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“Juden unter sich”. The Propaganda Companies and the Jewish Ghettos in Occupied Poland

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“JUDEN UNTER SICH”

The Propaganda Companies and the Jewish Ghettos in Occupied Poland

One of the most influential anti-Semitic propaganda actions produced in the “Third Reich” in the years 1939-1941 was based on images and reports from various ghettos in occupied Poland. Large portion of the raw material required for the anti-Semitic propaganda was collected and delivered by the Propagandakompanien (PK) of the Wehrmacht.[1] In order to analyze and understand the significance of this contribution, it is necessary to look not only at the propaganda materials, but also at the historical contexts in which they were produced. This includes organizational aspects, local conditions, general propaganda strategies and the given general and local war situation.

This article will examine the contribution of the Wehrmacht to the anti-Semitic propaganda of the “Third Reich” during three periods: The invasion of Poland, the establishment of a new order in the occupied Polish territories and the months preceding “Operation Barbarossa” in 1941. It will focus on the way PK materials were used mainly in the visual media in order to support the propaganda strategies and their subsequent goals set by the Nazi leadership.

General remarks regarding the propaganda organization of the “Third Reich”

When dealing with the wartime propaganda of the “Third Reich”, it is important to examine its organization and working methods. Contrary to common belief, Joseph Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry (RMVP – Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda) was not the only German agency that produced and disseminated propaganda during WWII. The military, the Nazi Party, Organization Todt, local press offices in the occupied countries and the SS are some of the organizations of the “Third Reich” that produced public media and propaganda. The RMVP surely coordinated and orchestrated the entire propaganda, including the anti-Semitic propaganda, but it was a collective effort of multiple organizations and agencies. Goebbels and his top advisers formulated the strategies and tactics of the German propaganda and set priorities.

This orchestration was carried out dynamically and almost on daily basis according to different factors: important events, changes in general policies, monitoring public opinion and of course, national-socialist ideology. Key decisions and directives were to the representatives of the media and the propaganda community through daily briefings. Since Goebbels disliked written orders and memos, most briefings and directives concerning the daily running of the propaganda were usually given orally.[2] Specific control of the press was exercised by the Reich's Press Office (Reichspressekammer) – normally personally by the influential Reichspressechef Otto Dietrich. He issued specific and general directives to the press during his daily press conferences and in regular written briefings which his office disseminated to chief editors.[3]

Wehrmacht and Propaganda

The Wehrmacht's propaganda organization was one of the most important propaganda organizations of the “Third Reich”. Acknowledging the importance of psychological

warfare in modern wars, the RMVP and the Wehrmacht cooperated effectively from the mid-1930s in an effort to prepare the country for the next war. They were looking for ways to improve Germany's ability to withstand psychological warfare in order to prevent a collapse of the home front, as was believed by them happened in the last phases of World War I. They were also looking for better ways to wage psychological warfare against the enemy.

In 1938, the Wehrmacht established five Propaganda Companies (PK), whose main task was to produce different media reports from military operational areas and to deliver them to the RMVP for dissemination to the media. Their secondary tasks were to conduct psychological warfare against enemy troops and the enemy's population in the operational areas and to organize educational and free-time activities for German soldiers (Truppenbetreuung).[4] Following the first operational deployment of the PKs during the German takeover of the Sudetenland, the RMVP and the Wehrmacht decided to establish within the Wehrmacht's high command (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht) a special department in order to coordinate and direct the operations of the military propaganda.

One of its most important tasks was to liaise between the RMVP and the propaganda units. The new department, known as Abteilung für Wehrmachtpropaganda (WPr.), was activated in April 1939. It expanded the military propaganda organization and its training, and by the beginning of World War II (WWII) eight army, two air force and one naval PKs were available for operations. Eight of these units participated in the invasion of Poland.[5] Since PK reporters were the only reporters allowed officially to work in operational areas, they became the main source of material for the "Third Reich's" war propaganda. Some PKs were stationed in the occupied countries and in Germany. Thus they covered events and topics related to the occupied countries and the German home front.

Photographers and cameramen were among the most important PK specialists. Like other PK specialists, most of the photographers and cameramen were located by the RMVP and recruited from the reservist manpower pool according to their civilian training and according to their political reliability.[6] As a result of this recruiting method some prominent media professionals found their way to the propaganda troops. They received state-of-the-art equipment, which included compact cameras, stereoscopic cameras, telescopic lenses and color films. While the photos were developed by the technical squad of each PK, exposed movie films were sent to Berlin and were developed there. (Fig. 1)



Fig. 1: A stereoscopic photo by PK photographer Hugo Jäger, depicting PK reporters at work in a forest near Compiègne, 21 June 1940, Source: Yad Vashem Archives

Among the most important media using PK visual material was the highly popular illustrated press, which published numerous PK photos during WWII. Such reports normally included several dramatic photos, accompanied by a short text and photo titles. Another important visual propaganda tool produced in the "Third Reich" during WWII was the "Deutsche Wochenschau" newsreel. The unified wartime weekly newsreel made an extensive use of PK footage. It was produced under the strict RMVP supervision, and its final editing was normally carried out by Goebbels himself.[7] Because of their importance, in some cases Hitler gave them the final approval.[8] PK materials were also used extensively in books, movies and other media. Because of its dramatic character and high relevance for the wartime propaganda, the PK material was extremely useful. The contribution of the PK

reporters to the war effort was openly praised by Goebbels, and the acronym "PK" became well-known in wartime Germany.[9]

Early PK reporting in Poland

The invasion of Poland served largely as a test for the young propaganda branch of the Wehrmacht. This first trial by fire for the PKs, their men and their equipment, also determined to a large extent images of Jews as presented in Germany's wartime anti-Semitic propaganda. Although the first ghettos were not established in occupied Poland until late 1939, the PKs reported about Polish Jews while the war was still raging. In many respects, these early reports helped to establish some of the key features of the national-socialist propaganda about the ghettos and their occupants. It should be noted that while the ghettos of WWII are being currently defined as a German measure aimed at isolating the Jews, contemporarily, the German propaganda used the term differently. In the time before their establishment, the German propaganda reflected the prevailing prewar notion by referring to every quarter or settlement with a dominant Jewish population as a "ghetto".[10]

Anti-Semitic propaganda appeared almost right from the beginning of the invasion to Poland in the war propaganda of the "Third Reich". It took place within two main contexts:

1) Anti-Semitism was used to strengthen the general anti-Polish propaganda.[11] This propaganda sought to legitimize the aggression against Poland, to de-legitimize the Polish state's right to exist and to convey a negative image of the Polish nation.[12] One of the main propaganda themes Nazi propagandists created at that time in order to support this argument was the notion of "Polish as equivalent to sub-humanity. Poles, Jews and Gypsies stand on the same inferior human level [...]".[13]

The RMVP elaborated this point further and defined the goals of this argument: "We must strive to ensure that the current aversion against everything Polish will remain for years to come. This aversion must turn from latency to consciousness. Poland is sub-humanity. Poles, Jews, Gypsies should be mentioned in the same breath. There are no social and other kinds of relations with Poles. A Pole is something impure, and no one wants to deal with him."[14]

2) Early in the German-Polish political conflict in 1939 the German propaganda sought to blame Great Britain and France for pushing Poland towards confrontation with Germany.[15] Later, Hitler and the Nazi leadership argued that the Jews in the Western leaderships had brought about the diplomatic calamity that resulted in war. In many ways, this propaganda also served to replace anti-Jewish-Bolshevik slogans, which became politically inappropriate following the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939. It continued after the German invasion to Poland.[16]

It is difficult to say how the propaganda units providing most of the early reports about Polish Jews were prepared for their mission. It appears that some of them, as well as WPr., received some background information about the Jews in Poland during the campaign. In their files there is at least one general memo written by the SS Einsatzgruppen deployed to Poland, which was based on Polish prewar studies about Poland's Jewry.[17] It seems though that due to a missing clear and central initial direction, the practice of reporting about the Jews in the media emerged on one hand as a natural continuation of prewar anti-Semitic propaganda practices, and on the other hand, it evolved within the broad main propaganda themes that accompanied the campaign.

The RMVP grasped only gradually the propagandistic opportunities offered by the sudden direct access to Poland's large Jewish population. These so-called Eastern Jews (Ostjuden) and their living environment embodied for many Germans the stereotypical images of the Jews as portrayed in the prewar anti-Semitic propaganda.[18] The RMVP tried to exploit the new situation in order to strengthen the general anti-Jewish propaganda. As mentioned before, the Polish campaign was a formative period for Germany's wartime propaganda. Procedures, methods and working relations in the propaganda community needed to be worked out and refined while learning the trade of modern wartime media work.

The learning curve was particularly steep when it came to the crucial cooperation between the RMVP and WPr. As a result, the RMVP sent through WPr. orders and directives to the PKs operating with the field armies (Armeeoberkommandos) almost on a daily basis. PK commanders briefed their reporters according to these directives and sent the collected material to WPr. in Berlin. The relevant media sections in WPr. assessed the material, conducted military censorship and delivered the censored

material to the RMVP, where it was disseminated to the media as required. Not everything that the PKs delivered was published. A large amount of press reports, photos, radio recordings and film rolls went to the archives – sometimes directly. On 2 October the RMVP sent to all the PKs operating in Poland the following directive: “More than before, we need from Warsaw and all the occupied territories, film footage of Jewish types as well as portraits and images of Jews at work. This material is to be used to reinforce our anti-Semitic propaganda at home and abroad.”^[19]

These general topics, as well as specific orders sent to specific PKs to collect material about Polish Jews,^[20] set the tone for contemporary and later propaganda reporting about the Jews in occupied Poland. Noticeably, even before the PKs reacted to the RMVP's instructions, they sent reports about the Jews on their own initiative. PK footage was used in an anti-Semitic newsreel report depicting the beginning of the German occupation.

Some reports published at this time sought to establish the connection between the Jews and the murder of Ethnic Germans (“Volksdeutsche”) in Poland – one argument the Germans used in order to justify their attack on Poland and distract public opinion from their own atrocities.^[21] The UFA newsreel edition released on 14 September included a reportage about the cleansing of Polish settlements and the arrest of people who were allegedly involved in crimes against Ethnic Germans. The commentary describing these scenes pointed at one specific hostile group: “Polish Jews, who in many cases bear the blame for inciting and instigating the murder of Germans. The profiteers and criminals, who after 1918 overwhelmed defenseless Germany..., were recruited from these circles. Today the brothers and sons of these Eastern Jews reside in England and France and agitate for a war of extermination against the German people.”^[22] (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2: An illustrated article published in the “Illustrierter Beobachter” on 28 September 1939, Photographs by Schwahn, Hinz, Platzek [PK-photographers]; Haeckel

Jews were also presented in contemporary reports as taking active part in unlawful partisan warfare against the invading German forces. Here, again, the German propaganda was quick in picking up the traditional German fear of irregulars (sometimes referred to contemporarily as *Franc-tireurs* – an old expression from the Franco-Prussian war of 1870/71) and turn it into a major myth in order to justify its brutal measures in the newly occupied areas.[23] A photo reportage prepared by reporters of the Luftwaffe’s KBK 4 (Kriegsberichterkompanie 4 – the term used by the Luftwaffe instead of PK) was published on 28 September 1939 in the “Illustrierter Beobachter” and depicted Jews being arrested and being transported away. It was claimed that “they are being suspected for shooting at German soldiers”. [24]

This report is extraordinary in several ways. First, it shows the importance of PK reporting for the anti-Semitic propaganda during the early phase of WWII, therefore underlining the contribution of the Wehrmacht to this propaganda. Secondly, the editors of the “Illustrierter Beobachter” took advantage of a current report in order to insert several older anti-Jewish messages. Therefore the same page included a photo of an elderly Jew from 1915 printed next to a similar image from 1939, as a proof that the Eastern Jews had allegedly not changed outwardly. Thirdly, perhaps the most dramatic photo of the series depicted Jews being transported away on a truck under SD supervision, with the description “German troops were shot at from their dwellings. They are being transported to a detention camp.”

The photo is part of a series of photos delivered by photographers of KBK 4 from the “area of Ustronie/Opatow”, deposited today in the German federal archives.[25] There are clear indications that these photos were taken in Wieruszów.[26] Interestingly, this specific photo appears to have been copied from the newspaper and disseminated by the western media during the war as a visual proof for the German persecution of the Jews in occupied Europe. After the war it became an iconic Holocaust photo that

appeared in several publications with different descriptions.[27] Therefore, this PK photo demonstrates not only the way propaganda images were created and used, but also their postwar dissemination and impact on the collective memory.

The UFA newsreel released on 4 October presented in its 12th topic images of Jews taken in unspecified places in Poland. The commentary explained: "Back to Poland: The most difficult problem facing our civilian administration in the occupied areas is the Jewish question ... This eastern Jewish sub-humanity has long provided West Europe with criminal riffraff. The democracies were supplied from here with pickpockets, pimps, drug dealers, white slavers, international banking profiteers and agitating journalists. These are the same Jews, whose brothers, sons and fathers advocate loudly in London and Paris for humanity and civilization." [28]

This and other visual propaganda sought to confirm the visual stereotypical image of the Jew, as established by the prewar propaganda based on the common image of the Jews. In addition, these anti-Semitic images were adjusted to fit current general propaganda slogans and arguments.

At the end of the campaign in Poland, the cooperation between the RMVP and WPr. reached its climax when a special filming team of the RMVP, headed by the Reich's Film Inspector Fritz Hippler and by the head of the anti-Jewish department Eberhard Taubert, travelled to Warsaw and Lodz. Supported by a couple of PKs, they filmed on location scenes for an anti-Semitic propaganda film project, which later became the notorious documentary "Der ewige Jude". [29] The presence of these two top propagandists underlines the importance of the anti-Jewish campaign and the movie. The film also used footage shot by PK cameramen in 1939 and used after editing in several newsreels. Therefore PK films and other footage shot in Poland soon after its occupation were used in a film that was supposed to form the "flagship" of the German anti-Semitic propaganda in 1940. [30]

The stereotypical image of the Eastern Jew in Poland was crucial for the old-fashioned anti-Semitic arguments in this film. Scholars pointed out that although a powerful anti-Semitic documentary was discussed before the outbreak of WWII, its production was delayed because it was difficult to find in Germany stereotypical Jews. In 1937, soon after the opening of the exhibition "Der ewige Jude" (Eternal Jew) in Munich, the RMVP sought to obtain Polish permission to shoot the required sequences in Poland, but the Polish authorities refused. [31] It is clear thus that the invasion of Poland and its occupation offered the Germans an opportunity to strengthen and refine their anti-Semitic propaganda, and not only within the context of the anti-Polish propaganda.

Establishing a new order in occupied Poland

The anti-Polish propaganda that accompanied the invasion to the country has subsided substantially after its defeat. When the Germans and the Soviets divided the country, and when the Germans established their rule in their share, there was no need to mention Poland and the Poles anymore. The Germans referred to the population of occupied Poland simply as "not German" (nicht-deutsche), or "foreign" (fremdvölkisch). [32] Furthermore, at least initially the RMVP sought to reduce the media reporting about the newly established General Government in order to prevent uncomfortable details about the situation there from leaking into Germany and to the outside world. The RMVP feared that information about the situation of the large Jewish population and about the large number of refugees and deportees would be used in the "hostile atrocity propaganda" of the Allies. Guidelines in this spirit were given to representatives of the press on 20 and 24 October. [33]

However, from late autumn 1939 German propaganda about occupied Poland sought to represent the restoration of law and order under German rule. This propaganda sought not only to present an anti-thesis against the allegedly corrupt and inefficient former Polish regime, but also to prove that Poland had become a safer place for the ethnic German minorities living there. In the same context, another central positive propagandistic theme that emerged at that time was the Germanization of the annexed western regions of Poland through the resettlement of ethnic Germans – the so-called "Heim ins Reich" initiative, which was proclaimed in September 1939. [34]

It should be considered when looking at the German propaganda policy that from the early period of the German occupation, negative reports about it started to appear in the foreign press. These reports, which originated mainly from the Polish government in exile and its underground sources, provided increasingly harrowing details about the German terror in occupied Poland. The German Foreign Office regularly monitored the hostile international media reporting about the German occupation in Poland and

informed the propaganda community about them.[35] Positive media reports from occupied Poland, and especially from the General Government consequently formed part of the Reich government's efforts to counter these negative reports and improve Germany's image, especially abroad.[36]

The gradual concentration of Polish Jews in ghettos made them more reachable and easier to find for German reporters and propagandists operating in occupied Poland. The easily identifiable communities were highly suitable for propagandistic exploitation because they offered images that supported prevailing Nazi depiction of Jewish cliques, hordes, riffraff etc.

Negative reports about the ghettos and about their residents sought to present on one hand a reverse image of positive Germanization and on the other hand showed how the Jews were forced to contribute to the reconstruction effort in occupied Poland and to the restoration of law and order. It should be considered that these reports stopped short of describing the radical anti-Jewish measures as such. The ghettos were mentioned, but it was pretended that they were always there. The massive and brutal measures involved in their creation and running were hardly mentioned. Therefore, most of the representation of Polish Jews in the media was conveyed in the form of travel reports and first hand impressions.[37]

Following the division of Poland and the establishment of civilian administration, most of the Wehrmacht's PKs moved to other places, particularly to the West. Civilian reporters were now allowed to move and work relatively free in what used to be military operational areas. However, PK reporters continued to provide from time to time reporting materials about the Jews in occupied Poland. In many cases these reports were compiled by members of the SS' PK. It was established in January 1940 as part of the Waffen-SS and operated under the loose professional supervision of the WPr. Most of its reporters also worked for the SS' popular newspaper "Das Schwarze Korps". It was a convenient arrangement because Günther D'Alquen, chief editor of the "Das Schwarze Korps", was also the commanding officer of the new SS-PK. [38]

In September 1940, SS-PK photographers Schilf and Wisniewski visited the Lodz Ghetto with a filming team and took photos of individual Jews and of different ghetto outdoor scenes. It appears that Himmler personally initiated this visit in order to document the ghettos.[39] Apparently the same Wisniewski visited around the same period the ghetto of Lublin, because in November 1940 some of his photos from Lublin illustrated an anti-Semitic article published in "Das Schwarze Korps" under the title "Jew in his own juice".[40]

However, the most extravagant material gathered at that time were photographs taken by Hugo Jäger, who was attached temporarily to PK621. Jäger was a well-known press photographer, who worked before the war with Hitler's private photographer Heinrich Hoffmann. Due to his prominent status, he was employed during the war as a special PK reporter and received some unique photographic equipment. In September 1940 he worked in Warsaw and Kutno with two special cameras. One was loaded with a color film, and the other was a specially constructed stereoscopic camera. The purpose of the color photos he shot in the two ghettos is unknown. Probably they were intended for use in the color propaganda weekly magazine "Signal", but they were never published. It appears though that the 50 stereoscopic photos taken by Jäger were intended for an unpublished photo book published by the Raumbild-Verlag Otto Schönstein, a publisher specializing in stereoscopic photo publications – many of them of propagandistic nature.[41]

While the Jews disappeared at that time from the new reels, press articles about the ghettos were published from time to time. An allegedly clear reference to the "criminal nature" of the Jews and its continuation in the ghettos came in a "Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung" reportage published towards the end of 1940. It was the only time that a report about Polish Jews appeared on the front page of a German newspaper. The title page inscription was "Stadt unter der Stadt" [City under the City], but the story itself was entitled "Im Ghetto von Lublin ... und ... 25m unter dem Ghetto" [In the Ghetto of Lublin ... and ... 25m under the Ghetto]. Using photos and text provided by PK photographer Hilmar Pabel, the report apparently depicted on its first page life in the ghetto. (Fig. 3)



Fig. 3: Title page of the article “Im Ghetto von Lublin ... und ... 25m unter dem Ghetto”, published in the “Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung” on 5 December 1940

On the next two pages it depicted a German police raid into a cellar complex in the ghetto, where the policemen discovered hidden wares and foodstuff.[42] It is difficult to say what was the background for this report and why it was published as a front-page story. Pabel worked before the war for the “Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung”, and from 1940 he served as a PK reporter. However, his name in the credit for the article does not include the customary “PK” title. Therefore, it is possible that he may have contributed the report informally or while on a work leave – a relatively common practice among the propaganda troops.[43] After WWII Pabel renewed his career and was also involved in humanitarian work. It was not until 1989 that his name was connected with the report in the “Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung” from 1940.

Pabel provided an unconvincing explanation for his association with this problematic report: “A man with a sort of tin tag stood there. How they were called? Military Police, I believe. And he said ‘You are now under my command. We are raiding the ghetto!’ I didn’t know that there was a ghetto there. And then they told me ‘Give us the film!’ And after five, six weeks or so a report was published in the ‘Berliner Illustrierten’ (sic) under my name.”[44]

The description of a photo on the second page of the article though told another story: “I was sitting at the (police) station for hours”, tells our reporter about these pictures, ‘and waited for an interesting case’. The interrogation of a Jew, who was questioned for some harmless matter, was almost at its end. Then he betrayed himself with something he said. A special police squad thus receives an assignment.”[45] Since all the policemen that appeared in the report were members of the Schutzpolizei and not of the military police, this explanation appears to be more reliable.[46]

A different propagandistic argument accompanied the reports about the ghettos in this period. The so called “Jews learn how to work” propaganda continued another trend started while the battle of Poland was still raging. The propaganda was intended to convey that the allegedly lazy Jews under German rule contributed to the

reconstruction of occupied Poland.[47] This argument appeared for the first time in an article of the "Völkischer Beobachter" already on September 17, 1939. What started in a radical Nazi newspaper soon became a central leitmotiv of the German anti-Semitic propaganda.[48] The new reels followed closely behind the "Völkischer Beobachter". The UFA "Tonwoche" released on September 20, 1939 sought on one hand to counter in a sarcastic way some negative foreign reporting and on the other hand to show how useful the Jews under German rule finally were. The raw film material was obviously shot by a PK cameraman.

Scenes showing stereotypical Eastern Jews in its 13th topic (following a report about returning Ethnic Germans) were described with the following: "The Jews are in best spirits in the ghettos of the occupied cities. These pictures strongly refute the Jewish atrocity propaganda in hostile countries. Insubordinate elements are being concentrated in camps. For the first time in their life they are being forced to work." [49]

As the historian Harriet Scharnberg inferred, this propaganda campaign seems to have come out of nowhere, although there are indications that basic beliefs in this spirit existed in the anti-Semitism of the 1930s. Goebbels' directive to the PKs in early October to obtain footage of Jews at work can hardly be viewed as an operative order for a full-fledged campaign. Besides, the press and the new reels included messages in this spirit before the directive was issued. It appears thus that the press and new reel editors chose this topic from a pool of propaganda slogans offered with the images they received. Some of these slogans were based on old anti-Semitic stereotypes, such as Jewish dislike of hard labor. This topic suited perfectly not only with the contemporary images of the Jews, but also with the efforts of the Nazi regime to present positively the merits of "German work" as part of the "Volksgemeinschaft" (People's Community). [50] Thus, while there was little PK involvement in the general anti-Semitic propaganda of 1940, their work in 1939 helped to create the main propaganda themes of 1940, particularly the "Jews learn how to work" propaganda. Their photos and films were especially effective in this respect. While the other anti-Semitic arguments subsided to some degree after the end of the Polish campaign, "Jews learn how to work" stayed a central topic. [51]

Prelude to "Barbarossa"

After the cancellation of the invasion to England in autumn 1940, large portions of the Wehrmacht were transferred to the East in preparation for "Operation Barbarossa". Among these forces were numerous PKs. Thus, during early 1941, at least three PKs stationed with the Eastern Army sent a large amount of press reports, photos, films and radio reports about Jewish ghettos in the General Government. The following data has been gathered from the PK activity report for February 1941:

4/2/1941 – a PK666 cameraman shot one film in Lublin's Jewish district. A PK689 radio reporter recorded one report in the Lodz Ghetto.

12/2/1941 – a PK689 photographer went to the Lodz Ghetto and took seven photographs.

12-13/2/1941 – two PK689 cameramen shot a roll of film in the Lodz Ghetto.

17-19/2/1941 – a PK689 press reporter visited the Lodz Ghetto and wrote a report about it.

17-28/2/1941 – another PK689 cameraman returned to the ghetto and shot two rolls of film. [52]

In April 1941, a photographer and a press painter from PK689 worked in the Warsaw Ghetto. In May, the same PK sent a cameraman and a press painter to the ghettos of Łódź (sic) and Lodz. [53]

Just before the beginning of operation "Barbarossa", a press reporter and a photographer from PK689 visited again the Warsaw Ghetto. [54] Reporters from the Luftwaffe KBK6 also appeared there in early June, and compiled numerous press reports about the ghetto. The unit was stationed near Warsaw at that time as part of the latest secret troop movement of the Luftwaffe to the East in preparation for the attack on the Soviet Union. The resulting press reports carried titles like 'Hinter dem Schlagbaum am Ghetto' [Behind the barrier at the entrance to the ghetto], 'Warschau zwischen Gestern und Morgen' [Warsaw between yesterday and tomorrow], and 'Warum Ghettos?' [Why ghettos?]. One report in English intended for foreign propaganda, was entitled 'Ahasver over England'. At least 20 photos shot by Sergeant Silbermann were added to the texts. [55] These reports not only included detailed descriptions of the ghetto, but also attempted to convince the viewers that the fate of



Fig. 4: "Juden hinter Mauern", published in "Illustrierter Beobachter", 12 June 1941, with photos taken by PK photographer Koch in the Cracow ghetto

It is tempting to view this burst of activity as part of the preparation for the "Final Solution". However, no explicit order by the RMVP or WPr. in this spirit was found. Furthermore, most of the material gathered at the ghettos was not published.[56] Looking at the historical context, it appears that the main reason for this sudden reporting activity was simply the inactivity of those PKs stationed in the East. While the PKs stationed in the West had many military events to report about at that period, those in the East had nothing to do. WPr. gave them a general directive to be as productive as they could in the harsh winter of 1940/1 and practically left them to their own devices.[57] The secrecy surrounding the massive deployment of the Wehrmacht in occupied Poland certainly restricted the topics for reporting. Since the PKs were expected to report about anything of interest happening in their areas of operation, the Jewish ghettos in Poland were a natural choice for subject matter.[58]

After the invasion of the Soviet Union, some of the material was taken out of the archives and was used propagandistically in the context of the renewed anti-Soviet propaganda. The most important publication using photos from the period before June 1941 was a four-page report published on 24 July 1941 in the "Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung" under the title "Jews among themselves" (Juden unter sich). (Fig. 5)



Fig. 5: "Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung", 24 July 1941: "Juden unter sich" ("Jews among themselves")

Seventeen of the 18 photos used in the article were credited to PK689 photographers Ludwig Knobloch and Albert Cusian, who shot dozens of photos in Warsaw in spring 1941. The article tried to depict the "degenerate life" of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, highlighting grave social injustice among them. The accompanying text also included direct references to different atrocities the Poles and the Soviets committed in Eastern Europe, suggesting that the Jews were behind all of them.^[59] This article formed an integral part of the anti-"Jewish-Bolshevik" propaganda barrage accompanying "Operation Barbarossa" and pointing at the Jewish character of the "archenemy" in the East. Therefore, the Jews were depicted again in the Nazi propaganda in the context of a major military and political campaign.^[60]

This time, however, the ensuing campaign resulted in a major escalation: the "Final Solution", which towards the end of 1941 turned into a comprehensive murder scheme of the entire European Jewry. In the following months the Jews largely disappeared from the daily war correspondence. As the historian Peter Longerich noted: "Articles about the situation in the ghettos or about police activities against the Jews in the occupied areas, which appeared every now and then in the press in previous years, now disappeared."^[61]

There were several reasons for this decline: The PK reporters were busy on the fronts, there were more interesting military subjects to report about and the worsening war situation diverted German media and propaganda attention away from the Jewish issue. Last but not least, when the "Final Solution" unfolded parallel to "Operation Barbarossa", the German propaganda tended to refer to the "Jewish menace" in a more abstract way.

Strangely enough, just when the ghettos disappeared from the German media in 1942, when the "Final Solution" started to unfold in its fullest murderous form, a German filming crew appeared in the Warsaw Ghetto. In May 1942, its members filmed raw footage for a propaganda film about the ghetto that never materialized. Some PK

Conclusion

The Wehrmacht propaganda was an important propaganda organization of the “Third Reich”. Its contribution to the wartime propaganda was enormous. In the early postwar period, the propaganda troops suffered from a poor public image because of their close association with the propaganda apparatus of the Nazi state. After the war, this bad image was addressed by the veterans’ organization of the propaganda troops, the “Wildente”. It was established in 1951 in Hamburg by former PK press reporter Günther Heysing. One of their main goals was “to set the record straight” and present the propaganda troops, and indeed the whole Wehrmacht, as disconnected from the Nazi regime and its crimes.[63] This portrayal of the propaganda troops as apolitical and “decent” was further enhanced by a book written by their veterans, among them their commanding general and other former WPr. officers.[64]

The PK media reporting about the ghettos and Jewish communities in occupied Poland suggest that this apologetic approach to their own history covered a different reality. Reporting about the ghettos and their population was only one aspect of the role played by the propaganda troops in the Nazi state. Thus, the propaganda troops and their ghetto reporting can be placed within the broader context of the modern discourse concerning the Wehrmacht’s war crimes and its Nazification.

When discussing the anti-Semitic propaganda produced by the Wehrmacht, it is important to place it in a broader context. Some of the media reporting used in this research was published quite prominently. The newsreel images of Polish Jews were placed either close to the beginning or close to the end, which usually included the highlights of the newsreel. However, caution is required when trying to assess the significance and impact of this propaganda. The early reports about Polish Jews were published next to more dramatic war news. It is reasonable to assume that the viewers and readers were more interested in these news features. Furthermore, reports depicting Polish Jews were relatively sparse, and they disappeared completely from the newsreels after October 4, 1939. From early 1940 onwards the press also reduced significantly its reporting about the Polish Jews.

As photography historian Klaus Hesse pointed out, the “Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung” published on 5 December 1939 a staged report about an SD raid in the Warsaw Ghetto; then one year elapsed until its next report, depicting Polish Jews – “Stadt unter der Stadt” – was published on 5 December 1940. Although the “Völkischer Beobachter” published at that time a larger number of generally anti-Semitic articles, which included articles about Polish Jews, there was a marked reduction in their frequency.[65] This was part of a broader trend. Peter Longerich argued that anti-Semitism became a propaganda topic of limited value between the outbreak of WWII and summer 1941. Hence, it never developed during this period into a general anti-Semitic propaganda campaign like in 1933, 1935 or 1938.[66] It is odd though that images of Polish Jews found little use in the orchestrated publicity that accompanied the release of three anti-Semitic movies in 1940: the unsuccessful “Der ewige Jude”, the moderately successful “Die Rothschilds”, and the box-office hit “Jud Süß”. Despite the incorporation of footage shot in Poland in 1939 in the “Der ewige Jude”, the topic was largely ignored in the popular press and the newsreels at the time of its release.[67] Therefore, after an initial interest in Polish Jewish topics for propagandistic purposes, the RMVP and the media lost interest when more important wartime subjects emerged and as the war shifted westwards in 1940.

It is worth noting though that anti-Semitic images and propagandistic slogans, created during the early phase of the German occupation in Poland, also found their way into other, sometimes unexpected, visual products. A short documentary film about the German railway during the Polish campaign, which was only intended for showing to selected audiences, referred in a couple of scenes to the “Jews learn how to work” propaganda.[68] A training film of the army’s military medical academy depicted the Jews of Poland as the main source of epidemics due to their poor hygiene, thus reflecting the “Jews as a hygiene peril” propaganda theme.[69] It appears that these scenes in both films are based on PK footage.

Just as a new anti-Jewish policy crystallized in the first weeks of the war – as indicated by Reinhard Heydrich’s “Schnellbrief” (“quick letter”) of September 21, 1939[70] – so too anti-Jewish propaganda crystallized in the early wartime. Although the depiction of Polish Jews in the German propaganda was initially tightly connected with the concentrated effort to discredit the Polish state and Polish right for self-determination,[71] with the beginning of the Nazi occupation it took place in more

orthodox contexts. It was more directly related to the cores of Nazi prewar anti-Semitism. "Hard evidence", supported by "live" images from occupied Poland, reinforced this anti-Semitism and gave it a new "authenticity".

As Christopher Browning pointed out: "If Nazi propaganda had not succeeded in turning many Germans into rabid anti-Semites in Hitler's own image, Nazi policies had succeeded in isolating German Jewry from the rest of society. The Jews had increasingly become an abstract phenomenon to whose fate Germans could be indifferent, not fellow citizens and human beings with whom Germans could identify and empathize. The German encounter with Poland gave new credibility to the Nazi message."^[72]

In this respect, PK ghetto reporting, especially in film and photo, was particularly useful and effective. The German anti-Semitic propaganda of WWII, and particularly in its early stage, was multi-layered. On the top layer the Jews were presented as a general enemy of the Reich, of the German people and of the Western civilization. In more specific terms, the initial propaganda of the Polish campaign sought to undermine the legitimacy of the Polish state through its association with its Jewish population and its Jewish character. Beyond that, the German propaganda isolated the Polish Jews and depicted them as a multipole local threat. They were presented as habitual criminals, as unlawful insurgents, as obstructing rebuilding, as sabotaging the economy, and as a risk to public health. These propagandistic arguments, based allegedly on real encounters and facts, were used to reinforce the prevailing prewar anti-Semitic image of the Jew.

But the changing context is crucial: With the beginning of WWII, the anti-Jewish propaganda was integrated within the broader war propaganda of the Reich. In times of war a clear definition of friends and foes became more crucial than ever before. The Jews were therefore not only presented as a group unacceptable for inclusion in the "Volksgemeinschaft" (People's Community) under any circumstances, but as an integral part of Germany's war opponents. The ghettos provided the Germans in this respect an excellent opportunity to establish and enhance the image of the Jews as the Reich's enemies in this new war. Thus, the increasing persecution of the Jews was accompanied by "authentic" anti-Jewish propaganda, which relied heavily on images taken by PK reporters in ghettos and Jewish quarters in occupied Poland.

Perhaps the final layer of wartime propaganda based on PK material is its postwar impact. The propaganda troops have left a huge visual legacy. Around 3 million PK photos were delivered during WWII, and around 1.7 million of them were handed down.^[73] Although the entire archive of PK raw films was destroyed towards the end of WWII, all the wartime newsreels have been preserved (including the four panorama color newsreels), allowing a large amount of edited PK footage to be handed down.

Due to their quality and their availability, PK photos and films shape the visual image of WWII until today to a large extent.^[74] Even the representation and commemoration of the Holocaust must rely heavily on these materials. Particularly the depiction of the ghettos and their occupants as documented by the PKs has been used extensively, and is still in high demand.^[75]

[1] Miriam Y. Arani, Die Fotografien der Propagandakompanien der deutschen Wehrmacht als Quellen zu den Ereignissen im besetzten Polen 1939-1945, in: Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung 60 (2011), Nr. 1, pp.1-49; Bernd Boll, Das Bild als Waffe. Quellenkritische Anmerkungen zum Foto- und Filmmaterial der deutschen Propagandatruppen 1938-1945, in: Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft 54 (2006), pp. 974-998; Ahlrich Meyer, Blick des Besatzers. Propagandaphotographie der Wehrmacht aus Marseille, 1942-1944, Bremen 1999.

[2] Willi A. Boelcke, Kriegspropaganda 1939-1941. Geheime Ministerkonferenzen im Reichspropagandaministerium, Stuttgart 1966, pp. 28-29.

[3] Ibid, p. 32; Doris Kohlmann-Viand, NS-Pressepolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg, München 1991, pp. 109-112.

[4] Hasso von Wedel, Die Propagandatruppen der Deutschen Wehrmacht, Neckargemünd 1962, p. 20.

[5] On the propaganda troops see: Wedel, Die Propagandatruppen; Daniel Uziel, The Propaganda Warriors. The Wehrmacht and the Consolidation of the German Home Front, Oxford 2008.

[6] Manfred Messerschmidt, Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat. Zeit der Indoktrination,

Hamburg 1969, pp. 240-241.

[7] David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda*, London 1993, p. 93; Boelcke, *Kriegspropaganda 1939-1941*, pp. 169-170.

[8] Wilfred von Oven, *Mit Goebbels bis zum Ende*, Buenos Aires 1949, pp. 57-58. See also in Bundesarchiv-Berlin (BA-B) NS10/49: Texts of new reel commentary and changes made in them by Hitler, 1939-1940 – mainly from the time of the campaign in the West.

[9] Joseph Goebbels, "PK", in: *Das Reich* Nr. 20/1941, pp. 1-2 (Leitartikel); Boelcke, *Kriegspropaganda*, p. 330.

[10] Dan Michman, *The Emergence of Jewish Ghettos during the Holocaust*, New York 2011, pp. 90-93.

[11] See: Jochen Böhler, *Auftakt zum Vernichtungskrieg: Die Wehrmacht in Polen 1939*, Frankfurt a.M. 2006, pp. 36-41.

[12] Lars Jockheck, *Propaganda im Generalgouvernement. Die NS-Besatzungspresse für Deutsche und Polen 1939-1945*, Osnabrück 2006, pp. 56-59, online https://prae.perspectivia.net/publikationen/ev-warschau/jockheck_propaganda.

[13] Eugeniusz Cezary Król, *Die Propaganda des Dritten Reiches im Verhältnis zu Polen und den Polen von 1939-1945*, in: Danuta Jackiewicz/Eugeniusz Cezary Król (eds.), *W obiektywie wroga. Niemieccy fotoreporterzy w okupowanej Warszawie 1939-1945 / Im Objektiv des Feindes. Die deutschen Bildberichtersteller im besetzten Warschau 1939-1945*, Warschau 2008, pp. 16-17.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Jockheck, *Propaganda*, pp. 60-61.

[16] David Cesarani, *Final Solution. The Fate of the Jews 1933-1949*, Basingstoke 2017, pp. 238-239.

[17] Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (BA-MA), RW4/261, Einsatzgruppe V: Broschüre "Richtlinien für die Nationalitätenpolitik", Teil I, Judenfrage, herausgegeben vom Lager der Nationalen Einigung, Warschau 1938. Interestingly, this report was sent to WPr. by PK501 operating in Poland on 10 October 1939.

[18] Cesarani, *Final Solution*, p. 248.

[19] BA-MA, RW4/241.1, *Propagandaweisungen des Reichspropagandaministers für den 2. Oktober 1939*.

[20] Oliver Sander, *Deutsche Bildberichter in Polen*, in: Jackiewicz/Król (eds.), *W obiektywie wroga / Im Objektiv des Feindes*, pp. 31-47, see p. 35.

[21] Miriam Y. Arani, *Fotografische Selbst- und Fremdbilder von Deutschen und Polen im Reichsgau Wartheland 1939-45. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Region Wielkopolska*, Hamburg 2008, pp. 175-176; Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity*, Lawrence (KS) 2003, pp. 62-63; Böhler, *Auftakt*, pp. 163-164.

[22] Ufa Tonwoche, 471/38/1939, 14. September 1939, 1:04.

[23] Böhler, *Auftakt*, pp. 158-163.

[24] No title, *Illustrierter Beobachter*, 28 September 1939, p. 923.

[25] Bundesarchiv-Bildarchiv (BA-BA), Bild 101I-380-0069-33-40.

[26] Joshua Eibschitz/Abraham Kluschener/Joseph Zellkowitz (eds.), *Wieruszów – sefer zikaron [Wieruszów's Memory Book]*, Tel-Aviv 1970 (Hebrew), pp. 280-281.

[27] See for example: *The Zloczow Community Public Commemoration Project* (ed.), *The Zloczow Book*, Tel Aviv (private publishing) 1971 (Hebrew), p. 259, with the description "Jews transported to Auschwitz".

[28] Ufa Tonwoche 471/41/1939, 4. Oktober 1939.

[29] BA-MA, RW4/241.1, WPr. an AOK8/lc, 7/10/39; Interview with Dr. Fritz Hippler, Berchtesgaden, 16/4/1998.

[30] Shay Hazkani, *The Forbidden Movies. Historical Analysis of Anti-Semitic Propaganda Movies in the Third Reich and their Influence on the German Public*, in: *Moreshet Journal*, 84, November 2007 (Hebrew), pp. 170-172. Significantly, the film was a box-office failure.

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170.

- [32] Krol, Die Propaganda, p. 20.
- [33] Peter Longerich, "Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!" Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933-1945, Bonn 2006, p. 148.
- [34] BA-MA, RH20-8/292, Reichspropagandaamt I für besetzte Gebiete: Bericht, 25 Sept. 1939, p. 2.
- [35] See for example: BA-MA, RW4/245, Auswärtiges Amt/Inf.: Bericht über polnische Presse und andere Feindpropaganda btr. Polen Nr. 16/1940, 20 März 1940.
- [36] Boelcke, Kriegspropaganda, pp. 249-250, 273, 276.
- [37] Longerich, "Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!", p. 148.
- [38] On this unit see: Office of Military Government for Germany (US), SS-Standarte "Kurt Eggers", n.p., Office of director of Intelligence, 1946.
- [39] BA-B, R55/409, Pro/4 ORR Imhoff: Meine Dienstreise nach Litzmannstadt im September 1940. See also: BA-K, Bild 101III-Schilf-002-14.
- [40] Jude im eigenen Saft, in: Das Schwarze Korps, 7.11.1940, p. 8.
- [41] Dieter Lorenz, Der Raumbild-Verlag Otto Schönstein. Zur Geschichte der Stereoskopie, in: Kultur & Technik. Zeitschrift des Deutschen Museums München, Heft 4, Dezember 1983, pp. 211-220; DHM, Schönstein Collection, PK/1928-1979.
- [42] Im Ghetto von Lublin ... und ... 25m unter dem Ghetto, in: Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, Nr. 49, 05.12.1940, pp. 1289-1291.
- [43] This scheme included work leave Goebbels requested in May 1943 from OKW for a large number of PK reporter for a planned anti-Semitic propaganda campaign. Uziel, The Propaganda Warriors, pp. 124-125.
- [44] Jochen Stöckmann, Mit drei Leicas im Gepäck an alle Fronten. Vor 100 Jahre wurde der Fotograf Hilmar Pabel geboren, Deutschlandfunk Kultur, 17.9.2010, http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/mit-drei-leicas-im-gepaeck-an-alle-fronten.932.de.html?dram:article_id=130931 [20.04.2020].
- [45] Im Ghetto von Lublin ... und ... 25m unter dem Ghetto, in: Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, Nr. 49, 05.12.1940, p. 1290.
- [46] See Ahlrich Meyer's critical remarks about the postwar narratives of former PK photographers, including Pabel, in: Meyer, Blick des Besatzers, p. 17.
- [47] Harriet Scharnberg, "Juden lernen arbeiten!". Ein antisemitisches Motiv in der deutschen Bildpresse, 1939-1941", in: Michael Nagel/Moshe Zimmermann (eds.), Judenfeindschaft und Antisemitismus in der deutschen Presse über fünf Jahrhunderte: Erscheinungsformen, Rezeption, Debatte und Gegenwehr, Bremen 2013, pp. 841-872.
- [48] Ibid, pp. 841-846.
- [49] Ufa Tonwoche 472/39/1939, 20.09.1939.
- [50] Scharnberg, "Juden lernen Arbeiten", pp. 847-848.
- [51] See for instance the relevant scenes in the movie "Der ewige Jude", as well as: Ghetto Typen aus dem Osten, in: Illustrierter Beobachter, Folge 44, 2. November 1939, p. 1606; Das Tagebuch, in: Illustrierter Beobachter, 9.11.1939, p. 1624.
- [52] BA-MA, RW4/338, WPr.Id: Lageberichte (PK) Nr.41, 1-28/2/41. Unfortunately this is the only detailed periodical report in this file.
- [53] Ibid. Nr.43 (1-30/4/41) & Nr.44 (1-31/5/41).
- [54] Ibid, WPr.Id: Lagebericht (PK) Nr.45 (1-30/6/41).
- [55] BA-MA, RL15/67, press reports by reporters Hans R. Ertz, Hans-Werner Groth, Friedrich Luegmayer and Karl Gleiss. Unfortunately, the photos are not in the file.
- [56] See an exception in: Juden hinter Mauern, in: Illustrierter Beobachter, Folge 24, 12.6.1941, p. 671. The title photo of this article can be seen together with the description of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Nachrichtendienst in: BA-BA, Bild 183-L25516.
- [57] BA-MA, RH20-17/274, Tätigkeitsbericht der Gruppe Ic/AO des AOK17 für den Monat Januar 1941.
- [58] Daniel Uziel, The Wehrmacht Propaganda Troops and the Jews, in: Yad Vashem Studies (29) 2001, pp. 27-65, p. 37, online https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%202021.pdf.
- [59] "Juden unter sich", in: Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, 24.07.1941, pp. 790-793.

- [60] Uziel, The Propaganda, pp. 246-247.
- [61] Longerich, "Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!", p. 150.
- [62] See the movie A Film Unfinished, Director: Yael Hersonski, 2010, 89 minutes.
- [63] „Wildente im 7. Jahr“, in: Die Wildente, 19. Folge, Dezember 1958, pp. 2-3.
- [64] See especially: Hans-Leo Martin, Unser Mann bei Goebbels. Verbindungsoffizier des OKWs beim Reichspropagandaminister 1940-44, Neckargemünd 1973; Wilfred von Oven, Mit Goebbels bis zum Ende, Buenos-Aires 1949; George Schmidt-Scheeder, Reporter der Hölle. Die Propaganda-Kompanien im Zweiten Weltkrieg, Stuttgart 1990; Werner Stephan, Joseph Goebbels. Dämon einer Diktatur, Stuttgart 1949; Wedel, Die Propagandatruppen.
- [65] Klaus Hesse, PK-Fotografen im NS-Vernichtungskrieg. Eine Bildreportage Artur Grimms aus dem besetzten Warschau 1939, in: Rainer Rother/Judith Prokasky (eds.), Die Kamera als Waffe. Propagandabilder des Zweiten Weltkrieges, München 2010, pp. 137-149, p. 143.
- [66] Longerich, "Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!", p. 150.
- [67] Welch, The Third Reich, p. 99.
- [68] Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv Berlin (BA-FB), 233508, Eisenbahnanlagen zerstört, 20. Februar 1940.
- [69] BA-FB, 158858, Kampf dem Fleckfieber!, ca. 1942.
- [70] Cesarani, Final Solution, pp. 255-257.
- [71] Krol, Die Propaganda, pp. 18-19.
- [72] Christopher Browning, The Origins of the Final Solution. The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, 1939-1942, Lincoln 2005, p. 13.
- [73] Sander, Deutsche Bildberichter, p. 40.
- [74] On the "second life" of PK films see: Judith Keilbach, Krieg recyceln. Zum Einsatz von PK-Aufnahmen in bundesdeutschen Fernsehdokumentationen, in: Rother/Prokasky (eds.), Die Kamera als Waffe, pp. 297-305.
- [75] For instance the exhibitions "Regards sur les ghettos" opened in the Memorial de la Shoah in Paris in 2013, and "Flashes of Memory. Photography during the Holocaust" Yad Vashem in Jerusalem 2018.

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Themendossier: Propagandafotografie hg. v. Jens Jäger



Die Beiträge des Dossiers beleuchten exemplarisch das komplexe Forschungsfeld der Propagandafotografie während des Zweiten Weltkriegs; sie betrachten das Verhältnis von „privater“ und „professioneller“ Fotografie und bieten transnationale Einblicke in Praktiken der Kriegsbildberichterstattung in Deutschland sowie der verbündeten Länder und ihrer Armeen. Jens Jäger: Propagandafotografie: Private Kriegsfotografie im Zweiten Weltkrieg, in: Visual History, 12.02.2020 ...
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