

‘Unsere Frage ist der Osten’

Representations of the Occupied East in German Soldier Newspapers, 1914-1918

by

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Although the First World War had been justified to the citizens of Germany as ‘defensive’ in character, the *Landser* found himself almost everywhere on foreign soil, occupying and controlling local, frequently hostile populations. The tone of the German western front newspapers was a mixed blend of justification and sympathy. The ruination of war provided the opportunity at times to depict a seemingly dirty and primitive people in dire need of German assistance and this, combined with explications of the ‘Urhaß’ of the French for the Germans, was a way of justifying occupation to the soldiers. The audience and authors believed, however, that they were dealing with a people very much like themselves, both culturally and in terms of technical and civil ‘progress’. Hence, through the veneer of chauvinism, there were many examples of pity and understanding for the occupied populations in France and Flanders as mostly innocent victims of war.¹

When we turn to the eastern front newspapers and the portrayal of local, occupied Slavic populations, the change in tone is significant and telling. That the Germans were now dealing with peoples many considered culturally inferior was readily apparent. The sudden occupation of millions of people and huge tracts of territory at the end of the ‘Great Advance’ in 1915, in conjunction with the effect of the British blockade of German ports and the end of dreams of *Weltpolitik*, turned German eyes to the East as a new land of opportunity, with the promise of permanent occupation in the form of colonialism.² The soldier newspapers were instrumental in the attempt to portray these peoples as very ‘primitive’, requiring German help. Through a colonial and at times racist discourse, the newspapers sought to explain why this occupation was justified, and why some eastern peoples were more highly valued than others. Specifically, the newspapers indicated that hoped-for German allies, such as Lithuanians and Estonians, were ‘better’ than Russians and Poles. The eastern people most valuable to Germany, their Bulgarian allies, were extensively described as somehow not Slavs at all. Finally, the German soldier

¹ For a discussion of the depiction of occupied populations in the western front soldier newspapers, see ROBERT L. NELSON: *German Soldier Newspapers of the First World War*, PhD, Cambridge University, 2003, ch. 4.

² For the classic explanation of this paradigmatic shift, see HENRY CORD MEYER: *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action*, The Hague 1955.

newspapers were surprisingly neutral, and sometimes even positive, in their portrayal of Eastern European Jews, a population the High Command hoped would prove an important ally in the struggle to defeat the Czar and rule the East.

German Soldier Newspapers

The German soldier newspapers (*Soldatenzeitungen*) of the First World War comprise a vast and rich source, produced at or near the front, by and for soldiers.³ The journals vary greatly in size, distribution and production from the large army newspapers (*Armeezeitungen*) to the small trench journals (*Schützengrabenzeitungen*). The largest and most influential of the eastern army newspapers, the *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, had an average printing of 30,000, while the smaller journals most often produced one to five thousand copies per issue. Distribution occurred via the military postal system, bookshops and canteens. The newspapers were supported financially by soldier subscriptions (with different prices for officers and lower ranks), home front subscriptions and donations. Occasionally, and only when a newspaper was in serious financial need, did the military provide some funding.⁴

³ Use has been made of the soldier newspapers in two recent articles: ANNE LIPP: Friedenssehnsucht und Durchhaltebereitschaft: Wahrnehmung und Erfahrungen deutscher Soldaten im Ersten Weltkrieg, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 36 (1996), pp. 279-292; ANNE LIPP: Heimatwahrnehmung und soldatisches 'Kriegserlebnis', in: *Kriegserfahrungen: Studien zur Sozial- und Mentalitätsgeschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs*, ed. by GERHARD HIRSCHFELD et al., Essen 1997, pp. 225-242; as well as in ANNE LIPP: *Meinungslenkung im Krieg. Soldatische Kriegserfahrungen und ihre Deutung 1914-1918*, PhD, University of Tübingen, 2000. The only earlier publication I have found which uses German soldier newspapers as a major source of historical evidence is DENNIS E. SHOWALTER: *The Homesick Revolutionaries: Soldiers' Councils and Newspaper Propaganda in German-Occupied Eastern Europe, 1918-1919*, in: *Canadian Journal of History* 11 (1976), pp. 69-88. The German soldier newspapers of the Second World War are discussed in HEINZ-WERNER ECKHARDT: *Die Frontzeitungen des deutschen Heeres. 1939-1945*, Stuttgart 1975.

⁴ Ca. 110 German soldier newspapers appeared on all fronts between September 1914 and the end of the war. Some of the largest army newspapers appeared several times a week, and among the smallest trench journals, once a month was usually the case. Printing presses in occupied territory were often commandeered to produce the newspapers. If this was not possible, the finished plates would be sent to the closest German press for printing. The production and censorship of the soldier newspapers is extensively described in the final section, 'Ergebnisse', of the dissertation by KARL KURTH: *Die deutschen Feld- und Schützengrabenzeitungen des Weltkrieges*, Leipzig 1937, pp. 207-247. This and the following paragraph rely heavily on Kurth, as well as anecdotal information about production gleaned from a reading of the soldier newspapers themselves. Today, large collections of the soldier newspapers can be found in the Library of Contemporary History in Stuttgart, the Military Archives in Freiburg and the German Library in Leipzig, with the most complete collection residing in the last.

The official purpose of these newspapers was to provide news about the war in general alongside local coverage, and to raise and maintain the mood of the soldier audience. The provision of news was crucial to the units far out in the East, for they had little (or significantly delayed) access to home front newspapers to supplement what they read in their own formation's publication. Further, and in contrast to their counterparts in the more familiar West, the eastern front newspapers contained many articles about the local, alien populations. These newspapers were censored, and edited by educated men who belonged to the German middle-class bourgeoisie. Roughly half of the members of the editorial teams were officers, and virtually all staff members listed the newspaper business as their pre-war employment. The larger the newspaper, the larger the percentage of officers on the editorial staff. In 1916, a *Feldpressestelle* was set up to more closely monitor the content of the soldier newspapers, as well as to provide a weekly *Korrespondenz* with approved articles to be appropriated by the editorial staffs, should they so choose. Although the vast majority of soldier newspaper articles were written by the staff, or contributed by soldiers, occasionally an essay written on the home front by a professor would be included. While the opinions and representations found in the soldier newspapers were constrained due to both formal censorship, as well as the self-censorship exhibited by the editors, the fact that soldiers paid for these newspapers, that they were extremely popular and would have been read, sometimes aloud, (and thus heard) by virtually every soldier who served more than a few weeks at or near the front, indicates their usefulness as a guide to helping us interpret aspects of the discursive worlds shared by the soldiers and officers on the eastern front in the First World War.

Looking East

Having settled down in the relatively quiet south-western front, near the beautiful town of Colmar, among the green Vosges mountains, a Bavarian company established an excellent, small trench newspaper, *Die Sappe*. The Alsatian landscape was not an unknown world to these southern Germans, and thus, throughout *Die Sappe*'s long run, from October 1915 to June 1918, the editors and authors had little to say about the locals and the environment. This unit had, however, participated in the 'Great Advance' that saw the German Army make huge gains in the East, from the late Spring to Fall of 1915, and it was this experience, an encounter with a truly foreign land and people, that elicited lengthy comment in the pages of *Die Sappe*.

'Erinnerungen aus Galizien', an autobiographical story by Max Drexel, a member of *Die Sappe*'s editing staff, appeared in eleven installments, from November 1915 to September 1916. Many of the themes that became a part

of the German 'mindscape' of the East appeared in these reflections.⁵ Drexel often referred to the 'Öde' of the East. After a seemingly endless eastern train ride, through dust, fleas, 'wahnsinnige Hitze', and past innumerable towns emptied and burnt to the ground by vicious armies, Drexel summed up this new, alien environment: 'Immer das gleiche Bild. Öde Heidelandschaft, verwüstete und verbrannte Ortschaften.'⁶ The Russians were blamed for all the destruction and, according to Drexel, after making the Russians 'pay' for their sins, the Germans were going to make this a better place.⁷ A patronising portrayal of the local Slavs as nice, poor, dirty, barefoot, lazy, primitive peasants appeared in these pages, and would recur throughout the German soldier newspapers, forging a strong stereotype of the needy 'children' of the East. Indeed, this discourse was so pervasive as to provide one of the frameworks within which Slavs were discussed in soldiers' letters. In two recent analyses of soldiers' letters, both Klaus Latzel and Aribert Reimann cite condescending descriptions of Poles and Russians. Latzel references the 'Öde' of the 'backwards' East present in letters, and the 'dirty' but 'nice' Slavs.⁸ Reimann argues that the letters indicate that many Germans did not consider Russians to be their equals, and that the encounter with Slavs only confirmed 'Mitteleuropa' thinking for some.⁹

It is important to locate these representations of the war in the East within a much wider discursive field. In his seminal work of 1955, 'Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action', Henry Cord Meyer details Germany's turn from *Weltpolitik* to *Osteuropapolitik*. The combination of the overrunning of Germany's colonies at the outset of the war with the virtually invincible grip of Britain's navy on the sea and its resulting blockade meant that dreams of an overseas empire faded quickly among Germany's élite. The sudden and surprising gain of vast amounts of territory in the East during 1915, however, provided an answer to Germany's colonial desires. By the summer of 1916, soldiers were returning home with stories of a vast 'empty' land, sparsely populated with strange, primitive 'natives', and, more importantly, long forgotten 'Germans', living in pockets throughout the East. Very quickly, the creative power of Germany's intellectuals went into high gear in order to justify the 'mission' in the East, often referencing the fact that the Germans had 'colonised' the Slavs since the Middle Ages. Indeed, Teutonic history had al-

⁵ The word and concept 'mindscape' is borrowed from VEJAS GABRIEL LIULEVICIUS: *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War 1*, Cambridge 2000, ch. 5.

⁶ Die Sappe, 21 January 1916.

⁷ Die Sappe, 10 November 1915.

⁸ KLAUS LATZEL: *Deutsche Soldaten – nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis – Kriegserfahrung 1939-1945*, Paderborn 1998, pp. 156-182.

⁹ ARIBERT REIMANN: *Der Große Krieg der Sprachen. Untersuchungen zur historischen Semantik in Deutschland und England zur Zeit des Ersten Weltkriegs*, Essen 2000, pp. 186, 210-212.

ready been revived in German minds with the great victory at Tannenberg in 1914.

Although the 'politics' of Germany's 'Eastern Adventure' has received scholarly attention sporadically since the 1950s¹⁰, only now, with the recent appearance of Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius' 'War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I' (Cambridge 2000), has the cultural history of this crucial event begun. Using German and Lithuanian sources, Liulevicius discusses the massive effort of colonisation in Lithuania and Courland, known as 'Ober Ost'. This was Ludendorff's dream of creating a military utopia where, free of civilian control, the German Army attempted to organise the land, resources and people of this area to the maximum benefit of both the newly arriving colonisers as well as the Fatherland.

The land beyond Germany's eastern border had long been depicted to Germans as a straightforward 'Czardom', inhabited by a monocultural ethnicity, the 'Russian' peasant. What the two to three million Germans who eventually spent time on the eastern front encountered, however, was an array of identities, cultures and languages that challenged them in a myriad of different ways. The formula that one race equals one language and one defined piece of land was shattered in the borderlands and led to doubts about the 'self-evident' nature of 'Germanness' itself. Such doubts and confusion resulted in the necessity for 'order' and the 'explanation' of this 'New Land'.

Slavs

There were many echoes of this colonial discourse in German soldier newspapers. The *Champagne-Kamerad* of 9 December 1917 carried a fascinating article entitled 'Männliche und weibliche Völker'. The author was one Otto von Bismarck. Here, he argued that, as was the case in nature, different nations (*Völker*) were divided into masculine and feminine groups. The Germanic people were manly, meaning they were independent. The Slavs and the Celts were womanly, meaning passive, always needing to be told what to do. Pure masculine breeds, like the Swabians of southwestern Germany, were so independent that they had trouble following orders. The Prussians, on the other hand, were a mix of Germanic and Slavic blood, and therefore perfect at both getting things done, and at taking orders when need be. Appropriately, the nation that had accomplished so much in the nineteenth century, Great

¹⁰ Two classic treatments are WERNER CONZE: *Polnische Nation und deutsche Politik im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Köln u.a. 1958, and MARTIN KITCHEN: *The Silent Dictatorship: The Politics of the German High Command under Hindenburg and Ludendorff, 1916-1918*, London 1976.

Britain, was described here as a mix of effeminate Celtic, and masculine Anglo-Saxon blood.¹¹

The rendering of the East as dependent provided an important framework for the argument that these lands required German stewardship, and held the key to the Fatherland's future. In a Spenglerian essay, 'Unsere Frage ist der Osten', the *Zeitung der 10. Armee* described the 'Untergangsschicksal' of the 'alte Völker' of the West, and claimed that the future was bound up in Germany's ties to the rising East. The western front was likened to decay, the eastern front to great possibility.¹² The front page of the 8 March 1916 issue of the *Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi* carried 'Deutschland und der Osten', by the Berlin professor Dietrich Schäfer. He wrote of the permanent nature of the 'Sprachgrenzen' in the West, with its lack of possibility, and juxtaposed this to the open book of the East. 'Englandhaß' he argued was completely misplaced, as there was no question that Russia was Germany's current and future archenemy. The threatening and expanding imperial nature of the Russian Empire was further portrayed in an article describing the various 'peoples' within its territory: 'Russland und seine Fremdvölker', explained that only 44% of the Czarist Empire was Russian, with 23% being Ukrainian, 4% Jewish, with many smaller groups comprising the remainder of the population. This empire was therefore deemed 'unnatural', and deserved to be pushed back to a more 'nationalistically' defined Russian core. Instead of arguing that German hegemony in the area would be just as unnatural, however, the article made the important observation that this 'non-Russian' land was barren, uncivilised and rural. In other words, it was begging for German settlement, which would also quickly take care of the 'ethnic-nationalist' dilemma of future borders.¹³

Since long before the war, the goal of 'Ostsiedlung' had been lobbied by a former Baltic-German academic turned journalist, Paul Rohrbach.¹⁴ Occasionally his work would appear in eastern front newspapers, pushing the above mentioned themes. In "'Nationale Kultur" im baltischen Gebiet', Rohrbach provided a quick overview of the population and situation of the many peoples in this area before declaring that only by joining Germany would the

¹¹ For a more thorough discussion of the use of gender to praise or criticise national groups in the soldier newspapers, see ROBERT NELSON: *Deutsche Kameraden – slawische Huren. Geschlechterbilder in deutschen Feldzeitungen des Ersten Weltkrieges*, in: *Heimat – Front. Militär und Geschlechterverhältnisse im Zeitalter der Weltkriege*, ed. by KAREN HAGEMANN and STEFANIE SCHÜLER-SPRINGORUM, Frankfurt/M. 2002, pp. 91-107.

¹² *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 27 May 1916.

¹³ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 21 November 1916.

¹⁴ Paul Rohrbach (1869-1956) was one of the most popular political commentators of his day. Born in Courland, he studied history and geography at Dorpat and Berlin before later becoming a student of evangelical theology. As editor of 'Das grössere Deutschland' (later 'Deutsche Politik') during World War One, he promoted what was termed 'Kulturimperialismus'.

cultures of these various groups have a chance of surviving and developing. Although a cultural chauvinist, Rohrbach was not a Pan-German, and normally appreciated the existence of other nationalities in Eastern Europe. However, in an article that appeared in July 1918, 'Ostsiedlung als Erneuerung unserer Volkskraft', he claimed that the East was 'mensenarm'. If Germany could not compete with the Anglo-Saxons on a worldwide level, he argued, then her future lay in the colonisation of the eastern lands. And when it came to the question as to who should be given this land for settlement, Rohrbach believed that, as opposed to 'Reich' Germans, the plots should be given to the two million Russian and Ukrainian German refugees trickling out of the defeated Czarist empire. If they were not given 'Raum', he warned, they would surely go to America.¹⁵

'Das Siedlungswerk in Kurland', which appeared anonymously in August 1918, continued the argument in favour of colonisation, claiming that, as there was hardly anyone in Courland anyway, it was time to bring in the 'Deutsch-Russen' refugees. The article explained that Hindenburg had ordered the maximum agricultural output to be retrieved from the soil, and that only Germans could turn this province into a truly productive land.¹⁶ In order to support such claims for the need of German hegemony in the East, the heavy hand of history was brought to bear in such articles as 'Einflüsse deutscher Kultur in Litauen', which described that already, in the fourteenth century, the Hanseatic League had extended into Lithuania. Ever since, argued the author, the German 'Ansiedler' had been good for the Baltic region.¹⁷ A piece from Dr. Max Hildebert Böhm¹⁸ was included in the 27 November 1916 edition of the *Zeitung der 10. Armee*. It pointed out that the dialect these good Germans spoke was very 'manly' in inflection and that many great Germans, not least Johann Gottfried Herder, had made the Baltics their home. Importantly, with regard to future hegemony, he pointed out that the 'Balten' had always taken better care of the natives than had the Russians. In 'Das baltische Deutschtum' it was argued that despite centuries of Russian oppression the Balts were still 'German', and that they had now at last been freed. The author then asked, in the wake of this liberation, could Germany now abandon its brothers in Livonia and Estonia?¹⁹

The Germans who were already long established in Eastern Europe, however, were not the main focus of the newspapers. Instead, praise and support

¹⁵ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 24 July 1918.

¹⁶ *Kriegszeitung der 4. Armee*, 8 August 1918.

¹⁷ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 18 June 1916. A long article on the history of Baltic Germans, 'Das Baltikum', appeared in: *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 29 May 1916.

¹⁸ Max Hildebert Böhm (1891-1968) became a 'star author' of the intellectual Right after the war.

¹⁹ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 4 March 1916. Another article declared that the Swabians living deep in Russia, and even in Palestine, were still living like true Germans. *Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi*, 3 March 1917.

for the newly arriving 'colonists' was more prevalent. The article 'Ansiedlung auf dem Land' claimed that there was simply no available land left in the Fatherland. Hopefully, wrote the author, with the Russians' removal of farmers from land near the front, this property could be assumed by German farmers, and an 'Ostmark' established.²⁰ The soldier newspaper *Ostwacht* actually ran a section entitled 'Unsere deutschen Ansiedler' which contained church, family and birth news. It once provided a lengthy list of all the local towns a government official had had to visit in order to meet the many new settlers. There were also items discussing the local area, as well as a historical article that conveniently argued that this land (Eastern Poland) had first been occupied by Germanic tribes, and that only when they moved west, around 200 A.D., was there room for the (late) arrival of the Slavs. In other words, these new 'Ansiedler' were merely returning to land their descendents had possessed.²¹

Amid all this talk of German history, settlement, conquest and occupation of the East, the actual peoples of this part of the world begin to emerge discursively. 'Der deutsche Vormarsch an der russischen Front' painted the Germans as liberators of the eastern peoples from a cruel, atrocity-committing Russian oppressor. 'Wilna und die Russen' described the Russian overlordship of this city as being witness to many 'bloodbaths', and the inept, inefficient system of keeping Poles, Lithuanians and Jews separated was criticised.²² 'Deutsche Kulturarbeit in Polen' argued that the German administration had to begin with nothing as the Russians had overseen a corrupt justice system, failed to make school mandatory, and never trained the Poles in civil administration.²³ According to the metaphor in another article, the change wrought by the arrival of German 'Kultur' had resulted in the lifting of the 'slawische Nebel'.²⁴ And news of the positive results of German colonisation, with regard to the locals, was announced repeatedly: 'Kowno deutsch' had photos of men and women working at the production of matches, drying fruit, and bottling preserves inside a marmalade factory.²⁵ The clearest example of how Germans were to regard their relationship to this land, that is, as colonists among the natives, were the stories and pictures in the special issue on

²⁰ Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi, 28 June 1916. Evidence of some conflict between the 'original' Germans in the Baltics and those who were newly arriving appeared in the printing of legal documents from Hindenburg and Hahndorff, in the 6 July 1918 edition of the *Zeitung der 10. Armee*. Here, the *Ritterschaft* was ordered to sell one-third of its property to the settlers, and they were not to overcharge.

²¹ *Ostwacht*, August through November 1918. The 'visiting official' article is in the November 1918 issue, the 'history' article in October 1918. See Lipp's discussion of the interest sparked among soldiers in the East when informed of the settlement possibilities for them there that would follow a victorious conclusion to the war. LIPP, *Meinungslenkung* (cf. footnote 3), pp. 189-194.

²² *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 11 January 1916. Jews are discussed below.

²³ *Die Wacht im Osten*, 4 September 1917.

²⁴ Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi, 31 October 1917.

²⁵ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 17 August 1918.

the 'Ausstellung der Wilnaer Arbeitsstuben'. Here the 'Volkskunst' of Poles, Jews, Ruthenians and Lithuanians was on display. Pictures of bowls, craft-pieces, clothes, etc., were accompanied by full descriptions in an ethnographic tone. All 'Kameraden' were enjoined to pay a visit to the exhibition in order to learn something about the 'natives'.²⁶ The manner in which the Germans viewed each of these various ethnic groups will now be explored.

Russians

Omer Bartov's description of the typical German soldier's first encounter with the East in the Second World War is useful to introduce similar encounters a generation earlier: 'The backward conditions in which the village populations lived, made even worse by the effects of the fighting, further encouraged the soldiers to think of the Russians as subhumans, while simultaneously reconfirming the troops' belief in the superiority of their own culture, race, and leadership'.²⁷ To be sure, the intervening years had created numerous points of conflict between Germans and Russians, but it is still useful to consider the language of that first encounter of a German occupying army in Eastern Europe and Russia between 1914 and 1918.²⁸ A long poem in the 24 June 1916 edition of the *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, entitled 'Russische Kultur', by *Kriegsfreiwilliger* Conny Brose, vividly painted a stereotype for his audience. In the following two quotes he refers to the ever-present question of hygiene:

Zerlumpt, zerrissen und gefräßig, verdreht, verwantzt, verfloht, verlaust, im Arbeiten besonders mäßig, er so in seinem Lande haust. Auch Waschen kennt nicht so ein Panje, wie's eines jeden Menschen Pflicht, nein, darin bleibt er treu dem Lande, er spuckt sich einfach in's Gesicht.

and

Da gibt es Hühner, Gänse, Schweine, die sehen gar nicht anders aus, nur wohnen sie – daß ich nicht weine – viel netter, als bei uns zu Haus. Sie wohnen in der guten Stube als sollt' und müßte es so sein.

In another article, detailing Russian beggars, the author declared his hatred for these 'Kreaturen' who spent all their ill-gotten money on schnapps.²⁹ In a somewhat more understanding article, 'Die Bettler in Rußland', the history of this occupational group was described. Beggars would normally seek charity in a specific *Bezirk*, moving from town to town within a distinct area, but

²⁶ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 3 August 1916.

²⁷ OMER BARTOV: *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*, New York 1991, p. 157.

²⁸ During the course of the First World War, the Germans had much more experience living among the Poles and Lithuanians than they did with Russians, as evidenced by the relative lack of articles on the latter.

²⁹ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 27 July 1917.

now, due to the war, many were forced to 'work' instead.³⁰ There is a sympathetic tone as well in 'Im russischen Dorf', where Staff Sergeant Hermann Trenkel claimed that, despite the extremely poor conditions, the life cycle of sleep, kids, love and death, was the same everywhere in the world. Nevertheless, Trenkel declared that if he had to spend his life in this little village, he would surely hang himself.³¹

An article by *Oberkaplan* Dr Karl Wilk argued that organised religion in the East was a major contributing factor to the inferior nature of these peoples. The Russian Orthodox church, with its heavy reliance on 'ritual' instead of theology, did nothing to lead this 'Barbarenavolk' away from its 'Aberglaube' and 'Unkultur'.³² In addition to the church being responsible for the state of affairs in Russia, the piece 'Russische Landwirtschaft' argued that the political situation of the Russian peasantry was responsible for their primitive conditions. In his claim that Germany represented 'Ordnung' and Russia 'Unordnung' the author argued that the German 'Bauer' was successful because he was 'free'.³³ An interesting article from the western front, 'Sie und wir', argued that the Russians must learn to understand German 'Kultur', yet did not fail to list the many achievements of Russian music and literature appreciated in Germany.³⁴ And the sketches of Russian peasants in the pages of the trench journal *Die Sappe* were far from unsympathetic.³⁵ Although the Russians were often portrayed as a dirty, primitive people, there was some recognition that this was probably caused by abysmal leadership and 'underdeveloped' culture, and not necessarily something genetically insurmountable. Finally, it is important to make the connection between Russian peasants and Russian soldiers. The fact that these people produced the men who held back the German Army until 1917, likely tempered the manner with which they were characterised as a people.

Poles

There were two sketches in the 28 February 1917 western front *Liller Kriegszeitung* juxtaposing the technological conditions of the West and East. The first had the jarring sight of a nice, modern carriage from the western front among the primitive conditions of the East, the second, a typical peasants' carriage from the East in a modern western front (behind the lines) setting. 'Das polnische Dorf' featured photos and an article describing the derelict state of Polish houses³⁶, and in 'Polnische Bauweise', the author made a

³⁰ Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi, 23 March 1918.

³¹ Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi, 7 February 1917.

³² Zeitung der 10. Armee, 29 May 1916.

³³ Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi, 22 January 1916.

³⁴ Kriegszeitung der 4. Armee, 10 August 1916.

³⁵ Die Sappe, n.d. [1917].

³⁶ Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi, 6 May 1916.

full comparison of the plan and material of a typical Polish house to one built by a newly arrived German settler, and found the former notably inferior. The Poles had no 'Schönheitssinn', the author argued, and with regard to the 'laziness' of the Poles, he invoked the old saying, 'Ohne Fleiß, kein Preis'. If left alone, they would continue to build poorly, and thus, '[müssen sie] durch Gesetzworschriften dazu gezwungen werden zum Wohle der Gesamtheit'.³⁷ Hence, German colonisation was for the good of the locals. Another article pointed out how much 'better' maintained the Prussian half of Poland was than the Russian, and that this was evidence enough of the German ability to mould and help these child-like people.³⁸ While the small unit that produced *Die Sappe* was on the eastern front, in Lemberg (Lwów), they produced number 23 of their journal, in which barefoot *Panjes* are happy that 'good' Germans instead of 'bad' Russians, have arrived. Further, the primitive technology and lack of 'Kultur' was clearly mocked in this trench journal of 1917.³⁹ In another newspaper, a 'dehumanizing' process was well underway, however indirectly, in the story 'Das polnische Pferd'. The author, *Kriegsarzt* Dr. Baumgart, claimed that the subject of the tale was a good horse, just that it needed proper care and attention to reach its full potential. It could be assumed that this was merely a metaphor for the Polish people.⁴⁰ And in the clearest of ironic juxtapositions, the song 'Polen', in the March 1918 *Ostwacht*, had the narrator claiming to love Poland because it reminded him how good Germany was.

Although the view of the natives was coloured by German cultural chauvinism, there were several articles depicting sympathetic exchanges between the soldiers and the locals. 'Bei den Panjes' described a very nice stay by a staff sergeant in a nearby village. The terrible Russians, he wrote, had taken everything from this simple folk. This was unfortunate, according to the author, because it was lovely to share, sing and have fun with these kind, dirty, primitive, poor people.⁴¹ In other drawings and photos, relations appeared amicable, yet they were always rife with paternalistic symbolism. In one sketch, all parties were smiling while the large, well-fed, well-uniformed German soldiers gave food to dirt-poor peasant girls.⁴² One brought wealth and benevolent, absolute authority, the other happily accepted, both gift

³⁷ Ostwacht, May 1918.

³⁸ Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi, 8 March 1916. The ethnological study of Poles found its clearest representation in 'Das polnische Museum für Kunst und Völkerkunde in Wilna', an exhibition soon to be opened for all *Feldgraue* to attend. Zeitung der 10. Armee, 20 July 1916.

³⁹ The author of, 'Das deutsche Volk und der Osten,' argued that the Germans had 'freed' the Poles, and that now was the time for Germany to move in with proper 'Wirtschaftspolitik'. Liller Kriegszeitung, 19 October 1915.

⁴⁰ Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi, 13 January 1917.

⁴¹ Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi, 22 April 1916.

⁴² Zeitung der 10. Armee, 11 May 1916.

and position. Lastly, the completely subordinate status of this 'nation' was brought out in one of the longest, and most condescending songs to appear in any of the German soldier newspapers. 'Das Panjehaus', by *Hauptmann* Rudolf Hering, took up an entire page of the 28 January 1917 issue of the *Zeitung der 10. Armee*. Among the many lines describing these people as so lazy and unhygienic that they were not really 'Menschen', came the following: 'im Panjeland nur schlecht / man unterscheidet das Geschlecht'. These were a people described as indolent, dirty, primitive, and generally so 'unmanly' that both sexes looked similar. They were the opposite of the Germans in every way, and were to have nothing but a completely subordinate and 'colonial' relationship to the Fatherland.

'Der Litauer und die Anderen'

The work of Abba Strazhas describes a confusing world behind the Baltic front which contained warlords and partisans, composed of young Lithuanian men, escaped Russian POWs and German deserters.⁴³ This reveals an aspect of the First World War much more akin to the Second than previously assumed. In his own account of this little known theatre of war, Liulevicius details an occupation characterised by German cruelty toward the local Lithuanian population. Yet, in the pages of the soldier newspapers, the Lithuanians were depicted most often in a very positive manner. The political relationship between a particular group and the Reich was thus critical to that group's portrayal in the soldier newspapers. For example, although a worthy foe on the battlefield, the Russian peasants were depicted as weak and inferior. The Poles, with virtually no soldiers and a long history of political division, were dismissed as a simple, filthy people with few redeeming features. The existence of assimilated Lithuanians in Eastern Prussia, however, along with the desire to establish a permanent, fully annexed military utopia in Lithuania and Courland, or *Ober Ost*, necessitated a very different approach to these new, semi-members of the German Empire.

For some Germans, their understanding of ethnicity and nationalism was severely shaken upon their arrival in the East. A late 1917 article, 'Der Litauer und die Anderen' recognised the complicated nature of the Lithuanian national question in a land where 'race' and ethnicity, as well as the geographical location, or heartland, of these groups, were far from being clearly delineated. There were diehard Lithuanian nationalists who only spoke Polish, for instance.⁴⁴ Order had to be made of this mess, and answers had to be provided. 'Die Völker Litauens' pointed out that, although this land was currently 'Nationalpolen', and Polish was spoken in the cities, the feeling ema-

⁴³ ABBA STRAZHAS: *Deutsche Ostpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg. Der Fall Ober Ost 1915-1917*, Wiesbaden 1993.

⁴⁴ *Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi*, 1 December 1917. See also LIULEVICIUS (cf. footnote 5), pp. 33-35.

nating from the still Lithuanian-speaking peasants was that it was time for the return of the old Lithuanian greatness. Importantly, this resurgent Lithuanian nationalism preferred its economic links to be with Germany.⁴⁵ Another article, describing the great trustworthiness of the Lithuanian people, 'Litauischer Vertrauensrat', explained that this trait was linked to Lithuanian nationalism, and that it was the basis of the deep relationship between Germany and Lithuania. These people were indeed very happy that the Germans had arrived, claimed the author.⁴⁶ Recognition of the growing 'interference' of the home front on the political issue of Lithuania made it into the *Zeitung der 10. Armee*. A front page article, reprinted from the *Berliner Lokalanzeiger*, on 8 March 1918, claimed that the Lithuanians knew (unlike the meddling Erzberger⁴⁷) that they were not 'reif' for complete independence, and that they preferred a closer 'Anschluß' with Germany. Furthermore, intelligent Germans were well aware that an independent Lithuania would be swallowed up by the newly formed Polish state. In an honest nod to *Realpolitik* the article made it clear that it was in Germany's interest to keep Lithuania within its 'Einflußsphäre', linking the Fatherland to the Balts in Courland. Later, the 23 July 1918 issue of the *Zeitung der 10. Armee* printed a very angry piece from the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* damning the recent selection of Herzog von Urach to be the next Lithuanian King. Such a decision should be made with the agreement of the German government, it was argued, and only if it 'den deutschen Interessen entspreche'.

The many articles on the Lithuanian people were significant for the way these otherwise 'dirty, primitive Poles' were portrayed as some kind of German 'Urvolk'. The article 'Litauen', from 1916, described this once great people as being, today, 'klein, tapfer und tüchtig'. Most importantly, the Lithuanian tongue was here described as the oldest Indo-Germanic language.⁴⁸ 'Der litauische Bauer und sein Haus' gave a full description of these simple, yet sturdy people and constructions.⁴⁹ The tone of 'Volks- und Aberglaube bei den Litauern' was very different from the earlier reference to superstition and the church in Russia. Instead, these people were depicted as if they were the actors in 'urdeutsch' fairy tales, with the same belief systems of early

⁴⁵ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 27 January 1916.

⁴⁶ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 12 July 1917.

⁴⁷ Matthias Erzberger (1875-1921) was a leading figure in the wartime parliament and member of the Catholic Centre Party. Although formerly an advocate of colonies and annexations, by 1917 Erzberger had become convinced that the war could not be won. That year he was a leading organiser behind the parliamentary resolution in favour of peace. From that point on, and especially after his involvement in the Versailles negotiations, he was hated by members of the Right, and became one of the most famous victims of the 'Fememörder'.

⁴⁸ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 18 July 1916.

⁴⁹ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 29 May 1916.

Germans.⁵⁰ The sketch, 'Reigen litauischer Kinder', showed a group of well dressed, mostly blonde, Nordic-looking children in a scene that could be anywhere in Germany, but not what one would expect in the war-torn East.⁵¹

Nonetheless, the picture of Lithuania was sometimes ambivalent, as in 'Wilna in kultur- und kunstgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung', which described a city full of paradoxes, where East met West. With enough 'deutsche Kulturarbeit', however, the city would remain properly 'Western'.⁵² Another article praised this pleasant, primitive, blonde folk, yet the fact that many Lithuanians were barefoot and kept animals inside their houses did not escape attention. Ultimately, however, the author found that their 'Schicksal' was tied to Germany, not the backward East.⁵³ In the only completely negative depiction of Lithuanian men, one *Jäger* Donauer described the local beggars in Vilnius in a tone of disgust, 'Herrgott, wie sehen diese Gestalten aber aus!'⁵⁴ In some surprising rhetorical twists, the newspapers were able to explain why the Lithuanians the soldiers saw daily were not 'just' dirty beggars. 'Der kleine Edmund' was about a little boy who collected cigarette stubs for money. He may have been filthy but that was only because he was so busy and 'fleißig' that he did not have time to wash.⁵⁵ And the beggars of Lithuania? An article from November 1916 explained that these people assumed they were God's children and were performing a naturally ordained job. The author was thankful that they were quiet and stoical about it, not loud and theatrical like the Italians.⁵⁶

The foreword to an 1853 German book on Lithuanian *Dainos*, or traditional folk songs, was printed in the 20 April 1917 issue of the *Zeitung der 10. Armee*. Here, a very positive description of this aspect of Lithuanian culture was accompanied by praise for this 'Urvolk'. A few months later there was a positive portrayal of 'Maironis, Litauens Lyriker'.⁵⁷ It was in the 31 July 1917 issue of this newspaper that the German audience was first introduced to Vidunas⁵⁸, the 'Shakespeare' of the Lithuanian language. This dedication piece continued at great length about this author, Lithuanian songs, and ultimately how wonderfully Germanic this 'Urvolk' truly was. In a 7 March 1918 'Liebesgabe' devoted to the Lithuanian people, Vidunas wrote on the history and importance of the *Dainos*, and there was a debate among some German academics as to which *Dainos* were of traceable German 'Herkunft', and therefore good, and which had Slavic influences, and were thus to be

⁵⁰ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 5 September 1917.

⁵¹ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 20 October 1917.

⁵² *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 8 July 1917.

⁵³ *Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi*, 11 November 1916.

⁵⁴ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 22 January 1917.

⁵⁵ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 31 December 1916.

⁵⁶ *Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi*, 15 November 1916.

⁵⁷ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 6 June 1917.

⁵⁸ Vilhelmas Storosta, 'Vidunas', (1868-1953).

ignored. Additionally, in 'Wege zur litauischen Volks- und Landeskunde', there was an overview of Lithuanian literature available for the curious *Landser* in Vilnius. In a long two-part article appearing on 7 and 9 February 1918, Vidunas described the Lithuanian people as big, blonde, blue-eyed, honest, egalitarian, and as a *Volk* who did not possess any folk songs that could be deemed 'naughty'. With this, the Lithuanians were starting to appear more German than the Germans. On 22 March 1918, there was an article detailing the life of the Prussian-Lithuanian Vidunas on his fiftieth birthday, well-deserved praise for this happily assimilated 'quasi-nationalist' who provided so much ammunition for the newspapers' political mission in Lithuania. At his most extreme, this pro-German national icon wrote a heavy, poetico-philosophical essay very near the end of the war in which he argued that Germany was the 'Erde', and a glowing flame. Lithuania, he claimed, was totally different. 'Wer will sie pflegen?', he asked.⁵⁹

An article from early 1917, entitled 'Die nordische Rasse und die Moskowiter', ranked the various nationalities of the 'messy' East according to how much Nordic blood they possessed. Not surprisingly the Russians, or Muscovites, were the most Slavic, possessing the least 'pure' blood. Those of the best stock were the Estonians, the Finns and the 'White Ruthenians'.⁶⁰ Indeed, by March 1918, in the wake of the Brest-Litovsk peace Treaty and Germany's desire for further annexations, the Estonians suddenly appeared in the pages of the soldier newspapers as a natural ally. Rohrbach lent his pen once again to the cause in an article that appeared on the western front. In 'Estland und die Esten', he claimed that this great people were still German-leaning, as they had resisted russification. Lake Peipus was the border between East and West he argued, and thus, all of the Baltic was culturally 'im Westen'. In fact, Reval was the 'nördliche Nürnberg'. Rohrbach stated that these people had asked for German help out of the chaos left by the Russians, and that therefore the Germans were 'nicht Eroberer, sondern Befreier'.⁶¹ In the same month, the *Zeitung der 10. Armee* devoted an entire *Liebesgabe* to 'Die Esten'. A poem, entitled 'Brüder in Estland, bald seid ihr frei', claimed that the Germans were coming to free these people from the 'Rote Garde'. The newspaper argued that this *Volk* were 'treu', 'blond', not Slavs, and, interestingly, they were deemed a 'manly' people, unlike the 'weibliche Letten'.⁶²

The complex relationship between the Germans and the Letts was the focus of only one article. 'Die Letten' described a people with an Indo-Germanic 'Volksstamm', quite close to the Prussians. Yet, as the article pointed out, in the 1905 Revolution these traitors had murdered many Baltic Germans, and therefore it was rather convenient that they were already for the most part 'verblendet' and dying out. All the more reason, continued the author, to

⁵⁹ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 13 September 1918.

⁶⁰ *Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi*, 3 March 1917.

⁶¹ *Kriegszeitung der 4. Armee*, 14 March 1918.

⁶² *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 5 March 1918.

bring German-Russian farmers into the area.⁶³ Letts lived in the most 'German' part of the Baltics, and thus were not to be recognised as a separate 'nation' in the soldier newspapers. 'Kurland als deutsches Land', by one Dr Arthur Luther (Leipzig), in the 28 October 1917 issue of the *Wacht im Westen*, stated that Courland had almost always been German. Indeed, he claimed the remaining Russian buildings here looked out of place, and even though only 8% of the 'Einwohner' were German, until 1795, all the 'Fürsten' were German. Luther went on to actually mention the Letts, arguing that they still survive because the Baltic Germans supported their 'Volksstamm' and actually gave them their culture. He lamented, however, that the Balts had not germanised these people more. The 'natives' of Courland, however, received no mention in a historical article that appeared on both fronts: 'Kurland und Preußen'. This was merely a long story explaining how Courland 'belongs' to Germany.⁶⁴

Other ethnic groups found in the East received brief mention in the soldier newspapers. Among the most exciting ethnological 'discoveries' by the Germans were the 'White Ruthenians', south-east of Lithuania, sometimes referred to as 'White Russians'. This stateless, ultra-poor, previously 'unknown' group, was seen as a possible ally by Ludendorff, and the 'colonial scientists' were sent in to 'study' them. One result was the scholarly contribution, 'Volkskundliche Beobachtungen zur materiellen Kultur der Weißruthenen', in the 16 January 1918 issue of the *Zeitung der 10. Armee*. Here, Professor Dr. F. Curschmann (also *Hauptmann d. L.*) rejoiced at the wonderful opportunity Germany had to investigate such exotic cultures. How superficial it was of some Germans to dismiss these people as primitive and dirty, he argued. In fact, he wrote, they built their own things, and bathed once a week. War, however, he warned, was changing this pristine 'Urvolk', and they had to be studied now before their secrets were lost.⁶⁵ 'Litauische Tataren' were the subject of another very 'interested' ethnographic article. 20,000 Muslim descendants of this once great people, who had arrived and settled in the fourteenth century, still remained in Lithuania, practising their old religion and continuing their traditional lives.⁶⁶ The other reference to Tatars was less favourable. *Kanonier* Oskar Wöhrle, in an article on Vilnius locals, described a large, dirty Tatar beggar who lived like an animal.⁶⁷ Relatives of the Tatars,

⁶³ *Kriegszeitung der 4. Armee*, 21 March 1918.

⁶⁴ *Kriegszeitung der 4. Armee*, 28 March 1918, and *Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi*, 13 February 1918.

⁶⁵ Unlike most of the other professors cited in the soldier newspapers, the historical geographer Fritz Curschmann (1874-1946) left his chair in Greifswald and went East, first with the artillery then later to count ethnic populations in *Ober Ost*. Indeed, the Ruthenians, and his interest in them, were very much a 'personal' discovery.

⁶⁶ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 16 October 1916. The author claimed that there were twenty mosques in the area.

⁶⁷ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 16 January 1918.

the Cossacks, received little attention. A late 1917 article gave a history of their role as warriors for Russia, but was not necessarily pejorative. A cartoon, 'Der Kosak', which appeared long after Brest-Litovsk, depicted a very ordinary looking fellow, and not the bloodthirsty murderer of propaganda tales.⁶⁸ And one article that tends to dispel the idea that blood, or biology, was seen at the time as more powerful than culture, 'Ich will', described a woman raped by Cossacks during the Russian march into East Prussia in 1914. The woman kept the resultant child, knowing Germany would need strong, loyal soldiers in the future.⁶⁹ This child's being raised by a faithful, strong, German mother obviously far outweighed his 'Asiatic' blood. Finally, in a case where cultural characteristics played right into the hands of the Germans, the Finns were easily defined as a group of people whose destiny was tied to Germany's. The newspaper of the German Army in Finland, *Suomi-Finnland*, contained many articles about this 'harte', 'starke' northern people. Many were actually written by Finnish academics who also argued that, in the wake of the civil war, the Finns needed a strong 'Staatsmacht' to help it, and who better than their brothers, the Germans.⁷⁰

Romanians

There was surely a sense of betrayal when Romania declared war on the Central Powers in 1916, many Germans having long believed the Romanians would side with them against Russia. Yet, after quickly vanquishing most of the Romanian Army, and setting up occupation in Bucharest, the High Command seems to have remained optimistic about these people. In the words and images of the rather professional-looking newspaper, *Rumänien in Wort und Bild*, the Romanian people were treated much like the 'White Ruthenians': primitive, yet not so difficult as the Poles. As was usually the case in the East, the Romanians did not conform to western ideas of nation and ethnicity. According to an article on 'Bukarester Baukunst', this area was 'nicht mehr Westeuropa und noch nicht Orient'.⁷¹ An article by Professor Dr. Alexander Brückner⁷² (Berlin) stated that these people were much like the Lithuanians, that is, not Slavic, but practising a Slavic culture.⁷³ Another writer claimed that the Romanians were the descendants of the first people to settle in the area, the 'Thraker und Illyrier', and that these tribes were in fact Indo-Ger-

⁶⁸ Zeitung der 10. Armee, 31 August 1918.

⁶⁹ Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi, 10 February 1917.

⁷⁰ Suomi-Finnland, 8, 11 and 15 May, and 30 July 1917.

⁷¹ Rumänien in Wort und Bild, 19 May 1917. The article 'Die Operette in Rumänien' argued that this form of art needed to develop before it could join the ranks of that performed in the West. Rumänien in Wort und Bild, 30 June 1917.

⁷² In 1892, Alexander Brückner (1856-1939) became Professor for Slavic Languages and Literature at the University of Berlin. He published works on Russian, Lithuanian and Polish literature, as well as a major work on the Polish language.

⁷³ Rumänien in Wort und Bild, 17 January 1918.

manic. Only under Byzantium had the culture become Greco-Slavic.⁷⁴ 'Bilder aus dem fleißigen Rumänien' contained many photos of Romanian farmers hard at work⁷⁵, although another issue of *Rumänien in Wort und Bild* displayed the two rather 'un-Germanic' winning examples of a recent photo contest: 'Eile mit Weile' displayed two old farmers seemingly working at a snail's pace; and 'Arm doch froh' pictured a brutally poor hut and family.⁷⁶

All the trappings of German history, 'Arbeit' and ethnography, seen in the Northeast, appeared again here with regard to Romania. 'Volksleben in der Dobrudscha' concerned itself with the Swabian farmers who had occupied the land for centuries. In the marketplace they still stood out because they had continued to dress and speak like their ancestors. Here was the scene in Constanta:

Daneben waren die üblichen Bilder rumänischen Volkslebens zu sehen, Bauern in spitzen Mützen und weissen Kitteln, Bäuerinnen in bunten Kleidern, Bulgaren in ihren eigenen Trachten, Albaner mit flachen Mützen und breiten Gürteln, Griechen, Armenier und Juden und endlich, aus diesem Mischmasch stark hervortretend deutsche Bauern, die ihre heimische Sprache und Rasse durch die Jahrhunderte treu bewahrt haben.⁷⁷

The excitement of the newly arrived academics in Romania was evident in the words of *Privatdozent* Dr Hugo Grothe⁷⁸:

Mit Staunen wird der Beobachter gewahr, wie viel Neues und Unbekanntes ihm täglich entgegentritt, neben alle dem, was beim Rumänen in Sprache, Leben und Denken vom Geist der umwohnenden Rassen sich widerspiegelt. Fürwahr Geograph, Ethnolog und Kulturhistoriker stehen hier vor Schätzen, an deren Hebung noch manche Mühe erfolgreich sich betätigen kann.⁷⁹

The newspapers catalogued Romanian culture with articles on 'Regenlieder', 'Kindertaufe' and the details of the 'Bauernhochzeit', which were presented with photos and in a manner which reminds a modern reader very much of typical late nineteenth-century ethnographic work from Africa or South America.⁸⁰ These people were seen as a primitive group of natives, ripe for German colonisation. In an article that echoed references to the ultra-

⁷⁴ Rumänien in Wort und Bild, 30 June 1917.

⁷⁵ Rumänien in Wort und Bild, 26 May 1917.

⁷⁶ Rumänien in Wort und Bild, 14 July 1917. *Die Sappe*, May 1917, featured a relatively positive sketch of a 'Rumänischer Bauer'.

⁷⁷ Rumänien in Wort und Bild, 7 July 1917.

⁷⁸ Trained in 'Orientalism' and geography, Hugo Grothe (1869-1954) founded the 'Orientalisches Archiv für Völkerkunde und Kunstgeschichte', the 'Deutsche Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft' and the 'Institut für Auslandskunde' in Leipzig in 1912.

⁷⁹ Rumänien in Wort und Bild, 15 September 1917.

⁸⁰ Rumänien in Wort und Bild, 30 June 1917. The photo of 'rain-dancing' children is in: Rumänien in Wort und Bild, 7 July 1917. There were also two ethnographic articles on the 'Volksgebräuche' and 'Totenkult' of the Macedonians, in *Kriegszeitung Heeresgruppe Scholtz*, 11 and 15 September 1917.

primitive White Ruthenians, the rural Romanians were described as if they were children. They were good, natural natives whose way of life was tragically being destroyed by the encroachments of German modernity.⁸¹

Bulgarians

An article in the 1 June 1918 issue of the *Kriegszeitung der Heeresgruppe Scholtz*, stationed on the Macedonian frontier, explained that Bulgarian was the language most useful at market in Skopje, and that the growing knowledge of this tongue by German soldiers was the clearest proof that Germans abroad were traditionally very good at getting to know the locals and interacting in their community.⁸² It is not surprising that Germany's only official allies in the East, the Bulgarians, were represented in a very positive light. In early 1916, Professor Dr Rudolf Eucken⁸³ (Jena) wrote an article for a western front newspaper which claimed that Bulgarians were the leaders in Slavic literature. He argued that they were very bright and that Germany could indeed learn and benefit from them.⁸⁴ A month later, in the 16 February 1916 *Deutsche Kriegs-Zeitung von Baranowitschi*, a contribution appeared with the surprisingly 'positive' claim that Bulgarians were 'durchaus' Slavs. 'Sie sind ohne Zweifel reinere Slawen als die Russen', and have less Mongolian blood than other Slavic peoples, the paper claimed. By late 1917 it was no longer acceptable to describe Germany's valiant allies as 'Slavs', and thus an article from August of that year stated that they were the actual descendants of Thracians (as it seems were the Romanians), a Finno-Aryan blood-mixture that was very positive:

dieser Einstrom finnischen Blutes in eine arische Rasse, das politische Übergewicht eines waffenfrohen Adels über ein sesshaftes Bauerntum schuf jenes gediegene und ausdauernde, harte und zähe, nüchterne und arbeitssame, stolze und kriegerische Volk, das auf der Balkanhalbinsel die Führung zu übernehmen und die byzantinischen Kaiser fünf Jahrhunderte lang in Schach zu halten vermochte.⁸⁵

When it came to the attempt to liken Bulgarians to Germans, however, the listing of positive traits was more common and fruitful than simple reference to the clearly confusing question of race and blood. 'Die Bulgaren sind die Preußen des Balkans' trumpeted one article. This 'tapfere Soldatenvolk' was

⁸¹ Rumänien in Wort und Bild, 16 June 1917.

⁸² While the 5 September 1917 issue of the *Kriegszeitung der Heeresgruppe Scholtz* claimed, in 'Das Volkstum der Mazedonier', that the locals were virtually 100% Bulgarian, in the edition appearing ten days later, an article entitled 'Die Albanier' recognised there were indeed others in this land, and that simple notions of 'nation' and 'state' did not apply very well to Macedonia.

⁸³ Rudolf Eucken (1846-1926), a philosopher, was best known for his writings on a socio-ethical 'new idealism'. In 1908 he won the Nobel Prize for literature.

⁸⁴ *Kriegszeitung der 4. Armee*, 14 January 1916.

⁸⁵ Rumänien in Wort und Bild, 25 August 1917.

in possession of 'deutscher Ehrlichkeit, deutschem Gewerbefleiß, deutscher Industrie und Landwirtschaft, deutscher Vaterlandsliebe und Unbezwingbarkeit'.⁸⁶ Another, slightly more complex article, claimed that, unlike big, happy Serbs, Bulgarians were small and 'mißtrauisch'. They were very serious, like Prussians, and unlike Frenchmen. This *Volk* was 'sparsam' and worked hard, although perhaps on the slower side. And finally, Bulgarians were 'fleißig', unlike the apathetic Turks.⁸⁷ More in keeping with the politics of the time was the article 'Der bulgarische Soldat'. Here, this solid and dutiful 'Freiheitskämpfer' had his long and deep hatred of the Serbs duly noted. There was no mention, however, of his long and deep hatred for his current ally, the Turks.⁸⁸ This last article, as well as a few others, emphasised the 'herzliche Kameradschaft' between Germany and Bulgaria, claiming that, unlike the Allies, Bulgaria and the Central Powers were proper comrades, never bickered, and fought together for victory.⁸⁹

Languages and the East

The (non)use of the language of the occupied represents an important contrast between the German experience on the eastern and western fronts. Many Germans in the West already spoke French, and they obviously considered it an important, 'worthy' language. In fact, many articles jokingly referred to what was clearly a monumental effort on the part of lesser-educated German soldiers to learn this renowned language. In the East, the case could not have been more different. The only 'language' that ever came out of the mouths of cartoon or story characters of Slavic origin was strangely-accented German. 'Panje' was virtually the only Polish or Russian word to appear in the soldier newspapers. There was rarely any hint that a German would be better off in the East if he spent the time to learn one of these drastically 'inferior' tongues.⁹⁰ One of the only articles implying that some Germans might be somewhat familiar with Slavic languages (as those from the Prussian East most surely were), was 'Die Sprachen im besetzten Gebiet'. Here it was argued that the mere fact that there happened to be many German words used in Slavic languages in no way meant that there was any relationship between the two linguistic groups. Instead, this was only brought about through the enor-

⁸⁶ Der Feldbote, 18 November 1917.

⁸⁷ Seille-Bote, 21 November 1915.

⁸⁸ Rumänien in Wort und Bild, 25 August 1917.

⁸⁹ Rumänien in Wort und Bild, 27 February 1916 and 26 May 1917.

⁹⁰ There was an interest in the eastern front soldier newspapers for both Lithuanian and Yiddish theatre. For those soldiers desperate to enjoy any and all forms of entertainment in the occupied East, there was an incentive to learn these languages. Liulevicius writes: 'A crucial factor was the fact that Yiddish was accessible to the German Ear. Lithuanian, Latvian, and Belarussian efforts were dubiously received.' (cf. footnote 3), pp. 138-139.

mous cultural and political influence of Germany in the East.⁹¹ In 'Sprache und Rasse', in the 16 September 1916 *Liller Kriegszeitung*, it was pointed out that although the Romanians spoke a Latinate language they were not Latins like Germany's western 'Urfeind', the French. Thus racially they were acceptable. Yet, even though Germans experienced few difficulties learning the language of their enemies in the West, the Latinate (and therefore properly Western) basis of the Romanian language did not rescue it from its Eastern, and therefore primitive context. There were no Romanian-German word guides in *Rumänien in Wort und Bild*. 'Die deutsche Sprache in Rumänien', an article on how this language should best be taught in occupied Romania, made it clear that language instruction was only for the subjects, not the colonisers.⁹²

Eastern Jews

The claim that antisemitism permeated all levels of the German population in 1914 is very difficult to assess. Racial/biological or truly radical antisemitism that mirrors the later Nazi type belonged for the most part to a minority relegated to middle-class organisations like the Pan-Germans.⁹³ This was the first major distinction between the German-Jewish encounter on the eastern front in 1914 versus 1939. The second was the novelty. Quite simply, many of the soldiers had not known these people existed. Above, Bartov's argument that the primitive existence of Slavs fit neatly into pre-existing German stereotypes in 1939, was found to be somewhat applicable to the situation in the East in 1914. However, his description of the Germans' initial engagement with the Eastern Jews in the Second World War is far less applicable to 1914: 'encounters with Jews in the East [did not] make [German soldiers] doubt the existence of that mythical Jew who played such a prominent role in their indoctrination material.'⁹⁴ The radically different state of 'pre-knowledge' among German soldiers in 1914 is discussed by Egmont Zechlin:

Erst nach der Besetzung Polens begannen die deutschen Soldaten und die ihnen folgenden Journalisten, das Ostjudentum zu 'entdecken' und darüber in der Heimat zu berichten. ... [Sie besaßen] kaum Kenntnisse über die Geschichte der Ostjuden ... und nur geringeres Verständnis für ihre kulturelle Eigenart.⁹⁵

To date, the main political history of this early engagement between Germans and Eastern Jews remains 'Die Deutsche Politik und die Juden im Ersten Weltkrieg', of 1969, by Zechlin. The most extensive cultural historical

⁹¹ Zeitung der 10. Armee, 17 April 1916.

⁹² Zeitung der 10. Armee, 31 July 1918.

⁹³ See ROGER CHICKERING: 'We men who feel most German': A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914, Boston 1984.

⁹⁴ BARTOV (cf. footnote 27), p. 127.

⁹⁵ EGMONT ZEHLIN: Die Deutsche Politik und die Juden im Ersten Weltkrieg, Göttingen 1969, p. 165.

approach to this encounter is the seventh chapter of Steven Aschheim's 'Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923' (Madison, 1982). The one pre-*Zusammenbruch*, antisemitic event of the First World War which is most often referenced is the notorious 'Jew Count' of October 1916, the proposed enumeration of all Jews in the military. This has sometimes been appropriated as evidence that the German military *in toto* was thoroughly antisemitic.⁹⁶ Aschheim states:

Jews were regularly treated with greater harshness than the local Polish population, and by the end of the war most Jewish observers agreed that the rift was, to a great extent, the product of plain anti-Semitic bias running through the ranks of both the army and occupation officials. No proper evaluation of the record can omit this factor; if it does not tell all of the story it nevertheless reveals a very important part of it.⁹⁷

Some thirty-one pages earlier he makes a very different, and somewhat more supportable claim:

For the average German soldier, the confrontation with the Jews of the ghettos only confirmed and deepened an existing stereotype. His perceptions were not necessarily grounded in anti-Semitism, but they doubtless lent credibility and resonance to the malicious anti-Semitic propaganda against the Ostjuden that appeared in the immediate postwar years. The images and impressions did not exist in a vacuum. During the course of the war they were transmitted to German society in the form of letters, articles, conversations.⁹⁸

Finally, the only evidence Aschheim provides about the 'average German soldiers' are German soldier newspapers. Having read Fred Hardt's 1917 collection of highlights from the *Soldatenzeitungen*, Aschheim states: 'in the popular trench newspapers ... [Ostjuden] were portrayed rather sympathetically and Jewish "cleverness" praised'.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ See WERNER T. ANGRESS: *Das deutsche Militär und die Juden im Ersten Weltkrieg*, in: *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 19 (1976), pp. 77-146; CLEMENS PICT: *Zwischen Vaterland und Volk. Das deutsche Judentum im Ersten Weltkrieg*, in: *Der Erste Weltkrieg. Wirkung, Wahrnehmung, Analyse*, ed. by WOLFGANG MICHALKA, München 1994, pp. 736-755; and the collection: *Deutsches Judentum in Krieg und Revolution, 1916-1923*, ed. by WERNER E. MOSSE, Tübingen 1971.

⁹⁷ STEVEN E. ASCHHEIM: *Brothers and Strangers. The East European Jew and German Jewish Consciousness 1800-1923*, Madison 1982, p. 181. See also PAM MACLEAN: *Control and Cleanliness: German-Jewish Relations in Occupied Eastern Europe during the First World War*, in: *War & Society* 6 (1988), pp. 47-69.

⁹⁸ ASCHHEIM (cf. footnote 97), p. 150.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 145. He continues in this paragraph to claim that these images were 'often' done with humour and made reference to 'economic terms'. While this might be true in Fred Hardt's collection, it is not true of the German soldier newspapers in general. Aschheim sometimes refers to soldiers' letters as well in his study, but does not cite them to support his claims of antisemitism 'running through the ranks'.

Although there were some examples in the soldier newspapers of Jews depicted as merely another dirty, primitive race in the East, the overall portrayal of the *Ostjuden* was often positive. The cultural similarities between Jews and Germans made them much easier to celebrate than the more 'backward' Slavs. Further, the Eastern Jews were seen as a possible ally, an ethnic group that might be incited against the Russian Empire that oppressed them.¹⁰⁰ The sparse evidence in the soldiers' letters indicates a largely indifferent attitude toward Jews on the part of the average soldier. Reimann refers to a 'populäre[n] Antisemitismus unter den deutschen Truppen', yet found only a few, rather slight, references to antisemitic behaviour. One letter claims that Jews were making money off of soldiers. Another letter merely states that there is a *Judenviertel* in Warsaw, but that one usually doesn't go through it. Reimann also cites a rather ambiguous letter that argued there was nothing wrong with stealing animals from Jews because the Germans were fighting 'für' this 'Gesindel'.¹⁰¹ Latzel cites some references to Jews as well, and while far from positive, they are spoken of as just another 'dirty', 'primitive' *Volk* of the East.¹⁰²

The only unrelentingly antisemitic article in the German soldier newspapers was 'Das Wilnaer Judenviertel', by *Kanonier* Otto Jahnke, in the 16 September 1916 *Zeitung der 10. Armee*. In his description of this 'niedrigste Menschenklasse', Jahnke commented upon the 'Geruch in den Straßen', and the 'häßliche[n] Frauen'. He sees a man about to hit his daughter, who then demurs when he notices the German uniform. The daughter cries out that her dad is a lazy drunk. In a later sketch, entitled 'Im Wilnaer Judenviertel', men and women were depicted quite normally going about their shopping.¹⁰³ 'Der Lumpenmarkt in Wilna' described this lively, chaotic place, while also making fun of the Yiddish that was spoken there. The author labeled the Jews as 'very generous' for they always gave money to beggars.¹⁰⁴ The article 'Zwei Kulturen' compared cities run by *Balten* to those run by 'Easterners'. The author simply lumped the Poles and Jews of Vilnius together and argued that the city possessed an Eastern and Slavic population, and thus was dirtier and less cultured than a typical western metropolis.¹⁰⁵ These references were among the few overtly pejorative representations of Jews in the German soldier newspapers.

¹⁰⁰ ZECHLIN (cf. footnote 95), p. 117; ASCHHEIM (cf. footnote 97), p. 143; SAUL FRIEDLÄNDER: Die politischen Veränderungen der Kriegszeit und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Judenfrage, in: Deutsches Judentum (cf. footnote 96), p. 31.

¹⁰¹ REIMANN (cf. footnote 9), pp. 212-213.

¹⁰² LATZEL (cf. footnote 8), pp. 166-169.

¹⁰³ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 8 June 1918.

¹⁰⁴ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 3 June 1917.

¹⁰⁵ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 3 February 1916. 'Jude aus Wladimir-Wohlyask' depicted a scruffy pedlar, again, no worse than another Slav. *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 22 September 1917.

Of the many sketches of locals in and around Vilnius, Jews appeared often. In these pictures the journals reproduced images which put forward a Jewish population that was most often noble and respectable. 'Aus Litauen' depicted various natives, and the one old Jew was clearly not as 'dirty' and desperate looking as the Lithuanians in the other pictures.¹⁰⁶ Significantly, 'Judenknabe aus Baranowitschi' illustrated a young boy wearing shoes.¹⁰⁷ The subject of the drawing 'Jüdisches Mädchen aus Baranowitschi' possessed a fine elegance, and the 'Jüdisches Wohnhaus in Slonim' was portrayed as far less 'primitive' than the 'backward' Polish domiciles found in sketches elsewhere in the newspapers.¹⁰⁸ And 'Jüdische Händlerinnen bei der Synagoge', depicted Jewish women smiling while working diligently peeling vegetables.¹⁰⁹ This stands in stark contrast to the images in the soldier newspapers of old Slavic women sitting morosely and begging in front of a church.¹¹⁰

A positive encounter between the soldiers and Jews was unveiled in the largest and smallest of soldier newspapers, focusing mainly upon the Jewish provision of wares (eg. boots) for sale as well as the usefulness of Yiddish to soldiers. In the 23 November 1916 *Wacht im Westen*, a section entitled 'Briefe aus dem Osten' contained a long article in which the author described the various refugees that passed him as he marched east. After detailing the primitive White Russians as being both muscular and in possession of good teeth, the German settlers as blonde and 'sauber', Polish Jews were discussed in detail. The women were seen as modish, having come from the city. Many of these Jews spoke German, and these terribly 'fleißige' people were said to quickly move into any house previously occupied by German soldiers, and there set up a store or café. They functioned as excellent translators and were indispensable in that they could always get supplies. As a people they were deemed 'gefällig, freundlich und willig'. Where these industrious people gained their 'Waren' was, to this author, 'unfaßlich'. Importantly, as they were 'anpassungsfähig', they would quickly become accustomed to German occupation. The smaller trench journal *Die Sappe*, in the long story of that unit's sojourn in the East, again praised the ability of Jews to produce goods for soldiers. In the following sympathetic episode, the troops had just come across a 'Russian'-destroyed Galician village:

¹⁰⁶ Zeitung der 10. Armee, 11 November 1916.

¹⁰⁷ Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi, 4 April 1917.

¹⁰⁸ Both sketches in: Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi, 12 May 1917. 'Das polnische Dorf', in the 6 May 1916 edition of Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi, described a Polish house as sad and primitive, but a 'Judenhaus' as something much better.

¹⁰⁹ Zeitung der 10. Armee, 27 July 1916.

¹¹⁰ Zeitung der 10. Armee, 19 January 1918. The representation of women in the soldier newspapers is discussed in chapter 5 of NELSON, *German Soldier Newspapers* (cf. footnote 1).

Vor den Häusern standen massenhaft Juden mit Frauen und Kindern und hielten Zigaretten und Schokolade feil. Wir kauften gerne, denn uns dauerten all diese armen Teufel, wie sie so dastanden vor ihrem Heim, in ihre langen Kaftane gehüllt und uns so traurig anblickten. Manche davon haben sicherlich wieder ein kleines Grundkapital durch diesen Handel erworben und konnten bestimmt bald daran gehen, ihr zusammengeschossenes oder verbranntes Haus wieder aufzubauen.¹¹¹

As opposed to being portrayed negatively as 'Kriegsgewinnler', the author depicted their hard work as worthy and necessary to start life anew.

As late as August 1918, the positive article 'Das Jiddisch', appeared on the western front. After claiming that the language was 'verboten' in 'Neuyork', the author declared that many men in the newspaper's readership had 'sich gefreut' when they discovered these speakers 'mitten in Rußland'. Sure, declared the author, they occasionally got some word wrong, but it was not so bad when 'ein hübsches jüdisches Mädchen' called one 'Mann'. Ultimately, argued the author, Yiddish 'ist doch Deutsch!' He hoped that Germany's three years of daily dealing with *Ostjuden* had made them know that 'we' are ultimately a 'friedfertiges und verträgliches Völkchen'. He asked those who labeled Eastern Jews as inferior to remember that the *Ostjuden* had been living among the Slavs, and that the former were not at all as bad as the latter.¹¹² An article in the 16 August 1916 *Deutsche Kriegszeitung von Baranowitschi* claimed that German soldiers had not expected to find anyone who understood them in the East, and were therefore 'angenehm enttäuscht' to meet the *Ostjuden*. The author went on to argue that, were the occupied territories to remain in Germany, Yiddish would slowly disappear, as it had in Posen. The piece 'Deutsch im Jiddischen', in the 15 June 1917 *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, claimed that this language was 'urdeutsch' and had 'eine willkommene Verständigung zwischen Soldaten und Bevölkerung der eroberten östlichen Gebiete ermöglicht.' Finally, on the very eve of the 'Zusammenbruch', 'Schmuggelware aus dem "Jiddischen"' featured the author amusingly comparing German and Yiddish words, and declaring that 'diese Sprache ist im Grunde nichts anderes als Deutsch.'¹¹³

A large 'Pogromwelle' followed the retreating German Army as the local populations murdered Jews they believed had been treated too well under German occupation.¹¹⁴ The German soldier newspapers, however, had been making a practice of reporting antisemitism and atrocities committed against Jews by the enemy throughout the war. The East Prussian based *Kriegszeitung für Taugoggen* reported, on 12 September 1914, the 'Verhöhnung russischer Juden'. Two days later, the pro-Jewish article, 'Russland und die Juden' appeared in the same journal. Regarding the treatment of Jewish soldiers in the Russian Army, 'Russische Gefangene' described a 'ganz jungen, gut aus-

¹¹¹ Die Sappe, 1 January 1916.

¹¹² *Kriegszeitung der 4. Armee*, 15 August 1918.

¹¹³ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 6 and 10 November 1918.

¹¹⁴ ZECHLIN (cf. footnote 95), p. 283.

sehenden jüdischen Mann' who, after being captured by the Germans, rejoices: 'Wie soll ich nicht danken Gott, da er mich hat gnädig bewahrt? Bin ich doch erst zwei Tage bei die Soldaten und schon gefangen.'¹¹⁵ 'Antisemitische Erscheinungen', in the 12 July 1917 issue of *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, claimed that the new Russian military was not allowing Jewish soldiers to vote or become officers: 'Jüdische Unteroffiziere gehören auch im neuen Rußland zu den allergrößten Seltenheiten.'¹¹⁶ A later issue declared that the *Volkskommissar* in Russia was suspending all Jewish newspapers and arresting their staffs.¹¹⁷ In a joke, entitled 'Der weise Rabbi', the Czar complains that his land is too big to protect the Jews. The rabbi responds that soon his land would be much smaller.¹¹⁸ 'Der Segen' detailed the story of how Jewish towns in Galicia were robbed by retreating Cossacks, and that therefore 'die Deutschen wurden von den Juden mit Freuden begrüßt!'¹¹⁹ 'Judenverfolgungen in Turkestan' reported 300 killed in Kokand.¹²⁰ And finally, German military newspapers reported with horror the roundup, deportation and occasional murder of Jews in areas the Germans themselves would re-visit some twenty-five years thence. 'Die Judenverfolgungen in Russland', described 'heart-rending' scenes in Galicia¹²¹, and 'Pogrome in Bessarabien' reported:

Wie die Voss. Ztg. aus Bern erfährt, fanden vor zwei Wochen in vielen Städten Mittel- und Süd-Bessarabiens große Pogrome statt, die von der dortigen rumänischen Bevölkerung veranstaltet wurden. Größere Banden, die vielfach Soldatenuniformen angelegt hatten, haben am hellen Tage die Judenviertel überfallen und völlig ausgeplündert. An einigen Stellen wurden Juden getötet, in den meisten Fällen wurden sie schwer mißhandelt.¹²²

¹¹⁵ Liller Kriegszeitung, 22 September 1915.

¹¹⁶ The state of Jewish soldiers in other Allied armies was referenced, as in 'Die Jüdischen Soldaten in der amerikanischen Armee', which claimed that Jews in America were protesting that they were shut out of the American officer corps. *Kriegszeitung Heeresgruppe Scholtz*, 5 June 1918. 'Ein jüdisches Bataillon an der Palästinafront', in the Middle East based soldier newspaper *Armeeabteilung Jildirim*, 11 July 1918, argued that such a formation had been put together in England, and that the men possessed low morale as the Polish and Russian members did not want to fight the Germans who were liberating their brethren in Eastern Europe. And the only reference to appear in the German soldier newspapers with regard to the German-Jewish soldiers fighting in the German Army was the occasional announcement of an upcoming 'Jüdischer Militärgottesdienst', such as that in early 1916 where *Armeerabbiner* Dr. Levy announced that for the Jewish 'Heeresangehörige' he would be holding a special service to commemorate the Kaiser's birthday. *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 18 January 1916. Other examples appear throughout the *Zeitung der 10. Armee*.

¹¹⁷ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 8 March 1918.

¹¹⁸ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 5 May 1916.

¹¹⁹ *Feldzeitung der Bugarmee*, 26 March 1916.

¹²⁰ *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 7 April 1918.

¹²¹ *Kriegszeitung der 4. Armee*, 14 June 1915.

¹²² *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 30 January 1918.

Germans were quick to point to Russian antisemitism, contrasting it to their own seemingly healthy relations with the Jews. This role, that of the upstanding liberator of 'pseudo-Germans', here the Eastern Jews, from the oppressive Russians, was relished by some members of an aggressive German military occupation in the East. The rescue of the Jews further fulfilled the myth of the justified occupation of foreign land and the proper defense of Germany and 'culture'. It was due both to political expediency, as well as cultural factors, such as the German roots in Yiddish, and the perceived hard-work ethos of the Eastern Jews, that enabled these people to be represented in the German soldier newspapers as worthy of German liberation and protection.

Conclusion

The cultural history of German occupation is more closely associated with the Second World War than the first. Concerning Western Europe this is perhaps understandable as far less of France was occupied by the Germans in the first war than in the second. The relative neglect of the eastern front in the First World War is, however, less easy to justify. Two to three million German soldiers and administrators marched east, conquering and occupying the very same land that would be taken a generation later in one of the most brutal (and studied) military campaigns in history. Surely the socio-cultural reaction of this first mixing of German overlords among the Poles, Russians, Lithuanians and Jews of the East is of the utmost importance in our understanding of what followed, both in the attitudes of the millions of men who returned from this front, carrying images into the interwar years, as well as in how the lessons of this first great occupation affected those who planned and executed the second.

Western European ideas of cultural chauvinism and progress were evident in the ways German soldiers viewed local populations. In the West it was impossible to successfully characterise the French as some sort of 'Untermensch', the majority of German officers having been exposed to this language and civilisation during their education. Although impoverished by war and occupation, the French would not have looked too foreign to German soldiers. The picture in the East was very different. For the first time, millions of 'ordinary Germans' were encountering 'dirty', 'primitive', 'uncultured', extremely poor peoples. The discourse in the soldier newspapers was nothing less than 'colonial' in tone, and, indeed, with the end of *Weltpolitik*, the East bloomed as Germany's last chance for a colonial empire. All the scientific trappings of ethnography and anthropology were brought to bear in article after article which 'defined' these natives. Racial biology did not have a strong presence in the soldier newspapers, but a Social-Darwinian concept of cultures was evident, both in Germany's 'right' to lord over the Slavs of the East, and in the declaration of 'youthful', vigorous Germany's deserved place among the old, 'declining' Great Powers.

Perhaps the most fascinating chapter of the story of the German occupation of the East, 1914-1918, was the hope that Eastern Jews might aid the Germans against the Russians. This, in addition to the Jews possessing a culture and language not dissimilar to Germany's, made for a surprisingly positive assessment of these people in the German soldier newspapers. Whatever antisemitism did exist among the élite of the German Army it was clearly suppressed in light of the need for a productive relationship with the *Ostjuden*, as well as the desire to maintain the *Burgfrieden* among all Germans, including the Jewish-Germans fighting at the front, and those supporting the war effort at home.

Ultimately, the evidence of tension in the soldier newspapers' depiction of the French, set alongside the mostly sympathetic portrayal of the French in soldiers' letters, indicates the failure of more overtly chauvinistic propaganda on the western front. Thus, the relative lack of ambiguity in the depiction of Slavs in the soldier newspapers, reinforced by the often patronising description of Poles and Russians in soldiers' letters, lends support to the thesis that many German soldiers in the First World War began, or continued, to view the East with a colonial gaze. The cumulative effect of daily encounters with these alien peoples, alongside the discursive frameworks provided by the ubiquitous soldier newspapers, may have created powerful memories and prejudices in the minds of many of those who participated in the war in the East, tasted the victory that was so gloriously gained in 1918, and despaired when all that had been won vanished at the armistice. But whatever their views at the end of the war, soldiers who read soldier newspapers encountered a complex and mixed discourse concerning occupation in the East. This was a language which both justified the German Army's presence and distinguished on cultural grounds between and among occupied peoples.

Zusammenfassung

„Unsere Frage ist der Osten“: Schilderungen der besetzten Gebiete Osteuropas in deutschen Soldatenzeitungen 1914-1918

Im Jahre 1915, als Deutschland seine Kolonien verlor und unter britischer Seeblockade stand, gewann die deutsche Armee ein riesiges „Kolonialgebiet“ im Osten Europas. Mit der erstmaligen Errichtung eines wirklichen deutschen „Kolonialreichs“ war der Übergang von einer Welt- zu einer Osteuropapolitik verbunden. Die zwei bis drei Millionen deutschen Soldaten und Beamten, die während des Krieges in diesen Gebieten stationiert waren, nahmen gegenüber der einheimischen polnischen, litauischen und weißrussischen Bevölkerung eine Haltung ein, die man als kolonialistisch bezeichnen könnte. Dies mag den ohnehin schon chauvinistischen Blick der Deutschen auf die Völker in Osteuropa verstärkt haben.

Um diese Perspektive besser zu verstehen, können deutsche Soldatenzeitungen, von Armeemangehörigen sowohl gelesen als auch verfaßt, herangezogen werden. Diese zumeist kostenpflichtigen Feldzeitungen waren bei den Truppen sehr populär, und die überwiegende Mehrheit der deutschen Soldaten im Ersten Weltkrieg hat sie gelesen oder zumindest gekannt. Daher sind, wenngleich die Zeitungen sowohl offizieller als auch der Selbstzensur unterlagen, die dort erschienenen Mitteilungen als ein wichtiger Bestandteil des soldatischen Diskurses im Ersten Weltkrieg anzusehen.

Im Hinblick auf die angesprochene Perspektive ergibt sich folgendes Bild: In den Soldatenzeitungen wurde eine „Rangordnung“ der Bewohner Osteuropas thematisiert. Verbündete Deutschlands, wie die Bulgaren, oder mögliche künftige Bündnispartner gegen die Russen, wie Litauer und Ostjuden, wurden oft positiv dargestellt und wesentlich besser behandelt als die als politisch unzuverlässig geltenden Polen oder der Hauptfeind, die Russen. Während jedoch die Soldatenzeitungen an der Westfront durch eine mehrdeutige Haltung gegenüber den Franzosen und deren Kultur gekennzeichnet waren, herrschte in den Ostzeitungen dennoch zugleich Übereinstimmung, daß fast alle Slawen gewissermaßen „kulturlos“ seien und unter deutscher Hegemonie verbleiben sollten.