Baltic citizens faced an eminent transformation, as the great powers of Europe, namely Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, advanced their respective geopolitical ambitions in September of 1939. The resettlement of Baltic Germans had officially been decided, however knowledge of the transfer was limited to small set of leaders, who had been informed of the plans to resettle the population group on October 2, 1939.¹ The following research will uncover the initial reaction of Baltic Germans to the news of the eminent resettlement, as well as the initial period of chaos and uncertainty, induced by a lack of information and organization in the time between the announcement and the official ratification of resettlement treaties.

While Hitler announced the resettlement of ethnic German groups in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, to maintain the peace and to reunite the German race, the omission of specific transfers to be initiated left ethnic German listeners with a sense of uncertainty and doubt.² A large segment of the Baltic German population initially carried on with their daily life, as if nothing of importance had taken place. When Hitler voiced his concern that ethnic German splinter groups might destabilize the international peace, many Baltic Germans assumed that Hitler’s apprehension was not directed towards them.³ Yet, the news of a potential resettlement became more prominent every hour. Eyewitnesses began to notice the arrival of

¹ Michael Garleff and Paul Kaegbein eds., Deutschbalten, Weimarer Republik und Drittes Reich Bd. 1, (Köln: Böhlau, 2008), 299-300.
³ Bielenstein-Bosse and Bosse, 30.
numerous steamships immediately after Hitler’s announcement. Volker Reichhardt witnessed the spectacle at the Riga port and described the ominous situation with words plagued by uncertainty. Reichardt exclaimed: “What do these giants [large steamships] mean?...Somehow the view makes me restless.”

A few days later, the official announcement of the Baltic German resettlement became a distinct reality. On October 9, 1939 Intelmann and Kroeger published the formal resettlement announcement in the Latvian-German newspaper *Rigasche Rundschau*. Likewise, the Estonian-German Newspaper *Revalische Zeitung* announced the resettlement of its German population.

While the designated resettlement officials attempted to assuage any sign of fear, panic, and distress induced by the announcement, the Baltic German population nevertheless endured a wave of emotions, varying in degree and intensity. As Jürgen Kroeger, a Baltic German, recounted: “From hysteric excitement to saddened whining, nothing was missing; it was unbearable!” Some Baltic Germans did not fear the resettlement, but rather celebrated the dawn of a new age for Baltic Germans. This segment of the population was comprised of fervent ideologues, as well as opportunists. Support for National Socialism and the Third Reich, and as such for the resettlement, varied among Baltic Germans, contingent on factors such as age and marital partners. National Socialism had a great appeal on the younger generation. Beginning with the 1930’s, the Baltic German youth had been organized in youth organizations, favorable to National Socialist ideals and by its very nature in the obedience to

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4 Heinrich Bosse ed., *Der Führer ruft: Erlebnisberichte aus den Tagen der Grossen Umsiedlung im Osten*, (Berlin, Zeitgeschichte-Verlag, 1941), 25.


9 Kroeger, 14-31; Bielenstein-Bosse and Bosse, 30.
the orders and wishes of Hitler.10 The subsequent response from this segment of Baltic Germans overwhelmingly leaned towards Nazi Germany and the resettlement in the new Lebensraum.11 As Joseph Schechtman pointed out: “The most immediate and wholehearted response…undoubtedly came from the German youth in the two Baltic countries. They…were fervent proponents of National Socialist racial theories and the cult of the Führer.”12

As a consequence, many of these National Socialist supporters largely viewed the resettlement in a similar light, as presented by Nazi officials, namely a dutiful call to rebuild the acquired territories in Poland. The calls for resettlement, published in the German newspapers in Estonia and Latvia presented the ideologue with the accurate pretext to leave the ancestral home.13 As Intelmann and Kroeger publicly proclaimed: “Settled closely together, we will do our part in the reconstruction and the settlement of the reclaimed German Eastern territories of the Reich…With proud anticipation we look towards the new historical assignment.”14 Baltic German resettlers illustrated this call for a glorious and fulfilling duty in their letters to their friends and family.15 They subsequently heeded the call for volunteers, aiding in the facilitation of the resettlement process. However, the hard work involved in the resettlement process, such as moving furniture, furthermore served an auxiliary purpose, as distraction from their ill-feelings about the resettlement.16 As Erdmund Vierhoff, a Latvian-German resettler, exclaimed: “Then came the orders from Riga and the work. Many of us were thankful that the haste of work…did not grant us with the opportunity, to think about, what we

11 Schechtman, 99-100.
12 Ibid., 99.
16 Bosse ed., 1-68.; Kroeger, 27.
leave and what we win.” Despite their ideological prepositions, even National Socialist supporters did not begin the resettlement process without enduring mixed emotions regarding the permanent withdrawal from their ancestral home. The pain of being uprooted remained ever-present, yet merely suppressed with National Socialist ideals about the future, the urgency of the resettlement process, and the fear of a Bolshevik invasion. The latter is evidenced in the letters and memoirs written by Baltic German resettlers with a favorable view towards National Socialism. Despite their ideological preposition, Baltic Germans experienced feelings of guilt, grief, fear, and uncertainty. Feelings that even more so dominated Baltic Germans who held an unfavorable or dispassionate view towards National Socialism.

The initial reaction to the announcement of transfer, seared itself into the memories of the average Baltic German family. It marked a day in their life and in the history of Baltic Germans, that permanently altered their life. A number of Baltic German families remembered the initial announcement without enthusiasm, but struck with grief and shock, most evident in the fact that even young children remembered the endless tears of family members. As Andreas Bresinsky recalled his childhood memories: “When we came downstairs into the living room, we found father, mother and sister crying.” A segment of the older generation, influenced by tradition and loyalty to the Baltics, were not enthusiastic about the upcoming resettlement. The love for their home and ancestors coupled with an uncertain future markedly influenced the initial reaction of Baltic Germans. Despite this antagonistic reaction, the decision to resettle or not to resettle was not merely settled on the personal preposition to

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18 Kroeger, 27.; Bosse ed., 21-34.
20 Bresinsky, 329
21 Bresinsky, 332; Schechtman, 99-102.
National Socialism, but a multitude of factors including, but not limited to the fear of a Russian invasion, personal relationships, and social and economic standing.\textsuperscript{22} As Hans von Riekhoff recounted: “For us Baltics this was a death sentence…For us there was only one alternative, either leave the land with which we have been connected with for centuries with every fiber of our heart, or stay and…be exterminated as the class enemy number one of a Stalinist Bolshevism.”\textsuperscript{23} For Hans von Riekhoff, the threat of a Soviet invasion clearly played a decisive role in choosing to resettle. As the initial shock settled, Baltic Germans had to address these concerns and wrestle with the decision of resettling or remaining. Each option entailed a set of consequences, that needed to be addressed and debated among the families and the population groups as whole. After the initial announcement, Baltic German instinctively raised issues with losing the basis for their livelihood, giving up property and belongings, losing a pension paid by the current government, among others. Throughout this period, rumors spread throughout the region, often terrifying the Baltic German population and inducing a state of panic among families.\textsuperscript{24} As Hans von Riekhoff recalled: “All kinds of rumors and horrifying news of riots by the mob spread like thin air.”\textsuperscript{25} Selected Baltic Germans could not live with the news of a resettlement nor the consequences of denying it and subsequently, void of any hope for a better future, committed suicide. Foreign correspondents, situated in Estonia and Latvia at the time, observed a proliferation of suicides among ethnic Germans who were unable or unwilling to face the potential detrimental consequences of either option.\textsuperscript{26} Chaos and uncertainty prevailed until the German government published a list of guarantees, answered pressing questions and alleviated the most common concerns.

\textsuperscript{22} Von Hehn, 95-99.  
\textsuperscript{24} Bosse ed., 20-29; Von Riekhoff in Bresinsky, 339; Intelmann, 98-100.  
\textsuperscript{25} Von Riekhoff in Bresinsky, 339.  
\textsuperscript{26} Schechtman, 99-102
Resettlement officials initiated a targeted campaign in the respective German minority newspapers. Every day newspapers released additional information on the resettlement process, addressed common concerns and attempted to convince the Baltic German population to heed Hitler’s call. Concurrently it highlighted the detrimental consequences of remaining in the Baltic nations. These publications are exemplary, not only of the negative and positive motivators National Socialists generated, to convince the population group, however also of the most common concerns that Baltic Germans voiced throughout this period. Baltic German families struggled with potential repercussions of a resettlement, producing a set of concerns and fears about an uncertain future.

As it was in the interest of the resettlement officials to facilitate a speedy and successful resettlement, they did not hesitate to address these contentious issues. In leaflets and newspaper announcements, officials answered concerns about economic prospects in the new territories, the loss of personal possessions and the fate of elderly Germans among others. To effectively assuage Baltic Germans and ease the decision, resettlement officials generated a picture of an idyllic Germany, promising the full backing of the German Reich to guarantee the well-being of Baltic German resettlers. As a leaflet proclaimed: “…it is the wish of the Führer, that we all have the certainty, to move from the uncertainty and deprivation of the previous life into the protection of a powerful National Socialist Reich.” Social benefits, previously only available to Reich citizens, such as marriage loans and vacations funded by “Kraft durch Freude” (Strength through Joy), became an essential factor in enticing Baltic Germans. The promise of ample job prospects and advancement opportunities countered common concerns about economic security after the resettlement. After all, Nazi propaganda guaranteed: “Work-

and Advancement opportunities for you and your children, that only depend on your ability and dedication.” Question and Answer leaflets, a popular format during the initial resettlement stage, presented Baltic German readers with the most common concerns and subsequent answers, such as receiving adequate compensation for lost property, a guaranteed return to the same profession, and the transfer of all assets. Fears of being separated from family and the community were quickly apprehended, as National Socialists promised a new life together with friends and family.

The propaganda released by the respective resettlement officials furthermore highlighted the perceived consequences of remaining. Baltic Germans who chose to remain, received notice that their decision had a permanent impact on them, their children and all future generations. According to newspaper releases of the time, German minority rights and as such the German identity would seize to exist. An article in the “Rigasche Rundschau” affirmed: “The day nears, when you will win your right to be German – or lose it for all times, for child and grandchild.” These announcements regularly juxtaposed the glorious mission of settling the eastern German territories to the detrimental and permanent choice of denying the resettlement option. Moreover, it induced additional trepidations among undecided Baltic Germans, such as the possibility of a job loss, the lack of protection from the German Reich and the unwillingness of the local population to accept you as one of them. Newspapers and leaflets therefore generated a clear and terrifying picture of potential consequences, based on fact as well as on extrapolations, with the clear mission to influence Baltic Germans into a

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34 Ibid., 165.
favorable position. Furthermore, Nazi officials made Baltic Germans aware that a negative response was irreversible, denying Baltic Germans the ability to return to Germany at any given point beyond the official resettlement.\textsuperscript{36} Coupled with the unspoken threat of a Soviet invasion, Baltic Germans sensed the severity of the choice.\textsuperscript{37} As Gerda Bresinsky noted in her diary, after deciding to resettle: “But we both, father and I, have come to the decision that we are obligated to take this step because of our children, and therefore we are ready to take this path even if it caused us bitter tears and heartache.”\textsuperscript{38} While the younger generation generally viewed the resettlement option with enthusiasm, induced by the promise of new job opportunities and the promise of an adventurous mission, the older generation struggled with this consequential decision, whether it was out of opposition to National Socialism, personal ties to the locals, or for health reasons.\textsuperscript{39}

However, as a consequence of the Russian threat and the National Socialist promises and pressures, as well as the loss of its minority status and as such its German identity, the majority of Baltic Germans opted to return to the Reich, despite of the anguish it caused for the common Baltic German family. Approximately 87 percent of Latvian-Germans and 97 percent of Estonian-Germans opted to uproot their lives and resettle.\textsuperscript{40} A total 12,900 Estonians and 48,641 Latvians of German decent heeded Hitler’s call to the Baltic Germans, “Heim-ins Reich”, in the population transfer of 1939/1940.\textsuperscript{41} Yet, after struggling through the decision-making process, and electing to resettle, complications did not seize to exist. While the momentous choice to resettle had been made, Baltic Germans thereafter had to undergo through

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\item \textsuperscript{36}“Lettland: Handzettel 2 etwa vom November 1939” in Loeber ed., 171-172.
\item \textsuperscript{37}Von Hehn, 96-103.
\item \textsuperscript{38}Gerda Bresinsky, “Diary of Gerda Bresinsky” in Bresinsky, 333.
\item \textsuperscript{39}Bielenstein-Bosse and Bosse, 33-33; Schechtman, 99-102.
\item \textsuperscript{40}Bielenstein-Bosse and Bosse, 30.
\item \textsuperscript{41}Schechtman, 85-92.
\end{itemize}
the resettlement process, a stage in Baltic German history characterized by both problems and successes.

While Hitler and Stalin had already come to an agreement about the resettlement of Baltic Germans, upon announcing the decision, Germany still required an official treaty with Estonia and Latvia, which would permit the departure of thousands of Baltic citizens and their respective property. An agreement vital to the successful transfer, as a sovereign government effectively still ruled each nation. As a consequence, before removing any Baltic citizen, German officials had to come to an agreement with the respective Estonian and Latvian government. On October 15, 1939 Estonia agreed to the resettlement under the terms laid out in the “Protocol on the Resettlement to the German Reich of the German Folk Group of Estonia.” The latter set forth the basic guidelines for the population transfer. Germany and Estonia agreed on the identification of ethnic Germans, Germany’s intent to award citizenship, the transfer of movable goods as well as the creation of Deutsche Treuhand Verwaltung (German Trustee Administration), which was charged with the management of all claims and debts. Germany and Estonia furthermore agreed to postpone the conclusive resolution of all financial claims against the Estonian government.\textsuperscript{42} Negotiations with the Latvian government were resolved on a similar basis in the “Treaty on the Resettlement of Latvian Citizen of German Nationality in the German Reich” from October 30, 1939. Unlike Estonia however, the Latvian government insisted on the clear resolution of property claims against its government, before commencing with the resettlement of the German minority, thus resulting in a considerable delay in the treaty ratification and as such in the resettlement.\textsuperscript{43}


The time discrepancy between the initial announcement and the ratification of the respective treaties resulted in a vacuum of information and directions for potential Baltic German resettlers. Without adequate directions, Baltic Germans began to speculate on regulations and timetables, often resulting in adverse consequences. As Jürgen von Hehn pointed out: “The initial work was first made more difficult, as it was unclear, how much time would be available. First it was said that the evacuation of people had to begin immediately, and the solution of all economic and property questions would come later.”

Alfred Intelmann later portrayed this period of the resettlement, as a time plagued with new worries and problems appearing every day. The departure of thousands of Baltic citizens with their property and valuables, as well as contractual obligations furthermore induced a host of legal questions that required immediate attention. As a consequence of this initial misperception and uncertainty of the resettlement process, coupled with fear of a Soviet invasion, Baltic German resettlers often fell prey to rumors and subsequently speed up the process without regard to monetary losses. As Intelmann recalled: “Triggered by the eagerness of a few young officials or due to impatience, here and there, people had sold the majority of their belongings, liquidated their sources of income in a great haste and now sat on their packed suitcase. They could not wait for the evacuation order.”

Despite attempts to calm the population and to deter the hasty sale of belongings, resettlers rushed to local markets rid themselves of their valuables. While resettlers went out in droves to purchase necessary items for transporting movable goods, such as suitcases, they concurrently rushed to sell belongings at the best price available. The market in Estonia and Latvia responded according to the influx in supply, as well as due to the lack of options for Baltic Germans, drastically decreasing prices for furniture, glass, porcelain

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44 Von Hehn, 118.
46 Ibid., 102
47 Bosse ed., 20-28; Von Hehn, 127.
and other valuables. As Hans von Riekhoff concisely observed: “Because of the initial restrictive specifications, many had prematurely sold their belongings for throwaway prices.”

Concurrently, the demand for packers and movers skyrocketed, practically rendering the latter unaffordable. As Baltic Germans packed their most essential belongings and sold anything perceived as unmovable, the waiting for further news began. During this time between the announcement and the treaty, families suffered under the state of uncertainty, packed but unable to move until further notice. As the resettler Ellen Stael von Holstein observed: “Yes, with time it became a terrible situation. As the initial few days developed into many days – yes, a few weeks! One was bursting with nervousness – since until the treaty was ready, nobody knew exactly, how and what one could do.”

Every day issues of this transitional stage, such as lack of adequate rationing, and anxieties of an uncertain future plagued Baltic German families. This transitional stage ended on October 15 and October 30, 1939 for those living in Estonia and Latvia respectively, as the treaties took effect and specifications regarding the transfer of property and resettlers became known. Contrary to initial beliefs, officials negotiated a favorable agreement with the respective host nation, permitting Baltic Germans to take a variety of goods and belongings with them. The hasty sale of goods under value therefore proved to be a disadvantageous choice. Sigrid Krueger, a Latvian German, later reflected on that choice with similar judgement: “If I would have known at the time, that furniture could be taken – an unlimited number of things would have fit into it – I would have naturally kept a lot more.” Lastly, resettlers even received the opportunity to take livestock.

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48 Von Riekhoff, in Bresinsky, 339.
such as cows, to the new territories in occupied Poland. As the positive news of the lenient treaty specifications became public, families rushed to grocery stores to purchase luxury goods, potentially unavailable in the former Polish territories. As Hans von Riekhoff vividly pictured: “When it became public, that one could take almost everything with them, a shopping race for various groceries began: Sugar, chocolate, coco and other things. Many even bought ham and smoked food.” With the announcement of specifications and the commencement of the resettlement, the chaos and uncertainty of this transitional state gave way to an efficiently organized resettlement process that despite bureaucratic hassles and setback generally received positive appraisals from the resettlers.

To conclude, the rumors and then ultimately the news of a pending resettlement caused mixed emotions among the Baltic German population group in Estonia and Latvia. While the younger generation, supporters of the National Socialist ideology, generally welcomed the news with fervor, the majority of the Baltic German population viewed the announcement with shock and grief, fearing the potential consequences for Baltic German life. Lastly, the majority of Baltic Germans chose to resettle, motivated by a mixed set of stimuli, such as the threat of a Soviet invasion, the loss of German identity and the ample promises made by National Socialists. Yet, despite having overcome the burdensome decision-making process, Baltic Germans still suffered under a period of uncertainty, as the terms of the new life in the occupied territories of Poland remained unclear. After overcoming the initial emotional toll of the announcement and its choice, Baltic German resettlers struggled under a period of vagueness and instability, waiting in limbo for further directions on the resettlement process and regulations pertaining to the export of belongings.

54 Bielenstein-Bosse and Bosse, 37.
55 Von Riekhoff, in Bresinsky, 341.
56 Ibid., 341.
Bibliography


