Nazi Anthropology and Public Health in Second World War Poland: The Case of Herbert Grohmann

Gretchen Schafft

**ABSTRACT:** Anthropologists who were also medical doctors often had a particularly active role in the Nazi regime, including the SS. One of these, Herbert Grohmann, studied under Eugen Fischer at Kaiser Wilhelm Institut of Anthropologie (KWIA) in Berlin from 1937 to 1938 and became his assistant. Grohmann, an SS officer, was sent to Poland as the head of public health in Lodz while maintaining his association with the KWIA. This article describes the interconnections of anthropology and public health in occupied Poland including the elimination (killing) of mentally ill patients, the implementation of the Deutsche Volksliste and the culling of ‘racially fit’ children for abduction to Germany. All of these activities are seen through the career of Herbert Grohmann.

**KEYWORDS:** Nazi anthropology, World War Two, occupied Poland, public health, holocaust, archival research

**Introduction**

A little known episode in anthropological history is that of German and Austrian anthropology in the Third Reich, that period of 1933–1945, during which Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party ruled Germany and invaded countries in every direction from its own geographical area (Schafft 2004). It is an unhappy history that was not much researched or discussed until recently because, above all, it is a discrediting history. World conquest was the goal of this would-be German empire, a world that would be rationally ordered according to a scheme of racialization in which the German ‘Aryan Volk’ would comprise the ‘master race’ and all others would take their orderly place in service to this ideal or be eliminated.

Anthropologists, along with medical doctors, played a vital role in sorting people into categories, from useful to the Reich to unwanted (unerwünscht) in the Reich. While the public has become familiar with accounts of Josef Mengele, ‘the butcher of Auschwitz’, they think of him as a deranged individual and do not place him in a context of crimes committed by a larger class of perpetrators. Like Mengele, who received his doctorate in anthropology in Munich, these criminals were men who had degrees in medicine and anthropology, or had undertaken extensive coursework under anthropologists in the new anthropological subfield of ‘racial hygiene’. Their careers spanned service in the SS (Schutzstaffel), an elite paramilitary organization based on the ersatz mythology of some pagan time; its notorious Einsatzgruppen, the shock troops that terrorized the eastern occupied lands; as well as service to the state as high-ranking medical officers in public health administrations in occupied Poland and the
Soviet Union. This article will explore the career of one of them.

The Idea of Racial Homogeneity

Despite the resources dedicated to it, there was actually no way to determine specific ‘races’ at the time of the Third Reich, just as there is no way to do so now. Phenotypically, Germans and their neighbours often had similar characteristics, yet Germans had been obsessed with the determination of racial differentiations within their own country since at least the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century (Schafft 2004). Certainly anti-Semitism played a role in the interest in race, but this could not explain the totality of this preoccupation with race and the Nazi determination to sort out and eliminate all possible variation within their borders except for those serving in a particular slavish role.

The beliefs that revolved around race were not limited to Germany, but were widespread around the world, and many countries were concerned about racial enhancement of their populations and the possible racial degeneration that might come from a heterogeneous society (Kühl 1994). The Rockefeller Foundation in the United States sponsored German racial research from 1927 until Germany began its march into other countries in 1938 (Schafft 2004: 48–54). Other countries, however, stopped at programmes of sterilization, and no other country, in an attempt to achieve racial purity, euthanized unwanted categories of people.

These concerns about race were taken to such an extreme in Germany, that they not only dominated the pre-war discourse of the Nazi Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei or NSDAP), but also had a broad popular appeal. The general public read voraciously about race and was acquainted with the rhetoric and theories of the day (Lösch 1997: 134–135). The government’s efforts to achieve ‘racial purity’ within the German population were maintained even after the beginning of the Second World War at times to the detriment of the German war machine.

German troops entered Poland in September 1939 and began massive killing which, like other atrocities, was cloaked in a benign verbiage. The Polish Underground in London quoted a captured document of a German official that read:

Simultaneously with the occupation of the former Polish territory the spiritual leaders of Polish nationality, the actual exponents of Polonisation [sic], the priests, teachers and nobles, the Polish intelligentsia in general was [sic] removed. The majority of the population were without character or independent opinion. To influence and lead this population according to German ideas was the task of the Party which had accepted responsibility for the entire work of nationalization. (Polish Ministry of Information 1943: 29)

The ‘removal’ was a systematic slaughter resulting eventually in the deaths of three million non-Jewish Poles as well as three million Jewish Poles (Lukas 1986: 36–39).

The Nazi policy known as ‘Blut und Boden’ (blood and land) proposed matching population groupings with geography in certain ways, so that the Altreich, Germany with its pre-1938 borders, would have the most ‘pure’ population possible, consisting of those of the Nordic race or acceptable mixed racial groups, depending on who was describing the characteristics. The lands bordering the Altreich would be home to those with similar, if not totally homogeneous, characteristics. As one moved further to the east, the populations would become more ‘Slavic’, more ‘Mongoloid’, except for colonies of German settlers who would be sent in from the Altreich to develop large, self-contained farming colonies. Life chances for these different groups would be circumscribed by the labels assigned to them or the passes they carried.

In order to perfect this system, particularly in an area of Poland bordering on Germany as it had been constituted in 1938, that the Nazis termed the Warthegau, the Germans instituted a system called the Volksliste. Following an
examination by a racial evaluator thought competent to make racial judgments, usually someone trained in an anthropological institute, the person in question would be given a document that stated his or her position on the Volksliste, from categories one to four. Each category carried with it a particular fate:

1. those assigned a virtual German identity would be sent to the Altreich for ‘Germanisation’;
2. those with somewhat acceptable characteristics would be sent to do labour in the Altreich;
3. those with less acceptable characteristics would be sent to do slave labour in progressively difficult circumstances; and
4. those who were deemed ‘lives unworthy of life’ would be isolated and/or killed.2

The enormous bureaucracy that had to handle this effort ofrationally sorting hundreds of thousands of people under the auspices of several agencies was ultimately overseen by Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS and a large bureaucratic domain called the Reich Commission for the Security of German Folk (Reichskommisar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums or RFDV) that attempted to actualize the Blut und Boden policy. Not only did enormous numbers of people have to be examined, but then they were moved from one location to another, initiating a massive system of temporary camps and lodgings, displacing settled farmers and their crop production and causing the deaths of thousands from disease and exposure to the elements (Lukas 1986: 17–27).

The role of anthropology was not a small one in all of this activity. Who better than anthropologists to sort kinship lines, decide on racial divisions and to explore ethnicity? From the very beginning, the profession became a valuable resource to the Hitler regime. Not only had the anthropological discipline provided much of the ideology, it had cooperated in writing the laws, serving as judges on the racial and genetic courts, trained the cadre of professionals to carry out the racial doctrine, conducted medical experiments, and certified individuals in racial categories that often sealed their fates (Schafft 2004: 257). In fact, the ideas that are thought to be particularly Hitlerian were expressed by anthropologists in the nineteenth century and further explicated in the early twentieth century. These included the hierarchy of races, the advisability of eliminating ‘unworthy’ lives, and the potential rational assigning of positions in the social structure such as status and role (Schafft 2004). It can be argued that the philosophy of the Nazi regime had borrowed most of its ideas from the writings of nineteenth century philosophers, largely represented by ‘armchair’ anthropologists.

The major research institute in Germany from the 1920s onward was the Kaiser Wilhelm Society in Berlin (renamed and reorganized after the war as the Max Planck Institute) with branches in other German cities. It had a dozen institutes within it, manned by scientists, including such internationally acclaimed scholars as Albert Einstein. Scientists of the combined institutes had to their credit many Nobel Prizes by the time Hitler came to power.

Under the direction of Eugen Fischer, the Institute of Anthropology, Human Genetics and Eugenics (KWIA), one of the institutes under this umbrella organization, carried on research regarding the supposed racial composition of Germany, inheritability of illness and genetic defects, contagion, and the psychological studies of twins (nurture/nature studies). It also had been involved in efforts to sterilize ‘racially mixed children’ before 1933. Joining with Hitler to go even further in enthusiastic efforts to purify the German ‘race’, appears not to have been difficult. Fischer wrote with great pride that the Prussian health minister, Dr Gütt, felt that the KWIA was exactly the institute to advise on the enactment of laws relating to sterilization. ‘this institute should perform research on the genetically ill and provide the clinical training and activities of a medical force trained
in genetics and racial biology. I am of the opinion that at the present time as we build the people’s state, no other institution can serve this task as well as we, and it must be our priority.\textsuperscript{3}

Fischer reiterated the importance of the KWIA in furthering racial-political agendas in Germany:

The institute had the leading role in the racial hygiene movement in Germany. It contributed to the preparation of a eugenics law, especially in working out the sterilization laws. The institute stands totally at the ready for the tasks of today’s state.\textsuperscript{4}

The KWIA immediately started giving courses of various length in racial hygiene to the SS, doctors, teachers, social workers, clergy and other professional groups. Within the first eighteen months of the new regime, the KWIA had trained 1,100 doctors in racial issues (Proctor 1988: 42). These courses were designed to teach the already professional students how to distinguish racial features, the dangers heterogeneous populations presented to the public health, the necessity of taking measures (including sterilization and euthanasia) to insure the health and safety of the biologically pure race. Soon the trainees were training others in universities and institutions throughout Germany until anthropology became virtually synonymous with racial science in that country.

The Case of Herbert Grohmann

A training course can sound rather benign, even when the content is so specious and misbegotten. Thus, the case of Herbert Grohmann is worthy of our attention, because he was such an ordinary participant. His name is found in archives, but it is found in only a few books describing the horrors of the Third Reich. Yet, because of his special training and immersion in racial lore through the KWIA and the SS, he became a major perpetrator of the horrors of the Third Reich.

Grohmann was born in 1908. He was an ardent Nazi, for he had been in the radical right-wing movement, the Youth Freecorps (Jugend-Freicorps), from 1925 to 1927, and thus was known in his personnel records throughout his career as an ‘old fighter’ (Alter Kämpfer), a very desirable designation to the Nazis. He joined the Nazi Party before Hitler came to power and joined the SA (Sturmabteilung), an early paramilitary force in Hitler’s regime, in 1931. As that group was disbanded, he moved on to the SS and made his career there.

Grohmann attended medical school from 1929 to 1934 and took his medical degree in 1937 at the age of 29 after completing the required number of practical internships and residencies. He reported that he was greatly influenced by anthropology. In fact, from 1936 to 1937, Grohmann took a nine-month course at the KWIA (Lösch 1997: 357–358). Around the same time, Grohmann received an evaluation from the SS commander which may have influenced his selection for this elite programme. ‘SS-Hauptscharführer Grohmann conscientiously has fulfilled his SS duty in his current position. He was a good comrade to all the SS-men with whom he interacted, and showed in every way, also in his private life, that he is the kind of party-comrade and SS-man that we should all be.’\textsuperscript{5}

Perhaps Grohmann was excited about this KWIA course, as he later indicated. At any rate, Eugen Fischer certainly was. He wrote to a colleague:

A few days ago, I opened a year-long course at the institute for twenty young doctors, entrusted to me by the Reichsinnenminister (Secretary of the Interior). We were told that this selection of candidates should study with me for a year and will then be used in offices of genetic health etc. At the opening, Minister Director Gütt gave a little talk, and then I led (the programme). During the inspection of the institute, I naturally had to keep saying something about the close quarters. You can imagine that it was no small matter to find twenty working places for the gentlemen. They now sit in the basement with a secretary in the corridor.\textsuperscript{6}
Six months after Grohmann completed his course at the KWIA, he was offered a position as assistant to Eugen Fischer for one year. He accepted it while maintaining his SS post as well. Grohmann was still named on the KWIA list of publications in 1943, indicating that he retained some position there (Lösch 1997: 358 and 566).

In 1940, Dr Leonardo Conti became the director of the KWIA Board of Directors (Kuratorium). His position as State Secretary for Health (Staatssekretär und Reichsgesundheitsfürher) made him the most powerful Nazi functionary in the field of health (Lösch 1997: 370). And in the board meeting of 1940, Fischer used Grohmann as an example of those members of his staff that were currently engaged in ‘war duties’ (Kriegsdienst). Conti helped realize Fischer’s aim to turn the KWIA into a more goal-directed, unified research arm of the government by providing funds and offering him his protection and endorsement. He wrote to the general director in January 1941: ‘On the basis of our conversation, it appears to me to be necessary that the Anthropological Institute be recognized as militarily strategic’. The direction that the research would take was in genetic experimentation, at first with rabbits. All that was missing was an experimental field of humans, in other words, large numbers of human subjects.

For Grohmann, already in the field by 1940, this emphasis on health and public health meant that his way was clear and that he had nothing to fear in carrying out his own plans. His ties to the KWIA were both a cover and an encouragement. He also used his anthropological training as a qualification relevant to advancement in the SS. He described his anthropological qualifications thus:

Since 1930, I have been very motivated by reading the books of Günther, beginning with Racial Studies, Racial Hygiene, I studied inheritance, racial studies and racial hygiene with Professors Dürken, von Eickstedt, and Lange. From the suggested scientific literature I read the works of Bauer-Fischer-Lenz, Clause, Darré, Gütt-Rüdin-Rüttke, Günther, Reche, Siemens, Staemmler, Schultzze-Naumberg.

His only shortcoming, noted in his SS files, was his short stature. That did not fit the SS image, but his other characteristics made up for his height. He was described as mature beyond his years, firm and reliable, absolutely convinced of the Nazi philosophy, and impeccable in his behaviour.

For Germany, the war began in 1939, a year after it had annexed the Sudentenland and Austria virtually unopposed. Grohmann became a doctor in the Office of Population and Genetic Public Health (Amt für Bevölkerungspolitik und Erbgensundheitspflege) under Himmler’s RFDV. With the beginning of the war, Grohmann moved eastward.

He became the public health director (Obermedizinalrat) for the city of Łódź, a city the Germans called Litzmannstadt on 15 February 1940. This was an exalted position for a man in his early thirties with no notable medical experience. However, despite little experience with medicine per se, he was, by then, an expert in racial and genetic inheritance issues. His post was tied to the SS position he had held in the Office of Genetic Health and Racial Questions, but he now had a higher rank.

Łódź had become notorious, for during those years the Łódź Ghetto housed approximately 200,000, mostly Jews and some Roma, of whom 42,000 died of hunger and disease. But Grohmann was not directly responsible for the ghetto and was more concerned with the masses of people being moved to and fro between the Ukraine and the Altreich according to the plan of implementing Blut und Boden policies. Litzmannstadt was a transit point for those being moved east and west. Thousands of Germans and Ukrainians were held in camps until they were resettled.

Łódź was an important industrial city with such a large textile industry that it was referred to as the ‘Manchester’ of Poland. It produced more than ten percent of the textiles used in
Germany. In 1939, Łódź was the second largest city in Poland and had 750,000 inhabitants of whom fifty-six percent were non-Jewish Poles, thirty-four percent Jews of Polish or other descent, and only nine percent German. Perhaps to rationalize the takeover of the city, the Nazi mayor on the occasion of Hitler’s birthday in April 1940 stated that ‘in spite of its eastern-European façade’ it represented old, settled Germany. With the occupation came plans that it would now become a German colony in the farming region of the Warthegau.

Grohmann’s tasks in Łódź were multiple. He divided them between those that must be handled immediately and those that he must plan for the immediate future. Among the immediate responsibilities was the fight against contagious diseases, primarily typhus, bacterial food poison, and poor sanitation. He also planned to conduct discussions with city officials about where disinfection should take place, test the disinfection equipment, examine the water system and attend to the living conditions of the German settlers, who in 1940 were not assured of an adequate place to live. His future plans included inspection of the hospitals, especially those for the mentally disabled and mentally ill. Grohmann also felt that in the interest of the state’s agenda, his office should not neglect research, through the division of the health department, devoted to genetic and racial care. Included would be the Jewish and Roma ‘problems’ and the problem of assimilating racially worthy people. On the other hand, excluding the less valuable people with a German heritage, as well as the foreign classes, was on his agenda. ‘The development in the East is the job of the cultured class. Cultural accomplishments were always and are still determined by race. The degree of culture of a people is dependent upon their racial composition.’ He finished his statement by writing: ‘The outlook for cultural change is therefore dependent on biological selection […] these tasks [entail] the materials for their execution, the means and the instruments’.

However, the public health work did not engage all of Grohmann’s attention. His major interest was always race selection. He felt called to administer the racial policies of the Reich, to certify individuals for the Volksliste and other purposes, prohibit reproduction of the ‘unworthy’ and encourage reproduction of the ‘worthy’, and provide medical facilities for the troops and the population.

The enormity of his Volksliste work is seen in the numbers of cases examined under his watch. From February 1940 to December 1942, Grohmann’s Division of Heredity and Racial Care examined more than 23,346 individuals. Perhaps Grohmann himself performed careful examinations, but in general, the examinations, which should have consisted of various measurements, quickly evolved into quick once-overs by staff members.

The Pole who is being examined walks by an SS man who has been trained in racial questions. If the person is capable of being German, then this person will be sent to an intermediary camp in Łódź with a German ration card. There are two ways of practising the racial separation. The one decides about German capacity by the nature of the applicant: his looks, his character, his manner. The other identification is only by his appearance. Which way is the right way, history will tell.

The purpose of the examinations was to place each individual or family on the Volksliste, identifying their positional category. It was used to identify those who had intermarried with Jews, and others who had families composed of people in different categories of ‘value’. The overriding distinction was between the ‘Polish-blooded’ (polnischblütig) and German-blooded (deutschblütig). Of great concern to the German examiners were those good relationships, friendships, respect and positive feelings among the various categories of people that were to be wiped out by the new regime. The Polish population simply would not conform to the prescribed attitudes toward one another! Another disappointment to those who so strongly be-
lieved in the ‘Master Race’ was the lack of clear evidence that all those with German features who could be certified as Volksdeutsch were better than their neighbours who could not.

The Hamburger Fremdenblatt, a German newspaper inadvertently described that situation by writing of the adjustment problems that those being ‘Germanized’ were having after they had been transported to the Altreich:

The children of these families quite recently were still attending Polish schools, together with Polish children from the same houses. These children had until now been playing with Polish children in the yard and in the street. If they had not been torn away from their Polish milieu and had not been ordered to live among German comrades, undoubtedly they would have gone on using the Polish language as before, and, as before, would have grown up with Polish customs and habits. The same applies to the adults. Among them are many who have spent all their lives in a Polish milieu, who frequently speak much better Polish than German, and who have even completely forgotten their native German language. All these people must now be brought in, watched over, and educated by the party, which has special tasks to fulfil in this regard. That will be possible only when they are concentrated in a separate German quarter. (Polish Ministry of Information 1943: 47–48)

A great deal of corruption entered into the process of determining what category one would be in on the Volksliste, with bribes and favouritism becoming a factor in decision-making. Despite this, examinations of various kinds continued for years. These included examining those who wanted to get married, those who had been married earlier across the racial boundaries, those who had adopted children or taken in foster children, or soldiers in the German army who wanted to marry Polish women. As Grohmann explained, ‘we are planning to put up a protective structure, better than a barbed wire fence or a wall, against foreign intrusion to separate those with selected racial and character qualities’.18 He envisioned a division of the gigantic holdings of the Polish nobles into small farms for those of strong German heritage, the Volksdeutscher.19

Grohmann was also, quite probably, involved in the selection of Polish children for adoption by Germans. This was part of the ‘Lebensborn’ programme of increasing the population figures of the Germans whose birth rate was falling due to the war. Children who appeared to be of German heritage were kidnapped from their families using various ploys and sent to collection points for ‘Germanisation’ and ultimately adoption into German families. The number of children who were considered for assimilation into the German Volk was not small. Indeed, in Łódz alone, 1,400 foster children were in question.20

The method of handling these children was heartless. Many lost their parents, who were taken into slave labour or sent to other labour or holding camps, and some just became lost in the turmoil of the transits. The SS searched the orphanages and childrens’ homes for children that could be considered ‘racially worthy’ and examined them carefully. They also looked in schools, and anthropologists sought them in villages they were studying. If the children were considered of ‘good stock’, they were transferred to a Lebensborn home. In a secret memo, it is recorded:

In the course of time, it is to be expected that available Polish relatives or acquaintances will try to find out where the children are. This is possible at any time through the police registration bureau. This is a danger to the intended purpose of Germanizing these children. Training difficulties, through the influence of relatives or acquaintances, will result in consequences and must in all events be rejected. I seek therefore that these homes form a special registration bureau that will be known under the name of the ‘Police Registration Office II in Kalisch/Warthegau’. (Hauptkommission zur Untersuchung der Naziverbrechen in Polen 1973: 77)

Although Grohmann wanted to cooperate with this programme, he was suspicious of those who might be Jewish. He insisted that each have an examination in the Public Health
Office to be sure they were ‘racially valuable children’. He further recommended a process of culling but the unworthy children from those who should come under the supervision of the SS to learn the German language and culture.22

Part of the selection process was to examine the children held in foster care. One such case is particularly noteworthy. A Polish woman had a foster child of whom she was very fond. She and her husband tried to adopt the child. The public health office determined through records that the girl was actually the daughter of a non-Jewish mother and a Jewish father. The result of the investigation read:

From the overall impression and the individually examined characteristics are suspiciously Jewish, and the foster child is in no way to be viewed as racially valuable. Various shapes of the face must speak to Jewish suspicions. As the file on this case does not contradict this, rather the opposite, the examination must be seen as the probability that this is a Jewish mixture. I suggest that she is placed in the ghetto.

Further, I do not find the foster parents suited to raise a child who is capable of Germanization, for the wife is Russian and must be considered as ‘foreign’, and being foreign she is not in a position to be able to train foreign children to be German.23

Grohmann had a sharp eye, and perhaps he had a suspicion that this was a child of Jewish parents who was being protected through an adoption. He would not allow that to happen. His keen observations also allowed him to notice that the number of Poles with German-sounding names seemed to correspond to the number of ‘(racially) worthwhile’ people in his part of occupied Poland. He recognized that they were highly likely to be ‘Polanized’ (polanisiert) after experiencing three, four or more generations away from Germany.24

Population groups of the most diverse backgrounds were coming into contact with one another in Lódz as Germans and Volksdeutscher moved into camps set up for them as way-stations on their trek to eastern Poland where they would settle into farms previously owned by Poles. Ukrainians and others who had German ancestry were moving through on their way to take up land in the Warthegau. Tuberculosis was rampant in the camps and Grohmann wanted a quick answer to racial and ethnopolitical questions to keep them moving toward their destination and to avoid epidemics in the overcrowded way-stations. His suggestions were two-pronged:

(1) German Volk must be supported in their resettlement (in the centre of Poland) through the development of generous policies. It is terribly important to support the growth of this group. Racially and ethnically worthwhile classes of people must reproduce in large numbers.

(2) The foreign people, especially the Polish Volk, cannot be moved out soon and, therefore, measures must be taken that lessen their possibility of reproduction. All must fall either into the group of either hindering reproduction or encouraging it for those who are worthy. Foreign bloodlines must be eliminated from the German Volk to further the cleansing of the Warthegau.25

Grohmann’s philosophy was clear.

It was always the purpose of the state to get rid of the minorities within its boundaries through special measures that would destroy strange ethnic groups. How this would be done would be determined by the ruling Zeitgeist. Either they would be assimilated or they would be eliminated down to the last person. The aborigines (Poles) are going to get the second version. It is hard and brutal.26

In November 1941, Grohmann wrote a secret memo about a conversation he had had with Eugen Fischer on a visit to Berlin. Fischer had visited two Russian prisoner-of-war camps and had noticed that of the prisoners who had been called to his attention as possibly having ‘worthy’ characteristics, only five to six percent had the combined characteristics of European races. The others had a majority of characteristics that he considered ‘inner-Asian’. Remarkable, however, was the fact that many, perhaps fifty percent, had blue or light blue eyes and even light blond hair. It was necessary to eliminate the idea
that these could be characteristics of the Nordic race that the rest of the body image could not support. He explained it this way: probably hundreds or hundreds of thousands of years ago, bands had roamed Europe and there was a certain lightening of the hair and eyes. As the races and peoples separated, some had kept a few of these characteristics, but everything else had changed. It is important then, not to take much note of this, but to look at the total body type of the Nordic race.

I have followed the observations of Professor Fischer, and of the approximately one thousand Jews I have examined, about fifty per cent of them have blue or light blue eyes. It appears possible to me that here, too, Fischer’s reasoning can be postulated and [we] do not have to assume that there was racial mixing among ethnic groups.27

By 1943, there were 100,000 settled Germans on the Volksliste. They were recognized as citizens of the Reich, as Volksdeutscher. In addition, 25,000 Germans had arrived from the Altreich, taking important, ‘key’ positions. The city was more than filled, and the war-wounded needed hospital space as well.

Grohmann’s responsibility to plan hospital and clinic facilities was one he took seriously, as he did all of his duties. He paid a visit to the psychiatric hospital, Kochanowka, on the outskirts Łódź, and rapidly declared that one of the hospital units would be made available for housing of an SS force, and the other three would be emptied to house ‘Germans repatriated from the East.’ The 540 patients would be ‘evacuated’ through ‘special handling’ (Sonderbehandlung). This meant annihilation and was accomplished through the use of mobile gas chambers that were sent from the concentration camp Sachsenhausen outside of Berlin (Aly 1995: 124).

Grohmann, as others in medical and research positions, called the chronically ill ‘sick material’. In these words, Grohmann ordered the action to be enlarged to cover the elimination of 895 Jewish and non-Jewish Poles so that 215 Volksdeutscher and ‘returnees’ (Rückwanderer) could be housed.28 In this manner, Grohmann looked over all the institutions under his control and sought ‘opportunities’ to ‘reorganize’ them according to the worth of the patients in relation to the Reich and its philosophy.29

However, even with the efforts to maximize the health and capacity of the German gene pool, which ultimately was what the Nazi regime was attempting, Grohmann and the public health establishment in conjunction with the SS created conditions in which thousands died not from the scourge of war, but from those very policies. Believing that they could sort the people into ever smaller categories and move them to form homogeneous regions did not work. The long treks fostered illnesses of all kinds. The stories of death and dying were often as tragic for the Volksdeutscher as for those who found themselves in lower categories on the Volksliste.

Conclusions

Like most other professionals in those years in Germany and Austria, Grohmann did his part to support the regime. With the help of anthropological training, and with the ongoing academic support of the most prestigious anthropological institution in Germany, he set up classification systems, sorted people into groups assigned specific life chances, interfered with reproduction, and, finally, murdered at will.

The ultimate in essentializing human beings into categories of ethnicity, nationality, or what the Nazis understood as race went hand-in-hand with defining public health as the chances of those defined as Germans and those defined as ‘others.’ It was intended that one would have every advantage, and the other would be assigned a negligible position in relation to the perceived needs of the state. This population policy (Volkstumspolitik) could only lead to annihilation of the spirit as well as the physical self. However, the world intervened, and the
war came back to the doorstep of Germany and finally entered. No longer could Grohmann and his cadre determine what would happen in Łódź.

As the Russians approached Germany, Grohmann was reassigned by the SS to the northeastern part of occupied Poland to serve with an Einsatzgruppen. In the spring of 1945, he was moved back to Berlin to help in the defence of the city. It is not known if he survived. As an exemplar of the use of anthropological racial science in conjunction with SS service in the Third Reich, his career is worthy of study. Grohmann was only one of many who combined their medical expertise with anthropological training to better serve the Reich. They have remained anonymous too long.

Gretchen Schafft is an applied anthropologist at American University in Washington, D.C. Her email is gschafft@verizon.net.

Notes

Archives Cited

PA = Archiwum Panstowowe w Poznaniu (The State Archive of Poznan), Poznan, Poland.
LA = Archiwum Panstowowe w Łodzi (The State Archive of Łódź), Łódź, Poland
NA = National Archives, Washington, D.C., U.S.A.
MPGA = Max Planck Gesellschaft Archiv, Berlin, Germany.
BAK = Bundes Archiv Koblenz, Koblenz, Germany.

2. PA, Signatur 1106.
3. MPG, I.1A 2404/3, 49.
5. NA, Grohmann’s SS file. Roll Number A/3343, 550-033A.
6. MPG, I.1A 2413/7, Letter from Eugen Fischer to Herr Glum, 6 November 1934.
7. MPG, I.1A 2404/4, 57–59. Eugen Fischer’s report to the KWIA’s Board of Directors, 11 November 1940.
8. Ibid.
9. MPG, I.1A 2413/4.
10. Many of these names represent renowned anthropologists of the day. Rüdin and Conti, who were not anthropologists, faced prosecution for war crimes after the war. Conti committed suicide before his trial.
11. NA, op. cit.
12. ŁA, Signatur 28509, Vortrag in Posen am 10.2.43.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. ŁA, Signatur 31834, den 26 Juni 1940, An die Herren Regierungsräteinpräsident.
16. ŁA, Signatur 31834, 23.
17. BAK, R57 (neu 25) Standort 10, Magazin 11A, Akten K 2.03, Reihe 117, Vertraulich. Lagebericht für die Zeit, 1 October–31 December 1941
18. ŁA, Signatur 31870, 5(10).
19. Ibid.
20. PA, Signatur 1137, Eindeutschung polnischer Waisenkinder, n.d.
22. Ibid.
23. ŁA, Signatur 31868.
25. PA, Signatur 1137, Abschrift Erb- und Rassenpflege als Grundlagen biologischer Volksstumsplanpolitik Dr Grohmann, 7 October 1941.
26. Ibid.
27. ŁA, Signatur 31870.
28. ŁA, Signatur 31814, Aufbau und Aufgaben der Abteilung Erb- und Rassenpflege, 6 (88).
29. Ibid.

References
