly show once more that Wittrock himself did not feel in any way responsible for the crimes of the Nazi occupation. In his opinion, God alone would decide the verdict, which conveniently exempts him from any self-reflection (Wittrock 1979, 98).

When applying Tara Zahra's concept of national indifference, Wittrock's idea of homeland is not only interesting with regard to the issue of a specific and conservative Baltic German culture. It is also illuminating because it includes his seemingly 'non-national' or 'non-political' ideas about nature.

Beside his alleged constant 'fight' (chapters 1 and 2 of his memoirs) against the other occupation forces, he included a special chapter under the headline of '*Saure Wochen – Frohe Feste*' (Sour weeks – joyful celebrations). In these chapters, he again stresses his sophisticated knowledge of 'high culture' and his well-elaborated proficiency in *Baltische Geselligkeit* (Baltic sociability) (Wittrock 1979, 64–71). In addition to this, decisive importance is given to the descriptions of the Dvina River and the beach in Jurmala, where he lived during the occupation. While talking about the nature, he also uses the opportunity to show off and impress his readers with his physical strength, which he—his age notwithstanding—still possesses and which the description of his daily swim in the Baltic Sea supposedly proves. Wittrock also regularly participated in hunting activities with his close friends. Taking these descriptions into account, and keeping in mind his repeated mentioning of 'fighting,' it is instructive to read his idealization of the German man, who combines assets like 'romantic devotion toward nature' with the rather traditional virtue of 'courageousness.' Remarkably, in his personal ideal this 'German man' does not necessarily have to be a Baltic German, as his comment to his friend from Germany, Walter Alnor, shows: 'Especially appealing appeared to be the common hunting trips with my neighbor and colleague Dr. Alnor in Courland, a highly cultivated sound German man and real hunter full of mettle' (Wittrock 1979, 69).

Naturally he considered himself as such a 'vigorous German man' in a letter to his friend Rosenberg (Jüngerkes 2010, 260). Therefore, even the potential nationally indifferent aspect of nature is closely linked to national aspects, because of his perception of the surrounding nature as a space where German men may unfold their virtues. Meanwhile, women and Latvians seem to be absent in these descriptions.

In summary, Wittrock's national thinking outlined the concept of homeland together with his religious inclinations highlight the fact that he supported the idea of a traditional, conservative resurrection of the old Baltic German world on the regional level. In doing so, Wittrock was opposed to ideologies pursued by the SS and other Nazi politicians. On the other hand, he was in line with Nazi policies concerning the idea of German superiority toward Latvians on the regional level and he surely had no doubt about German superiority in Europe. It is notable that his narrative bears some deviation from a pure German nationalistic point of view, which is not only due to the postwar phenomenon of distancing oneself from Nazi crimes. The emphasis on traditional Baltic German regional culture and the romantic inclination toward nature combined with masculine German virtues particularly tells us something about slight aberrations from a clear Nazi-dominated nationalism, while generally speaking he does not leave a solid nationalistic rhetoric.

The special emphasis on the Baltic Germanness is all the more remarkable bearing in mind that Wittrock's mother was of Estonian origin (Wittrock 1979, 7). However, she was culturally Germanized—a phenomenon which accompanied social upward mobility of Estonians and Latvians until the late nineteenth century (Jansen and Schlaw 2000). Strikingly, enough he completely omits that fact and obviously holds the opinion that Latvians and Estonian would become Germanized after the war at the same time, with Riga being the first place to accomplish the Germanization mission (Evarts 2005, 258). By supporting the idea of Germanization he perfectly combined his own family experience with the mainstream political opinion during the second half of the nineteenth century, when the idea of a cultural Germanization of Latvians and Estonians was supported by many Baltic

Germans, and merged it with racist Nazi ideology of the twentieth century. Unsurprisingly, his friend Rosenberg held a similar view. Speaking about Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians, Rosenberg pointed out that they differed significantly from the Slavic people and instructed his officials to select some of them according to racial criteria with the aim of future cultural Germanization (Plath 2012, 88).

Harry Marnitz—the Latvian?

The case of Harry Marnitz bears certain similarities but also significant differences to the case of Hugo Wittrock. Like Wittrock, Marnitz was born in a rural Baltic region, in Üxküll/Ikskile in present-day Latvia, near the Dvina (Germ. Düna, Latv. Daugava) in 1894. The first World War abruptly interrupted his medical education and prompted him to side with the Baltic German *Landeswehr* (Baltic Territorial Army) against the Latvian independence movement. His father was killed by the Bolsheviks in 1919. He finished his medical studies in 1926 in Königsberg and continued to work in Weimar Germany while keeping an interest in domestic Latvian politics. In contrast to Wittrock, Marnitz became a member of the Nazi Party and the SA in 1926. He was awarded the infamous 'Golden Party Badge' and became involved with the *Rassenpolitische Amt* (Office of Racial Policy) as a medical adviser.

When Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, Marnitz immediately volunteered for service in occupied Latvian territory, to which he was admitted, and he quickly found himself in charge of the Health Department in Riga. Due to constant quarrels with the same opponents as Wittrock in the SS, he lost this position in the Health Department at the end of 1943 and left the occupied region. After the war, he continued to work as a doctor in Bremen and achieved particular reputation with some innovations in the field of massage therapy before dying in 1984 (Jüngerkes 2009).

His memoirs were published in 1958 in Sweden in Latvian, appeared in German in 1991 only after his death (Marnitz 1991). Assessing his testimony, it becomes apparent from the very beginning that Marnitz is writing for a Latvian readership. As previously mentioned, Marnitz' memoirs encompass a slightly more self-critical attitude; this does not mean that Nazi crimes like the Holocaust are in the center of the description, rather, like Wittrock he only casually addresses the Holocaust. At the same time, it must be said that he tried to rescue two Jews, which became the reason for his dismissal from his position in occupied Riga. However, his depiction of this affair does not reveal much concern about the matter as a whole (Marnitz 1991, 70–74). Likewise, he objected to the killings of mentally ill in Latvia, but then again his main concern revolves around the issue of property rights with regard to the respective hospitals (Jüngerkes 2009, 121).

We may assume a common ground for Marnitz and Wittrock since both objected to policies pursued by the SS and higher German institutions at the civil administration like the Reich Commissariat. Marnitz himself reveals some sympathy for Wittrock by describing him as follows: 'Mr. Wittrock represented the old German Riga, which became obvious in many of his decrees, but nevertheless he behaved in a fair and correct manner towards the Latvians' (Marnitz 1991, 30).

Like his Baltic German colleague Wittrock, Marnitz also drew a line between Germans from the Reich and the Baltic Germans. According to Marnitz, the former

were led by a pure hunger for prey, whereas the latter had some useful local knowledge, not the least the language, and pursued largely conservative goals:

Everywhere was the inclination to interfere in Latvian affairs and to pry about. The Germans from the Reich (*Reichsdeutsche*) did it to make profits, but the Baltic Germans aimed at the weakening of the Latvians, because they permanently were in a state of fear of a revolution on part of the Latvians. (Marnitz 1991, 43)

Generally speaking, in Marnitz' view, the Baltic Germans sought a rather conservative and misleading policy in the Baltic:

Somehow the percentage of Baltic Germans among the staff of the Reich Commissariat was remarkably high. Most of them dreamt of the resurrection of the old and beloved hegemony of the Baltic Germans while a clear perception of the actual circumstances was the exception. (Marnitz 1991, 22)

Marnitz is especially critical of the District Commissar in Mitau, the Baltic German Walter von Medem, because he tried to portray himself in the tradition of the dukes of Kurland: 'One got the impression, as if one of the old dukes [of Courland] had assumed power again' (Marnitz 1991, 15).

Marnitz accused Germans from the Reich of being ignorant of the local culture, as the following citation shows:

Another gentleman serving in the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories recommended to the district commissars to erect wooden blockhouses right after arrival, equipping them with embrasures to be prepared for defense against attacks. Additionally, he recommended to stock up with groceries meant for the whole winter season. The implications of these recommendations remained uncertain. Apparently he imagined Russia to be a pre-medieval territory populated by vicious and uncivilized tribes. About the Baltic countries this gentleman had ever heard anything, indulging Indian tales during leisure time instead. It would not surprise me if the reader doesn't believe me, but actually, any knowledge about the Eastern territories was extraordinary sparse among the bureaucrats appointed to administer the occupied territories. Instead naive thoughts and fantasies prevailed. (Marnitz 1991, 15)

In his opinion, the naive thoughts and fantasies, especially among the Reich Germans, prevented a reasonable occupational policy, which in his views should have relied more on Latvian support. In contrast to Wittrock, the essential criteria in Marnitz' evaluation of other German officials is their willingness to allow the Latvians a certain amount of national self-determination. He continuously promoted the idea of including the Latvian people in the anti-Bolshevik war, which was initially rejected by Hitler, the SS, and some parts of the civil administration. Only after the German military forces started to retreat did Marnitz' views begin to win out. The promotion of Latvian national aspiration holds the key in Marnitz' report. This is certainly to some extent due to the addressed Latvian readership, since the book was published in 1958 in Latvian. However, it still coincides with the fact that Marnitz was famous for his amicable attitudes expressed and documented in several speeches held in Latvian, like his assertion, that the Latvians are a full-fledged people ('Latviešu tauta ir tauta šī varda īsta nozīme', in Tevija 1942, 3). The same attitude can be found in written reports during the Nazi occupation as well. For example, he warned his superiors not to underestimate the Latvians and he reminded them of a common destiny with the Latvians:

What do we want in this country? We want to subordinate all the resources of the country to the idea of final victory, as much as we can by any means. We can achieve this solely by

implementing among the Latvian people the conviction that we share a common destiny. It is therefore crucial to implement the willingness to support our war efforts without any reservations and finally work for the enforcement of trust towards us and convince them of our benevolent intentions with regard to them. (Latvijas Valsts Vēstures Arhīvs 1943, 99)

In order to foster his plea for a change of German occupation policy toward a strategy to win Latvian support, he continues with a remarkable warning not to underestimate the intelligence of the Latvians, which must have been very provocative for Germans, who fancied themselves as the superior race: 'After all they [the Latvians] have known everything for a long time, concerning the problems we discuss about their future. We should not reckon that we deal with a people who lag behind in terms of intelligence' (Latvijas Valsts Vēstures Arhīvs 1943).

What does this commitment to the Latvian culture tell us about Marnitz' self-definition in terms of national concepts? Like Wittrock, he divides Baltic Germans and Reich Germans, depicting the Baltic Germans slightly better than the Reich Germans, due to their local knowledge. More importantly, it appears to be his positive attitude toward the Latvians that divides him from pure nationalists and Nazis. Another important element must be discussed to compare the cases of Marnitz and Wittrock. As in Wittrock's account, the depiction of nature and the term of 'homeland' play an essential role in the reasoning of Marnitz. But the crucial difference is found in the link between nature and Baltic Germanness on the part of Wittrock, and the link between nature and the regional aspect of 'homeland,' which, in the case of Marnitz, overtly includes Latvian culture. While Wittrock talks about the river Dvina as if local Latvians were nonexistent, Marnitz repeatedly and explicitly draws the connection between the Dvina and the Latvian language: 'There [at the Dvina] it was a matter of honor not to speak German. People said, that it was forbidden, for in case of disregard it would rain' (Marnitz 1991, 2).

Marnitz explains that his devotion toward the Latvians and the Latvian culture stems not only from the fact that he seeks Latvian support for a common war effort, but rather because of his deep love of Latvian culture and nature, which established roots in his mind since early childhood, when he even admired the Latvian people:

Because my mind had drawn me towards the waters since childhood, I incessantly admired the boat people and I strove to resemble them. ... An old saying has it that the first love never dies, and looking back at my childhood I have to confess that since early childhood the Latvian Dvina attracted my love and I remained loyal to it ever since. ... And yet exclusively Latvian noises can be heard here, since not only the people, but the Dvina itself speaks only Latvian, unfolding its secrets to the rambler. (Marnitz 1991, 3)

Remarkably, the notion that the Dvina speaks Latvian and not German is quite clearly the opposite of what Wittrock tells us about the river Dvina in national terms. However, both men identify the Dvina as an integral part of their concept of *Heimat* (homeland) and self-definition surpassing all other possible items like pure national categories. Still, nature serves only as a bearer of other items of self-constructed identity. In the case of Wittrock, nature informed the background for his idealization of a German man. In Marnitz' case, nature is imbibed by the Latvian culture.

Accordingly, Marnitz describes his return to Riga in 1941 as a very emotional experience, not because he felt empowered by the great German victory that enabled his return, but because he met the beloved surrounding of Latvian language and Latvian people when arriving: 'The Latvian language, which permeated all over the

Central station of Riga, affected me a lot. I felt as if I had returned to my homeland after a long trip abroad' (Marnitz 1991, 16). He recalls the emotions, which he connects with his 'return to his homeland,' further by adding detailed descriptions. And again, beside the Latvian language, it is especially the river Dvina that obtains a particular devotion:

Already at the arrival in Riga on the first night, the language of my childhood embraced me everywhere and welcomed me with a soft touch, which caused a feeling of relief and happiness in such extent I hadn't experienced in a long time. On the day after the opportunity appeared, to visit the old Ūxküll and to greet the river Dvina, the familiar boat people and friends. Here it was – the long missed homeland after years of longing in Germany, which greeted my heart with joy and contentment. (Marnitz 1991, 26)

The assertion that he felt like returning home after a long trip and that he had to endure years of longing in Germany is nothing but a clear insult to German nationalists and therefore gives us good reason to presume he exhibited something like national indifference, or at least a much stronger deviation from clear nationalism than in the conservative case of Wittrock. To endorse such an interpretation, it is worthwhile to look at the final sentences of the memoirs, as he assembles all the crucial elements of his thinking:

The farewell was very cordially and proved that I had gained the trust, friendship and love of many Latvians during the two years. I remember, that the Minister of the Social department, Silis, once said: "Well, Mr. Marnitz, actually you are not a German, you are a Latvian.

It is interesting that Marnitz seems to be proud of this statement, though as previously mentioned, his memoirs were originally published in Latvian and thus likely intended for a Latvian audience. Nevertheless, his strong desire to please a Latvian audience remains a critical question in interpreting his writings in postwar society. Obviously, as his engagement during the war had shown, he held strong sympathies toward the Latvians, which is noteworthy since the Latvians were seen as inferior people according to Nazi German racial ideology. His general commitment toward the ideology of National Socialism notwithstanding, he repeatedly alleged that Latvians and Germans share a *Schicksalgemeinschaft* (common fate), which was forged during the war, culminated with the battle in the Courland pocket, and continues until today. Beside the common fate, he reserves his last sentence to the fate of Latvia alone, which lay in the hands of God alone.

The Baltic German character in Latvia evolved under the influence of both nations against the background of the nature and the historical fate of Latvia. This influence on part of the Latvian side had increased since 1918. It would be to immense avail, if as a result of the process, an utter mutual understanding and cooperation could be reached. That, which we created in a common effort, came to naught in the flames of the Courland Pocket. Only our memories remain, ties of friendship and hope. Latvia will exist! In this we believe and for this we hope. And the mutual comprehension between Latvians and Baltic Germans will rest on open and frank footings. God alone knows and decides if we will witness such a development. (Marnitz 1991, 78)

The case study of Harry Marnitz is not only of interest due to his self-description in terms of his national loyalties, but also its relation to Zahra's concept of national indifference. She rightfully and convincingly points out that it was one of the major goals of the nationalists to eradicate national indifference (Zahra 2010, 118). But the examples of the challenges that Marnitz encountered in Riga point actually to the

contrary: In fact, the Nazi officials actually did the opposite of eradicating national indifference in the Baltic states. One major goal of their national policy was to weaken the national consciousness of the local population, ultimately leading to Germanization. One example of this policy was the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (Reich Labor Service), which initially was not designed to increase the German work force. The labor force aspect gained significance within this project only after the Germans started to suffer heavy losses at the front (Plath 2012, 95–98). Because of these priorities of the German occupation policy, Marnitz went to great lengths trying to support and encourage the development of Latvian culture, which came as a by-product of the activities of the Latvian *tautas palīdzība* (peoples-aid-organization) (Jüngerkes 2010, 366–70). The Nazi plan envisioned a gradual decline of national consciousness, which eventually would enable Germans to impose their cultural values on the population ultimately transform Latvians into Germans. In this case, it was the nationalists who targeted national indifference among the local population, expecting them to quickly abandon their Latvian national character to become Germanized later on; it was Marnitz, the Nazi member, who opposed German nationalism by supporting Latvian nationalism.

Conclusion

In the cases of Wittrock and Marnitz, we may observe the common tendency to give priority to the regional aspect of *Heimat*, in contrast to the other conceivable factors like the Nazi ideology or traditional German nationalism. At first glance, the phenomenon to emphasize nature and the regional aspect of *Heimat* (and in the case of Wittrock partly also religion) may be interpreted as a general phenomenon. This phenomenon is seen in the context of a trend after 1945, when large ideologies gave way to a period of a more individualized self-realization, on which Zahra criticizes. She relates rather cautiously to the idea and suspects that ordinary people before 1945 deviated from the official ideology more strongly than usually accepted. On the other hand, however, she asserts that when national ideologies on the state level were declining after 1945, this did not necessarily mean that individuals ceased to embrace nationalistic self-identifications. (Zahra 2010, 112). However, it does not seem completely unlikely that the former Nazis discussed in this study tried to ‘rescue’ themselves (and their conscience) to more apolitical, non-national, and individual factors such as nature and religion. Interestingly enough, this does not necessarily contradict their former views as a whole, but appears to be rather a shift in emphasis, since these narratives obviously entail some truth with regard to the well-documented activities of Wittrock and Marnitz in Riga.

At this point, it is not fully comprehensible why Zahra only slightly and rather dismissively alludes to the topic of hybridity (Zahra 2010, 100, 116). In contrast to her argumentation, the cases of Wittrock and Marnitz illustrate how even strong nationalists had the potential of alternative loyalties, which could serve as rescuing identities when needed. For obvious reasons, an application of concepts of hybridity seems plausible. Leaving aside the tremendous dimensions of recent hybridity talk, it is worthwhile to consider just two aspects of the hybridity concept, which intensely determine the ongoing debate and relate to our case studies. For one thing, these aspects entail the components of mixture and variability with regard to the identity of the individual, which seem to fit Wittrock and Marnitz quite well (Kraidy 2005, 47).

Both Marnitz and Wittrock drew from a pool of different categories like nation, homeland, religion, or nature, while constituting their narrative of self-presentation. Only the importance of the respective items seems to have changed during the course of events. They also argue for a strong coalescence of cultural and political elements, which has permeated our memoirs heavily (Bhabha 1994, 32).

However, this does not mean that Zahra's thoughts with regard to Wittrock and Marnitz should be rejected altogether, for her idea of functionalizing the blank space pertaining to an individual strategy works well. Zahra asks for an agency of apathy with reference to national indifference and finally suggests focusing more on the individual as the agent (Zahra 2010, 113, 118). This makes sense especially with regard to Wittrock and Marnitz, and it does not contradict the idea of hybridity. Their narratives, which included layers of alternative loyalties referring to Baltic nature, homeland, Baltic German manly virtues or religion, were beneficial for them, not only for arguing in front of a postwar public opinion but also in terms of their own conscience. The hybridized pool of loyalties was already present during their former life in Riga and could be seized by shifting the mixture of loyalties within the pool afterwards. Becoming less nationalistic was useful for these individuals—an example of the active dimension of passiveness—and it was possible, because of a hybridized predisposition.

Only the composition varies with regard to Wittrock and Marnitz. Both emphasize homeland and nature, but differ concerning the connotations of these categories. Wittrock is linking his cultural ideal of Baltic Germanness with a romantic setting of the regional nature as if local Latvians and Estonians were nonexistent, which implies the projected Germanization with regard to the local population. Marnitz, on the other hand, looks to convey his ideal of local patriotism including a peaceful coexistence of Baltic German and Latvian culture via the common devotion toward the homeland, embodied in his beloved nature with special attention to the (Latvian) Dvina. Furthermore, Wittrock is inclined to reconcile German nationalistic thought by distancing his thinking from 'the evil,' that is the philistine SS, and depicting his ideals in a conservative light consisting of religious aspects and manly virtues (the ideal German man). Oddly enough, it was Wittrock, the Baltic German with an Estonian mother who received a German passport rather late in his life, who turned out to be the more 'German-minded' nationalist, while the holder of the 'golden Nazi party emblem' boasted himself to be a Latvian.

Who of them can be regarded as an archetypical representative of a Baltic German mindset? It seems that Wittrock was the one who assembled Baltic Germans in his surrounding while Marnitz mostly spoke very critically of Baltic Germans in his environment. This may indicate that the conservative views held by Wittrock were probably widespread among the Baltic Germans within the occupation regime. Marnitz, by contrast, seems to have been the one singled out among the Baltic Germans in Riga. While it is empirically impossible to measure their representativeness among Baltic Germans within the occupational regime, there is good reason to assume that these two were not the only ones restructuring their national thoughts after 1945 toward a less distinct emphasis on national thinking. While Zahra closes her remarks with the honorable desire 'to rescue the citizens of Habsburg central Europe from the "prison of nations" once and for all' (Zahra 2010, 119), it is safe to say that Baltic Germans from the Nazi occupation regime were quite successful in rescuing themselves: neither Marnitz

nor Wittrock were prosecuted after the Second World War. They escaped prosecution and re-painted their Nazi past by reconstructing their narratives in a hybrid manner while downplaying their participation in a highly nationalistic and criminal administration.

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