**Evacuated to Death: the lexicon, concept and practice of mobility in the Nazi deportation and killing machine**

‘But how was one to rehabilitate and transform words betrayed and perverted by the enemy? Hunger—thirst—fear—transport—selection—fire—chimney: these words all have intrinsic meaning, but in those times, they meant something else’

Elie Wiesel, 2008 [1958], *Night,* Penguin Books, p. ix

*“[Mr Rampton reading from Himmler] […] “I am referring to the Jewish evacuation programme, the extermination of the Jewish people”*

*[…]*

*Q. [Mr Rampton]: The point I wish to draw your attention to is this, that there, Himmler, speaking to SS chiefs, or whatever it was, uses evacuation and extermination synonymously, does he not?*

*A. [Mr Irving]: In that case, yes.”*

David Irving vs Penguin Books and Deborah Lipstadt, Day 6 Transcript, 19th January 2000

**A Introduction**

From the excerpt of the Irving vs Penguin books and Deborah Lipstadt libel trial reproduced above, we are reminded of what Elie Wiesel would called the betrayal of words within the Nazi deportation and killing machine of European Jews. How could evacuation be deployed in these contexts and for these purposes? Isn’t evacuation an act of protection, moving someone or somebody to safety and away from harm? What is so crucial here is not simply that the practices of the Holocaust were termed evacuations, however inappropriate, misleading and murderous that was, but how and why their meaning was utterly ‘betrayed’.

In the name of protection, evacuation has always had the potential to become otherwise which this paper explores through particular version(s) (on versions see Anderson and Adey 2012) of evacuation in the unlikely context of the state apparatus of Nazi Germany. As the expert, who Hannah Arendt characterised as the ‘the master who knew how to make people move’ (Arendt 1963), Adolf Eichmann – the bureaucrat at the head of the Nazi deportations and transports – is an exemplary if untrustworthy spokesman for how evacuation became a euphemistic device to conceal or cloak its ultimate purpose. For European Jews it meant deportation, transportation, forced labour and mass killings, where death could come in either one of those stages - even when the death camps themselves were evacuated towards the end of the war (Blatman 2011).[[1]](#endnote-1) In these contexts, ‘evacuation’ *is*, but *is also* more-than, a misnomer.

We are perhaps used to thinking about evacuation in very different ways to this. To have been “evacuated” often implies a kind of welfare, a controlled process of mobility – an emergency mobility (Adey 2016) - that is conducted as part of a state’s, institution’s, organisation’s or civil society’s responsibility to protect citizens, workers or inhabitants (Davies and Glanville 2010; Glanville 2013). We know that evacuation occurs under the pre-tenses of protection and humanitarian response for populations. We also know, of course, just how inequitable and dangerous evacuation mobilities can be (Cresswell 2008). To have been ‘evacuated’ does not automatically mean the equitable transportation of someone from one place to another, but, in some cases, a disorganised and highly unequal mess of imperfect or non-existent systems, leaving a vulnerable populace left to largely fend for themselves (Graham 2005; Smith 2006). Equally, evacuations can be performed in disproportionate, racist, sexist and heavy-handed ways. In many instances evacuation may not happen at all (as Sheller (2013) has shown in Haiti).

In this paper I want to show how evacuation – the arts, practices, logics, rationalities and technologies – the complex geographies of moving people (and people moving) out of the way - goes to the heart of how societies and states have learnt how to protect, while it is a key way in which they have killed, waged and managed war, and persecuted, punished and separated peoples from their rights, property and freedoms (see, in a different context, Tyner 2014; 2017). Whilst it takes an extreme setting and example, the German state’s coding, logistics and distortion of evacuation, deportation and killing, often under Eichmann’s IV B4 department within the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA), the Reich Security Main office, it is remarkably consistent within a broader logic of evacuation mobility in very different contexts. Nazi evacuations display one clear and extreme pole of evacuation mobility. They are destructive *and* expulsive, and we might find in the critical or counter-history of evacuation of sorts performed in this paper, a genealogy of the assembly not simply of protection, but what Adi Ophir (2007) has called a ‘disaster producing apparatus’. And yet, in this version, the capacity to persecute, disempower or dispossess and ultimately destroy is *also* protective. Both catastrophe and care, or ‘care and control’, may actually rely on one another (in the context of the humanitarian response to Ebola see Pallister-Wilkins 2016).

In the rest of the paper we will see that the Nazi forms of evacuation were a measure of disguise. The sequencing and transportation of Jewish (and others) peoples, were a process which the Nazi’s used and legitimised grotesquely for the protection of the Reich and the Volk. But we will see that the Nazis did not merely kill *instead* of evacuation, rather they were able to do so through the techniques evacuation named, gave shape to, but also hid, concealed and made indistinct through other forms of mobility. In the shifting and promiscuous language of the Nazi’s, along with the confusion and excess of the horrors evacuation actually constituted, this betrayal of meaning may help us realise how evacuations and other forced mobilities are able to take place.

In the next section of the paper I situate evacuation within a wider set of geographical approaches before discussing several genealogical threads to evacuation. These threads, however partial, help us to determine some of the evolution of evacuation as an idea, but also introduce us to quite different ‘versions’ of evacuation pertinent to the Nazi context.

**B Geographies of Evacuation:**

There are many kinds of evacuation. Evacuation can have different purposes and consequences, intended or otherwise. Most often, however, it contains nebulous and elastic limits in relation to other kinds of categories, terms and processes of mobility: who or what is evacuated and how do they count for it? Where is one evacuated to or from? What is a perceivable cause for an evacuation, and when should it cease? By what means or angle or vehicle (Walters 2015) is evacuation accomplished? And who is given authority to declare, advise or carry out an evacuation?

It is in a broad zone of indistinction - common to emergency and interpretations of the spatial theory of the Nazi’s (Agamben 1998; Giaccaria and Minca 2011b) - where many evacuations tend to happen, and we must attempt to account for this ambiguity and not exclude it in any theory or study of evacuation. Prior research in geography has been somewhat lacking on evacuation explicitly – despite the sharpening of focus during Hurricane Katrina (Smith 2006; Li et al. 2008; Cutter 2006) and other recent emergencies. An exception might be the aligning of geography with evacuation planning and behavioural science within fields such as disaster studies in the early 1980’s (Cutter and Barnes 1982; Cutter 1991; Zeigler, Brunn, and Johnson Jr 1981), but also an earlier relationship between geography, operational research methods and cold war evacuation planning in civil defence measures in North America through the work of William Garrison (see particularly Barnes and Farish 2006).

During these convergences Kosinsky and Brunn’s (1991) ground-breaking survey of urban evacuation acknowledged the ‘polymorphous’ character of the term, suggesting that because of this nature:

‘evacuation straddles the boundaries between circulation and migration and between other modes of movement. Perhaps more effectively than any other subset of the larger phenomena it fortifies the contention that human mobility in all its endless variety constitutes a seamless whole’ (Zelinsky and Kosinski 1991: 304).

Despite or perhaps because of this polysemy, evacuation is a curiously empty concept. Indeed, it is often deployed under certain political rationalities that are very good at legitimising evacuation precisely by depoliticising its mobility. Tim Cresswell, for example, explores the continual efforts by New Orleans city authorities in 2005 to deny that any racial politics could exist within the prejudices of the city’s evacuation plan during Hurricane Katrina’s obliteration of parts of New Orleans and Louisiana (Cresswell 2006). Evacuation can be considered as a necessity in emergency, as we see in other crisis and emergency logics. But it can be *evacuated* of any substance of social and political meaning. This easily reduces or sinks evacuation to an unthought, abstract or technical process within narrow political evaluation (see again Barnes and Farish (2006)).

Evacuation as a term, label or verbalisation is also a curiously affirmative act despite its connotations with retreat, negativity or as a rupture from the home. As much as it may be caused or triggered by particular logics and rationalities that identify a reason and process for an evacuation, it also constitutes its own justification. Evacuation’s enunciation quickly declares something to be moved away, a space that requires emptying, and a reason to leave or clear a population from a territory. The very act of evacuation can then easily overtake its own impulse. It also has the ring of organisation, it conditions its necessity, and may settle dissenting points of view.

My focus, following Elden’s (2013) genealogy of territory is to be led by when and where evacuations have been designated, conceptualised and practiced as such. Indeed, Elden’s specific historical-geographical methodology leads him towards relations between what is named evacuation and other cognate terms, and how particular ‘politics-power-place-practices’ are labelled on the other, moving ‘between meaning and designation, between concepts and practices’ (Elden 2003: 18). Thought in these terms, evacuation is primarily the simple act of moving away, or being moved away, from danger. This can be autonomous, people regularly evacuate under their own volition. Others follow advice to self-evacuate. Evacuation can be governed, supported, and sometimes ordered too, depending on the context. In this light, evacuation usually occurs within a temporal relation to a moment of crisis or emergency, what Ben Anderson (2017) has identified in several ways: as an exception, from a constitutional crisis to decisions over exceptional measures as ‘periodic intensifications of sovereign power’; an ‘urgency’ to meet the exception with response within an ‘interval’, or the ‘gap or break during which emergency action can still make a difference’ (Anderson 2017, 470; see also Anderson 2016). Evacuations may happen in advance of a predicted danger as an act of precaution. Evacuations can also happen during and after a potential event in order to prevent worse or sustained damage to a community, or as events become more unsafe.

As discussed above, evacuation is almost always deployed under a logic of protection; something or someone is protected by the very act of moving someone or something out of the way. And yet, the protected are not always those who are moved out of the way of harm, but potentially *into* harm. Evacuations can be what Adi Ophir (2007) calls ‘disaster producing’. Given the social science and geographical scholarship on New Orleans’ and Louisiana’s experience of Hurricane Katrina (understandingkatrina.ssrc.org), this kind of interpretation is not uncommon from within some of the critical academic attention to evacuation.

Other kinds of logics and practices, however contradictory, can coexist with evacuation. Which is to say that we must recognise how evacuation has been used in ways that go far beyond euphemism, or, indeed, an unintended outcome or a structural inequality. In some contexts, we find that evacuation has been considered one part of a process of, for example, resettlement – evacuation being the technical sequence of removal. So we have evacuation/rehousing; evacuation/emigration; evacuation/eviction; evacuation/destruction, as Ariella Azoulay explicates in the forced displacement caused by Arab-Israeli partition in the formation of the State of Israel. Such a process was set within what she identifies as a context of a wider and pernicious deployment of other bureaucratic terms, such as “repatriation” and transfer, or what she calls ‘different ways not to say deportation’. Medical evacuations effectively justified the ‘evacuation of their [Palestinians] “own free will”’ from the Jewish to Arab zone in Jaffa in 1948, which was captured within an ICRC archive of photographs (Azoulay 2012; 2011). How could repatriation – a neutral term - and evacuation - an apparently positive one - be used by an ICRC archivist to express the plight of peoples ‘being driven across the borders of the new state that has just been founded’ asks Azoulay (2012)?

Evacuation is so troubling, then, not only because its motivations are highly varied, but because it can become indistinct from other words, concepts and practices and thus particularly difficult to extract or distinguish from them. I think it is helpful to consider these spatial and political indistinctions through what Israeli philosopher Adi Ophir (2007) calls a ‘catastrophic’ relation to emergency for both self-government and the practices of the state (Johns 1999). Tracing the history of emergency response and preparation for disaster within modern Europe, Ophir finds that European cities and their colonies were frequently laid waste to according to divine providence. For Huskinson, most governments ‘resorted to theodicy’, earthquakes could even be accepted in their providential nature, ‘as part of God's plan, and as conducive to the long-term moral improvement of Christians’ (Hutchinson 2000, 5). While the formation of humanitarian tools, organisations and principles would see their absorption within different modern state apparatus in order to protect in what Ophir identifies in a ‘providential state’, a ‘catastrophic state’ relates to emergency differently.

As the mirror image of the providential state, Ophir (2007) sees a totalitarian system at the most extreme end of a continuum of more or less ‘devastating disaster producing apparatuses’. He writes,

‘For the providential state formation, the abandonment of a designated population is always an aberration of the system; for the catastrophic state formation, it is the fundamental rule upon which the system rests’.

In these moments, a state logic of catastrophe does not seek to include its inhabitants or citizens in order to push a disaster outside of itself, but to produce and administer disasters and emergencies to bring disaster inside. Both logics or forms are intertwined. Indeed, the ‘state’s disastrous policies are usually justified and become legitimized by a providential promise directed at one sector of the governed population only’ (2007: 23).

Zones, cordons, boundaries and apparently empty spaces fulfil particular state and territorial logics of security and emergency within evacuation (see Zeigler, Brunn, and Johnson Jr 1981). Through these orders evacuation produces outsides, those who fall just beyond its protection, those it designates as deserving of evacuation, and those it moves precisely in order to protect others, resources or property. These outsides are highly spatialised. As Leon Hempel suggests, an ‘evacuation zone’ separates, ‘risk from the supposedly secure area that divides the space, creating by the solid line a topographic order which is intended to enable the controlled escape from the identified hazard zone.’ (Hempel 2012 *my translation*). But there are other geographies to evacuation than the zone and the shifting boundaries of states advancing and retreating. Instead, lines and vectors, concentric rings, train carriages and camps multiply a range of different spaces, scales, places and what we might call disciplined, ‘carceral’ (Moran, Piacentini, and Pallot 2012), and ‘violent’ (Culver 2018) mobilities. These open out other ways in which state logics are performed and operationalized through evacuation, as well as a range of sites and movements to which we should turn to understand it.

**C A Nazi Geo-politics of Evacuation: Lexicon, Concept and Practice**

An array of contemporary work has traced out the Nazi geopolitical and biopolitical organisation of space, population and territory (Barnes and Minca 2012; Giaccaria and Minca 2011; 2015).[[2]](#endnote-2) These writings illustrate the centrality of a bureaucracy driving the Nazi killing machine through mobility. The organisation of Nazi mobility meant a shifting policy of ad-hoc persecution, discrimination and dispossession that evolved from voluntary emigration to organised and forced population movements and deportations whose end was the death-chambers, death in labour, or death during the eventual liquidation of the camps. Evacuation was central to the way in which this process was understood, practiced and, critically, debated, disguised and confused.

In terms of how the Nazi’s organised this mobility Adolf Eichmann is central. He was, for Hannah Arendt, the chief bureaucrat of movement. Eichmann’s section of the RSHA, IVD4, was responsible for ‘emigration and evacuation’, and later in March 1941, re-designated as subsection b4 responsible for the more general Jewish ‘Affairs and Evacuation’ (see Cesarani 2005). Eichmann’s department – with the only facilities to ‘execute an evacuation of Jews *en mass’* - took control of organising Nazi evacuations within the Reich and its annexed territories, whilst supporting evacuation from occupied states (Arendt 1963, 76). Eichmann’s section was responsible for enabling the restriction of Jewish mobility through Germany, but it was also the culmination of a bureaucratic move of responsibility for transportations from Albert Rapp’s ‘Staff for the Evacuation of Poles and Jews to the Generalgouvernment’ from the annexed Wartheland from Poland in 1939.

At first blush, the way evacuation was weaved into the Nazi’s plans for the final solution appears relatively clear as an evolution of resettlement, settlement, racial ordering policy and mass killing. Evacuation, in several forms, is set clearly in alliance with death. The concept is set-out in the Wannsee conference of 1942 when the “evacuation” eastwards of all Jews in Germany and its annexed or aligned states is planned as an industrial logistical process of forced mobility through a ministerial bureaucracy headed by Heydrich and planned by Eichmann (Roseman 2003; Gerlach 1998). Eichmann is regarded once again by Arendt as an “expert in forced evacuation”. He assessed transport capacity, the demand at the extermination and labour centres at the concentration camps. In Hungary Eichmann organised 450,000 people to be “evacuated” to Auschwitz by the end of the war. But both evacuation and Nazi mobilities were actually far more complicated and convoluted.

The purpose and experience of the wider Nazi transports, deportations and death-trains has been undeniably well-told as complex, messy and contradictory forms of forced movement within a wider Nazi mobility economy of war materials, military personnel, slave-labour, Jews and protected civilian evacuees. As Tim Cole has shown in different places, the Holocaust was, ‘constantly moving’, it started in the ‘east and then headed westwards within the expanding space of German victory followed by the shrinking space of German defeat’ (Cole 2016, 226). It was also multiple, taking place through multiple places in multiple events, and it was mobile, involving forced movements and reciprocated movements of concentration and killing, but also ‘escape and hiding’ (2016: 3) across national borders - along railway track and road - as well as within those of the occupied territories.

Take two different movements. Testimonies of deportees from the Reich to concentration camps, and the experience of camp evacuees during the liquidation of Auschwitz in 1945 by the SS. For Simone Gigliotti (2016) these mobilities resemble the ‘death worlds’ of the concentration camp experience, which she shows in her critique of the spatial sedentarism within some holocaust scholarship. Gigliotti focuses on the experience of these mobilities and journeys, when time was to be ‘endured, embodied and violated’ in what she calls a ‘suffocating presentism of movement’, found between the ‘closed mobility of the train carriage and open mobility during evacuation columns’ (Gigliotti 2016, 343). As Cole (2016) and others (Blatman 2011) have shown also, the systematic process of killing in the camps, could be compared to the ad-hoc discretionary processes of forced evacuation of the camps on the roads. Meanwhile the apparent openness of the road was actually a blurring of boundaries of enforcement and death, as the ‘camps in motion’ saw the idea of escape ‘reworked to mean not only an active choice to flee, but failing to remain within the shifting boundaries of the march’ (Cole 2016: 179).

The story of evacuation here sits even more messily within these processes as the camp itself is put into motion. How was it that evacuation evolved to killing, or the final solution? How could it simultaneously name the process of deportation from the Reich, to evacuation from a death camp back to it, where death was met along the way? Where did these processes come from? How did other kinds of evacuation exist and for whom?

Many other authors have been unpicking the banal workings of the bureaucrat or ‘desk killers’, who imposed their ‘primordial inscription upon the blank page of a more or less isotropic plane’ (Clarke, Doel, and McDonough 1996, 476) onto Germany and its annexed territories. In this context, Barnes (2015) and Minca (Barnes and Minca 2012) have shown how academic and professionalized geographic knowledge and expertise was mobilized in that planning, particularly through Walter Christaller’s notions of central place which specified coordinated and hierarchical settlements (see especially Aly and Heim 2002) under the Reichcommissioner for the Strengthening of German Nationhood. It is within this nexus of knowledge, expertise and codified systems of administration where evacuation was enrolled as a technical solution to purify the Reich and as a means to hide that process. It is also there that Giaccaria and Minca identify how a ‘new space of semiotic indeterminacy was created’ where territorial and genocidal solutions emerged and merged, often through the codified expressions of spatial planning and its tools,

‘systematically described with the spatial language of the movement/relocation of populations (not only the Jews) and terms like Umsiedlung (resettlement), Aussiedlung (transportation) or Entfernung (distance, but also ‘expulsion’ and ‘removal’—as, for a surgeon, the removal of a tumour), reflecting a significant degree of continuity between the language of the territorial solution and the one adopted to describe the different stages towards the Final Solution, between regional and urban planning and biopolitical violence’ (Giaccaria and Minca 2011a, 74).

In what follows we find evacuation as a political technology of mobility in a series of bureaucratically organised processes and practices which seemed to have worked because of how well they obscured and obfuscated, even in the name of protection and where contradictory measures - from the most horribly cruel to the caring – can exist in almost the same space.

**Lexicon**

How can such a paradox of terms exist? Schmitz-Berning (1998) makes this contradiction even more stark in her dictionary of the Nazi’s lexicon where ‘Evacuate/Evacuation’ has two apparently opposing meanings: ‘a) to clear regions vulnerable to war or bombardment of women and children; b) to deport Jews with the object of destroying them’ (Schmitz-Berning 1998, 5; Torrie 2010).[[3]](#endnote-3) We must ask therefore, what makes such a doubling or dissonance possible? How can a technology be both for protecting space and people, and killing? How can evacuation be used for moving the vulnerable exposed to danger out of the way, to moving another group of the populace precisely in order to expose them *to* danger - to evacuate them to death?

Part of the reason for this is the coupling or indistinction of terms Minca and Giaccaria explicate as the ‘semiotic indeterminacy’ manufactured by the Nazis in what Shoshana Felman (2001) might call a ‘space of slippage’ of language and law (Giaccaria and Minca 2011a). Even Hannah Arendt’s use of language and her own translation of the German ‘*Aussiedlung’* (resettlement) and ‘*Evakiuerung’* (Evacuation) in different editions of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* are inconsistent and contradictory, sometimes conflating and translating ‘Aussiedlung’ with ‘Evakuierung’ and vice versa.[[4]](#endnote-4) The same is also the case of original Nazi documents. Part of the reason for this is confusion and deliberate disguise. Evacuation was a linguistic cloaking or lexical mutation common to the war-time evolution of the Nazi bureaucracy, which meant it was deliberately made common with, conflated, and replaced other terms (Arendt 1963, 65).

As a signifier within those codes, forced Jewish mobilities become entangled in the Nazi’s penchant for secrecy, myth and propaganda in order to call a thing something it was not. There are several reasons for the cloaking of the intent of these measures, some of which was ensuring the compliance of those intended for death, as well as a broader geopolitical game to assure international actors looking in and the Jewish leadership within and outside Germany. Both of these imperatives would come together in examples such as the Theresienstadt (Berkley 2002) concentration camp in occupied Czechoslovakia which received international publicity and was beautified in accordance with the disguise of its living conditions (Troller, Shatzky, and Cernyak-Spatz 2004). Its real purpose was lulling ‘German Jews and the world into complacency about the “evacuations”’, suggested the late David Cesarani (2005, 134).

Historians have also been at pains to debate and secure the actual conceptual and practical meaning of these terms as depicted within the court cases of Adolph Eichmann, and Irving vs Liptstad and Penguin Books (discussed below), and less so to disambiguate evacuation within the various processes of Nazi mobility. It is of course a difficult and confusing problem for historiography too, and one where the lexical disorientation of the Nazi’s continues. Take Philip Rutherford’s (2003) forensic but linguistically confusing description of *1. Nahplan*, one of the first plans in 1939 to deport Polish Jews and non-Jews, those that the Nazi’s constructed as ‘an immediate danger to the German nationhood’, from the Reichsgau Wartheland to the Generalgouvement (see also Browning 2014). Ironically the Wartheland was where many *Kinderlandverschickung* (see below) children were evacuated to (Hermand 1997). For Rutherford,

“local officials were entrusted with the selection of deportees, the organization of evictions, the establishment of a transit camp and the transport of the evictees to it, the provision of a meal for the deportees before departure, and the outfitting of evacuation trains with straw for warmth and rudimentary equipment (specifically buckets) for sanitation’ (Rutherford 2003, 253).

In this sentence, Rutherford uses eviction and deportation, both similar but quite different practices of removal and forced movement. Both are also labels and subjective conditions and experiences that again are very different – ‘evictees’ and ‘deportees’. Rutherford also refers to an evacuation train, so evacuation in this instance is the means of removal out of the Wartheland. And all during a period when the murderous intentions of ‘evacuation’, or ‘deportation’ had not yet been made clear. In other words, evacuation is often used almost interchangeably with other intentions, practices and subjective states of mobility. Evacuation, as we have discussed, was also used to describe the transport of concentration camp prisoners back into the Reich for their labour by the final stages of the war; a means to empty the death camps in a manner which would rid their guards of their prisoners - killing them by moving (see below). It was also a form of civil protection for vulnerable members of the general populace who were removed from metropolitan centres.

Evacuation had different meanings before and during the war for different peoples too. In Germany and occupied France, extensive measures were designed to protect the rest of the ethnic German populace by evacuating people, primarily women, children and the vulnerable, however reluctantly. They were also provided with an evacuation allowance of subsistence. The Jews, asocials, mental health patients and other categorized designations were excluded from this provision on the grounds of ‘ideology and security’. Torrie (2010) identifies the case of a Jewish woman who had been put forward for evacuation by a neighbor until the National Socialist People’s Welfare (NSV) organisation representatives realized her origins and she was identified for deportation. In this instance, a potential protective measure of evacuation, saw the woman identified for the expulsive and ultimately destructive version of ‘evacuation’.

Civilian evacuations of other German citizens, and their categorisation was further confused in the manner of the designation of ‘evacuee’. Both ethnic German and Jew could be designated under the same term. This intimately entwined the subjection of the Jews to an *exclusion* from evacuation policies intended to protect the subject of evacuation, while they would be *included* within the expulsive/destructive ones intended to remove them from the territory of the state under the logic that the act would protect it and its peoples. In this sense, the category of civilian evacuee within the Nazi lexicon becomes increasingly difficult to place as ‘victim or perpetrator’, because as Torrie argues, even an ethnic ‘germanic evacuee’ could be understood as ‘both war victims and at the same time […] consenting beneficiaries of state policies that oppressed those not considered to be part of the “national community”’ (2010: 7). How could both versions co-exist and interfere with one another?

The Nazi leadership actually strained not to call the more ‘protective’ population movements evacuations. Civil ‘evacuations’ were sometimes adopted through other sets of terms in order to avoid the use of ‘evacuation’ altogether. Dietmar Süss has explained that other neutral terms were employed in its place, such as ‘re-accommodation’ and ‘people who had been re-accommodated’ (Süss 2014, 74). The regime preferred *umquartieren* to *evakuieren* in order to emphasise what Torrie calls the ‘temporary, provisional quality of the measures’ (2010: 10), but also to differentiate these measures from those used by other states within Europe. For the Nazi’s civil evacuation was defeatist and exemplified French cowardice and disorderly conduct. It simply did not fit the vision of a mobilised German community. As Peter Fritzche makes clear in his analysis of popular contributions to *Gasschutz und Luftschultz* - an air raid protection journal in the early 1930’s:

‘For the state to let down its guard and "demobilize" its citizens was to invite the social disorder and political fragmentation that were supposedly endemic in the democracies. Evacuation from the cities had to be avoided at all costs, not simply because it was technically infeasible, clogging roads and straining suburban resources, but also because it upended civil repose, threw people helter-skelter into the streets, ripped apart families - "the germ cell of the state" - and thus induced individual selfishness and defeatism. It was the end of a defensible society’ (207).

The front cover of the journal featured planes overflying a generic German city, with a huge floating protective hand sheltering the buildings below, taking refuge under the responsibilities of community and state. This, not evacuation, was the priority.[[5]](#endnote-5) Given these other potential associations, another reason for why ‘it seemed inappropriate to use the same word to describe both deportations and the transfer of vulnerable members of the “national community”’, was indeterminably added (Torrie 2010, 10).

And yet, the more familiar form of evacuation under *luftschutz* - German air raid precautions - was actually common and extensive (Klee 1999), as the *generalmajor* and post-war head of German civilian defense Erich Hampe set-out in technical and almost boastful terms in his history in 1963.[[6]](#endnote-6) And despite the misgivings, even evacuation drills in the pre-war preparedness for air raids was a common propaganda technique which began in the summer of 1933 under the newly founded Reich Civil Defense League who launched a national air readiness campaign (see Fritzsche 1997, 209). For Earl Beck, this had much to do with the total ‘extreme bureacratization’ of everyday life, designating at the most local level organisation and designation of responsibilities, ‘throughout the air raids the local agencies for relief to the victims were active and apparently quite efficient, the local party leaders sought to emphasize their concern, to arrange evacuation of women and children’ (Beck 1982, 335).

The voluntary evacuation of children during the *erweiterte* or the ‘extended’ *Kinderlandverschickung* program organised by the Reichsdienststelle KLV and the NSV, as far as possible, tried to avoid the term too. They wanted to avoid the (stronger) pre-war association of evacuation with weakness, nor undermine civilian confidence in the war effort. Instructions emphasised that whilst the measures would share ‘to a certain extent the traits of an evacuation’, a health measure would be ‘more acceptable to parents than a full-fledged evacuation’(Torrie 2010, 52). ‘Freimachung’ was sometimes used, meaning ‘vacation’ (Gärtner 2012; see also Hermand 1997). During the first kinder evacuations in 1940, ‘Evakuierung’ was absolutely to be avoided, public announcements initially forbidden, the foreign press were not to be informed, and the spreader of a rumour of ‘forced’ evacuation measures would be threatened with the concentration camp, warned Goebbels (Kock 1997, 75 n 21). Newspapers would continually refer to the evacuations as if they were the means for the German youth to be taken to educational and recreational camps (Kock, 1997, 77).

However, the pre-war discourse, like the wartime codings, were actually quite fraught. A series of articles published in *Gasschutz und Luftschutz* in 1935 by Munich police officer Nagel, articulate the value and benefit of evacuation [discussed as *Räumung*], for around 20-22% of the total population of a city with ‘medium vulnerability’. It suggested plans to disperse urban populations by truck, railway, automobile and pedestrian marches, through road blocks, signage and organisation, as well as how to deal with temporary housing in reception areas, food supplies and the moving of livestock. Evacuation, Nagel suggested, should be voluntary, but require – in order to prevent panic – a level of control and coercion.[[7]](#endnote-7) Two years later in the same journal, an imposing military figure would advocate erasing evacuation from the national vocabulary of civil defence altogether. Retired artillery General Grimme argued this point, ‘the word evacuation as a civil defence measure’ he would write ‘should disappear from the air raid protection vocabulary of the German people’ (Grimme cited in Torrie 2010, 18). His article argued that in its place, the German people should remain *in their place*, and observe their spiritual or moral duty to prepare, unto death.[[8]](#endnote-8)

If Grimme’s article seemed to close the debate, by 1940 it was open once more. Evacuation was more regularly used and eventually evolved into far wider discourse and apparatus, showing up in Goebbles’ diary entries regularly in 1943. As the Allied’s strategic bombing forced a reconceptualization of civil evacuation policy, Nicholas Steneck has shown that Goebbels’ would begin to consider that the ‘“evacuation problem” was now critical and required emergency action’ (Steneck 2005, 58; Klee 1999).

In this sense, as the Nazi’s had moved their position towards the final solution, they confusingly moved the lexicon over civil protection to the language of evacuation too. And yet, what is of no doubt was the implication of these terms for the different populations they were intended to move. Some holocaust denial has relied on confusing this point, to attempt to take the term of evacuation at its face value. David Irving’s libel claims against Penguin Books and the historian Deborah Lipstadt is another case in point when evacuation’s lexical meaning is problematized in the space of the courtroom. One of the issues the court case revolved around was whether it was possible to hold schemes like the Madagascar Project – a ludicrously ambitious and probably hoaxed plan to send 4 million Jews to Madagascar - as actual evacuation plans that would not involve mass killing, nor require Hitler’s own knowledge of them. This was Irving’s position. Or, rather, as the defendants argued – especially expert witness historians Richard Evans and Peter Longerich who were cross-examined at length by Irving - that references to evacuation were predominantly ‘euphemistic’, the relationship synonymous (euphemism has also been identified as a key technique of Nazi concealment *and* Holocaust denial (Vidal-Naquet 1992), and that the evacuation or deportation and execution of the Jewish population were so ‘intimately connected that is impossible to draw a distinction between them’, summed up the judgement.

Historical truth however, can be easily twisted within the dramatic space of the courtroom trial, especially Eichmann’s (Felman 2001). Commensurable with the layer of fictions, Nazi jargon and testimony that interweave deportation and mass killing, was Arendt’s notice of a kind of suspension of reality during Eichmann’s trial. The courtroom dramatics and confusion of Eichmann’s and others’ testimony in Jerusalem through the vast court transcripts, documents and charts - Eichmann interpreted some 15 multi-coloured hierarchical graphs - was ‘an exception’ for Arendt obfuscating speech, ‘let alone of the rare capacity for distinguishing between things that had happened’ (Arendt 1963, 224). The speechlessness evoked in other writers from the trial, like Muriel Spark (Bailey 2011), point not only to actually establishing a clearer notion of the Nazi’s terminology, concept and practices of evacuation, but an affective excess in the labyrinth names and practices bound up in evacuation and their abstract and affective incongruity with the practices they described. It is to this end that Arendt famously argued that Eichmann could not and did not speak except through the banalities and clichés of the Nazi coded language and officialese of which evacuation was crucial. As Felman summarises, it was Eichmann’s ‘autistic ventriloquism) of technocratic Nazi language’ which is what’ incriminates him above all in Arendt's eyes’ (Felman 2001, 204).

Irving’s trial, while similarly excessive in the line of questioning, reveals a different set of slippages of language. As the expert witnesses showed, Irving had repeated the Nazi tricks of evacuation by deliberately misreading and misrepresenting evidence within his arguments, mistranslating words and phrases, and moreover, transposing quotes and evidence of Hitler’s guilt and complicity so as to conceal it. As Evans puts it, ‘falsifying statistics, misrepresenting testimony, attributing false conclusions to reliable sources, using evidence which he knew to be unreliable or forged, and bending reliable sources to fit his arguments’ (Evans 2002, 191). Evans even accused Irving himself of using euphemism - his pretension to holocaust ‘analysis’ rather than ‘denial’.

The point here is that while the intent and historical character of evacuation as a mode of killing was undeniably clear, when we begin to unpick the designation from the concept, practices and other senses and uses of the term preceding and contemporary to the Final Solution, even if the politics is knotted up within the roots of some holocaust denial, we need not dispense with these relations of intimacy and indistinction. They are primarily essential to evacuation’s duplicity, as much as they are to those who would wish to deny the Holocaust altogether.

**Concept**

In readdressing what Arendt referred to as a ‘negative demographic policy’, for many historians Nazi evacuation is synonymous with destruction. Bogdan Musial perhaps makes this most clear in the investigation of the notion in Operation Reinhard, the plan to transfer all remaining Jews in the Generalgouvernement of Poland immediately from Lublin in 1942 to the East. For Musial the meaning of ‘evacuating of the Jews across the [river] Bug” was clear to all the participants — it was synonymous with their murder […] “evacuation” was synonymous with death’ (Musial 2000). Within this infrastructural logic of violence, evacuation was mobilised in such a way that saw its logic of protection distorted to include and exclude the Jewish population from its very different versions according to wider discursive-ideological notions of race, population and territory.

But while evacuation primarily meant death - eventual destruction was what was implied as a goal - it is still too reductive to suggest that that is all evacuation was in the broader Nazi imagination of ideas, measures and processes of mass population transfers within and outside German territory. As Cole has argued (above), these too were in motion.

Within what Barnes and Minca (2012) have called the ‘dark geographies’ of the third Reich, evacuation also existed as a protective measure provided for the ethnic German population, as we have seen. This version of evacuation was notably excluded to Jews whilst it was an aggressive way to rid the Reich of them. Within this twisted logic, evacuation was still about protection, but invented for the racial and territorial security of the state and its peoples which Jews were to be eradicated from. Its discourses and practices were produced through a spatio-regional notion of a Germany and its territories emptied of Jews, yet open for ‘ethnic’ German settlement. This somehow made sense because evacuation subsisted within a wider spatio-mobile imagination of Nazism which articulated a ‘deterritorialisation’ of Jews into an archipelago of prisons, concentration and death camps, and even, as noted above, fantastical extra-territorial plans of expulsion to West Africa. It was also a reterritorialising move (Clarke, Doel, and McDonough 1996; Barnes and Minca 2012) to nurture and protect German racial purity in settling the land. As a form of security, evacuation legitimised a spatial threshold of the state and its territories which justified the evacuation of that space according to a skewed moral geography.

Ian Klinke (2018) has shown that such an idea of racial and territorial purity – which extermination would solve – was the problem which inter-war German geopolitical theorists were grappling with which proved so inspirational to the Nazi regime. Both Ratzel and Haushofer, suggests Klinke, naturalised the idea of ‘extermination as a process in world politics’ which could lay the ‘basis for a policy that saw extermination as a strategy to ensure the nation’s survival in a competitive environment’ (Klinke 2018, 31). The nation as a biological body, competing for national survival forms a continuity with a physiological but expulsive body evacuating unwanted internal and polluting substances from within its boundaries – this is common to earlier medicalised notions of evacuation. *Lebensraum,* as Clarke et al (1996) put it,worked internally as an ‘ontological ordering characterized by the systematic expulsion of its own internally engendered waste’ (Clarke, Doel, and McDonough 1996, 476).

Seeing Jews as inhuman pollutants also carried over to the Polish populations of the Generalgouvernment. Governor General Hans Frank referred to them as ‘lice’, even if the plans to deal with them ‘were only superficially similar’ (Housden 1995, 485), but driven by different racial biological and economic concerns. There are continuities elsewhere too. With regard to the British experience of evacuation, especially of children, revisionist historians have sought to displace the apparent ‘myths’ of Operation Pied Piper, which began in September 1939 to evacuate children from urban centres during the threat of air raids and German invasion (Welshman 1998). The British experience of wartime evacuation has been understood as a crucial moment of social change in Britain, especially as evacuation’s mobilities and encounters revealed important fractures around class prejudice, racial suspicion, religious sectarianism, and where evacuees were subject to pathologised stereotypes as the carriers of disease, immorality and incivilities (Welshman 1999; Adey, Cox, and Godfrey 2016).

The modernist writer BS Johnson’s (1968) post-war collection *The Evacuees,* stands out for its serious engagement with the British evacuation through the work of many writers who experienced it. Of special relevance here is the understanding Johnson brought to evacuation which appears to have seeped into the rest of his writings. The collection pays special attention to what he called the more general or ‘clonic sense’ of evacuation, what Julia Jordan describes as ‘the evacuation of the body caused by the muscular contraction and relaxation of alimentary or digestive tract’ (2014, 138). As others have noticed in Johnson’s writing, evacuation is not a technical achievement of movement, but a state of being evacuated, a displacement of self. It is a kind of internal mobility tightly bound up with feeling and gendered associations of bodily discharges. Evacuations are a kind of abject waste. Somewhat in common with the ideological drives underpinning the Nazi evacuations of the Jews this elaboration is very important, and such a ‘clonic sense’ of the term actually remembers other meanings of evacuation from within the medical sciences.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Underpinning the Nazi notion of evacuation were ideas of space and mobility. For Giaccaria and Minca, geography, thought both topographically and topologically were key dimensions of the rationality at work within the Nazi imagination, writing, ‘space was also a rationale for genocide: spatial segregation in ghettoes and camps naturally increased mortality, they were planned and managed and often integrated with the surrounding cities and regions’ (Giaccaria and Minca 2016, 152). Auschwitz is more often understood as the perfect expression or ‘crystallisation’ of this ‘conceptual, spatial and temporal’ locus (Steinbacher 2005, 3).

Moreover, mobilities, like ‘evacuation’, were as essential to even the camp system itself (see Sofsky and Templer 2013), where mobility could be ‘accurately routinized, and turned into additional occasions for torture and murder’ (Giaccaria and Minca 2016: 152). Such expulsions relied upon the Nazi’s ideological prosecution of *Lebensraum* (living space) and *Entfernung* which would be expressed in the notion of a *Judenrein*, or a territory cleansed of the Jews. It is regularly repeated that Auschwitz alone had 44 parallel railway tracks, as many as New York’s Penn Station (Clarke, Doel, and McDonough 1996). The lines of the railways which would permit large scale armament and munitions movements across Europe, supported the modern bureaucracy and economy so essential to keeping the Nazi machine in motion. But this system, constituted by the Ministry of Transport with the help of the *Reichsbahn*, would also transfer Jews to the 5 or 6 Nazi killing centres in Eastern Europe. Indeed, as Cole and Giordarno note on the micro-geography of the ghetto in Budapest in the later stages of the war, the very process of ghettoization, was a story of ‘moving – or rather not moving – Jews, but also a story of moving – or rather not moving – non-Jews (Cole and Giordano 2016, 116).

Simone Gigliotti’s (2009) and Tim Cole’s (2011) ground-breaking work on Nazi deportations, also take our attention to a terrain of vectors of mobility and infrastructure outside Auschwitz, such as ‘railway stations, platforms, carriages, and tracks’, streets and physical landscapes that enable the spaces of exception to metamorphise ‘from banality to extremity’ (Gigliotti 2009, 65). Spaces of mobility and transit, and narratives of mobility of arrival and departure, ‘with its desperation, anticipation, and sense of motion without destination’ (Gigliotti 2009,65), not only held together the camp as a spatial-political formation – the camps were only possible with the constant turnover of transports containing prisoners and deportees - but also constituted a far wider experience of exception and evacuation.

We might even compare the Nazi concept of evacuation with the similarly entangled vehicle of Indian Partition, the railway, and the unbelievable violence that accompanied it during the massacres of the so-called ‘trains of death’, despite the myth of rationality often associated with the train under colonialism. Marion Aguiar sees the railway and its mobility as precisely what enabled trains and train carriages to become a metonym for modernity, a marker of national identity and, counterintuitively, as an abstraction - the trains representing religious and national ‘communal identities that were abstracted from bodies’ (Aguiar 2011, 85). For Aguiar it is exactly this ‘abstraction produced by mobility that enabled the violence to take place’ (85), but in so doing it is also what reverses the ultra-synonym of the train as modernity (Presner 2007). In this sense, the co-existence of mechanical rationality *with* but also *as* the means for inhuman violence, suggests that the train is almost the perfect symbol for the contradictions of evacuation within the Nazi concept.

The idea of evacuation varied quite markedly over the period of the Second World War and the Nazi’s time in power. Oral testimonies help to indicate how the populations subjected to evacuation understood the term, before and after the realisation of its real meaning.[[10]](#endnote-10) Evacuation became a modality or process to produce *Lebensraum* through deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. Sometimes this was simultaneous, where in the Warthegau, ‘evacuations and installations’ (the settling of Polish farms by dispossessing Polish families) could happen on the same day (Browning 2014, 66). In this sense, beyond the terminology of evacuation discussed in the last section, as a concept it was increasingly conflated with other Nazi ideological notions – expulsion was necessary for German resettlement.

This line of argumentation is highlighted again if we return to the Irving trial, and his wish to retrieve a difference of terms. Such an attempt was opposed by historian such as Richard Evans in written and oral evidence. Evacuation could not be called what it was in other contexts, as Irving argued it could in his own glossary which included “liquidieren, evakuieren, umsiedeln”, contending that these terms could be understood in a non-genocidal manner, contesting the broadly ‘euphemistic reading’, this time, of the defendants and their expert witnesses (in reverse to the above). In a sense Irving and the witnesses both agreed that different meanings could inhabit single words. What mattered to Longerich’s rebuttal was that the context within which the words could be used and interpreted should shape the historian’s understanding of events, to the extent that the German ‘Umsiedlung’ could have meant resettlement, but ‘more often embraces a homicidal meaning as well’. This is a crucial elaboration for as a concept for the Nazis it was also (in)distinct from the actions aimed at the protection and expansion of the German state and its ethnic community.

What is also clear is that evacuation and the way it evolved during the Nazi’s time in power, only gained in indistinction from other terms and concepts, and to far greater extremes than it would elsewhere. As Steinbacher argues ‘‘Resettlement’, ‘clearance’ and ‘evacuation’ were, between 1939 and 1941, still meant literally, and only gradually became synonyms for mass murder’ […] Earlier instances of expropriation and disenfranchisement had involved expulsion and deportation, but not killing’ (Steinbacher 2005, 81). Indeed, Conroy has argued that the idea of evacuation as protective, expulsive and destructive used in relation to the Nazi’s euthanasia programme (discussed in the next section), became muddled by the muddied understanding of evacuation within the regime itself, what it meant and who it was applied to, to the extent that those, ‘responsible for interpreting such orders were often uncertain of what was required of them, and sometimes chose the more extreme option, even when this had not been the original intent” (Conroy 2017).

By the end of the war the Nazi’s were evacuating or ‘liquidating’ concentration camps, death camps and POWs. Through this process thousands of prisoners were killed but by other means, notably through the camps’ own evacuations (on the death marches see the extraordinary Blatman 2011). Moreover, the Nazi’s evacuation of camps like Auschwitz, in the face of the Soviet’s advancement, was highly inconsistent. For example, it is possible to identify evacuations of prisoners who during mid-to-late 1944 and early 1945 were transported back into the Reich, as well as to Silesia, Dachau and elsewhere, primarily for the purpose of using their labour (although many would be worked to death), and not, as with the “death marches” - a term for the evacuation of the camps that Blatman has called a ‘voyage of murder and horror’ - with the intention of killing them and to prevent them falling into the hands of the Allied powers (Blatman 2011, 52). Gigliotti and Masurovsky qualify to what extent we are able to understand these intentions as really protective evacuations given, ‘the range of conditions that seriously undermined the possibility of that outcome’. This included the availability of train transport, the priority on the railway lines of other troop and resource transports, all within a ‘geography of persecution that exposed inmates to volatile and hostile conditions of German and Soviet military fronts, glacial weather, and the unpredictable behavior of camp guards and escorts’ (Gigliotti, Masurovsky, and Steiner 2014, 3).

As a concept, the Nazi form of evacuation applied to the Jews, dislocated evacuation-as-protection from the subject it moved. Within this mind-set, and a broader Nazi geopolitics there is still a logic, however twisted, to calling it evacuation, even if the object of protection is not the evacuee. Let us now turn to the Nazi’s practical measures of evacuation to see how different versions of evacuation interfered with one another in practice.

**Practice**

As we have seen evacuation was used inconsistently as a set of mobile practices. Death was almost always close behind, but it is important that we consider that the purpose and process also bound evacuation together with its different versions. The practices employed by the Nazi’s ‘evacuations’ of the Jews to killing centres ran in parallel to the evacuation measures identified for ethnic Germans. The first German civil evacuation order for the more general populace was given on the 29th August 1939. This meant moving ‘non essential’ civilians living between the Western border of Germany and the *Westwall*, including towns and villages and cities like Karlsruhe. The order was conducted by Nazi party officials, moving evacuees by train to reception areas in the German interior. Although the Nazi’s had become increasingly more ambivalent about evacuation as a potentially useful measure, compared to their pre-war distaste for the process, Torrie suggests that it had important consequences as a bureaucratic and practical learning point:

‘[Lessons] gained in fields as disparate as train scheduling and forcible billeting had an impact on programs ranging from the resettlement of Reich Germans in the occupied lands of the West to the far more sinister deportation of Jews and other undesirables to concentration camps’ (Torrie 2010: 34).

Similarly Steinbacher characterises the development of the human transports as an ‘administrative act’, a set of learning practices brought on by the evacuations, clearances and settlements so that, ‘with precise timetables, cost calculations and contingency plans’, the practices were ‘already routine long before the systematic murder of the Jews began’ (Steinbacher 2005, 81).

The office responsible, IVB4, was separated into subsections a and b. These differed in emphasis pre- and post 1941. Franz Novak was the officer responsible for coordinating the trains determined for evacuation within section a (Lozowick 2005; 1999). Novak would work with the *Reichsbahn* on planning international train transports and managing them. This meant allocating available space on the track to ensure there was capacity for evacuation, and ensuring there was sufficient numbers of train cars to carry out the operations. Report forms were used for communicating progress back to Novak from the distribution and absorption stations, sent by cable (Lozowick 1999). A typical plan of Jewish expulsion can perhaps be seen in the report: ‘Technical Directives on the Evacuation of Jews to the East (Izbica)’ issued by IVB4 in June 1942.[[11]](#endnote-11) The first section defined the operational authority (RSHA offices), and the second spelled out which Jews could and could not be deported (depending on age and profession). Section three dealt with concentrating the Jews and preparations for deportation, describing what they may and may not take along with them. Section four described the accompanying escort for the trains. Section five, detailed those who would be the receivers. Section six outlined the obligation of dispatchers and receivers to report to section IVB4 so as to assure an updated picture.

The actual process of different versions of evacuation, despite the obfuscatory purposes of the expulsive and destructive ones, were – in some respects - similar too, linked ‘in innumerable concrete and abstract ways’, as Torrie details,

‘A specific group of people was brought together, boarded a train and proceeded sometimes in the case of a social worker to a destination far from home. The same *Reichsbahn* officials who scheduled passenger trains to take children of the *volksgemeinschaft* to safe areas in occupied Poland, arranged cattle cars to take other children to Auschwitz […]’ (Torrie 2010, 132)

The Jewish evacuations themselves were illusions, ‘evacuees’ advised to carry ‘travel rations’ with them, the trains being carefully arranged so as to avoid a mass panic from the transport’s real purpose. As Lozowick suggests, the practices relied upon the formula developed for the evacuation/deportation trains of the *Reichsbahn* and *Ostbahn* in 1939, where in the context of *1.Nahplan* some of the logistics, burden and frustrations of organising billets with Polish and Jewish reception committees resembled the civilian problems of other Western European states.

The Germans that were subjected to protective evacuation measures could directly benefit from the expulsion of their Jewish counterparts and the dispossession of their money and property. In occupied France, for example, furniture worth 670, 863 Reichsmarks was distributed to air raid victims forced to evacuate their homes or cities, as distributed by the *Comite Ouvrier de Secours Immediat* (COSI). The eleventh ordinance to the Reich Citizenship Law of November 25, 1941 gave legal ground to the wholesale confiscation of Jewish property and assets on event of their deportation out of the Reich (Gerlach 1998), some non-Jews would move straight in.

Into this wider calculus was the organisation of the railways, and the prioritisation of the trains rolling the Jews out of German territory, the evacuees that were being taken to safety, the military cargo being moved to supply the front, and the soldiers that were brought back (Hilberg 2003). Even if these different versions of evacuations competed with each other and the military and industrial transports for allocated space, Raul Hilberg was under no illusion that, ‘no Jew was left alive for lack of transport to a killing center’ (2003: 19). Once again the railway was a conjunction of a rationality of machinic efficiency and economy with the Nazi’s racial politics. Occasionally efficiencies overtook racial ideology. This is well shown in the practical difficulties over maintaining the railway mobilities which would deport Jews and Poles in *1.* *Nahplan* when Polish railway workers were given evacuation ‘deferments’. The director of the Reichsbahndirektion-Posen also complained that the deportation of Polish railway workers would seriously undermine the economy of the Wartheland and the ability of the *Reichsbahn* to carry the evacuations out (Rutherford 2003).

The complicity of these different versions of evacuation in practice can also be seen Nazi’s euthanasia programme, which murdered people with disabilities, mental health illnesses, and even those shell-shocked from their experience of war, as early as 1939 (Krause 1997). These ‘evacuations’ came with the rationale of clearing asylums and hospitals for the welfare and care of ethnic Germans effected by Allied air raids and hospital space for wounded soldiers, through a twisted logic of civilian evacuation familiar to other parts of Western Europe. Karl Brandt – the Commissioner for the Health Care System and Hitler’s escort physician - was to remove patients from psychiatric hospitals in areas ‘particularly endangered’ by the Allied bombing (Bryant 2017, 52). Operation *T4* now has the notoriety as the programme which, often by train, transferred hospital and asylum patients from Berlin, the Rhineland or other German cities into the Generalgouvernement, or to Mesertiz –Obrawalde (Benedict and Chelouche 2008) for killing. Hospital space could only be used for the economically productive or valued and recoverable life.

Even while the Jewish “evacuations” relied upon the strength and ruthlessness of the state and the efficiency of its transport network to perform them, the civilian ‘protective’ evacuations were dealt with in a rather different way, involving a much softer German state unwilling to risk popular unrest at the measures which not only proved unpopular but difficult to enforce. Hitler was averse to make evacuation mandatory, continuing pre-war suggestions for ‘voluntary’ evacuation, and careful not to appear too coercive (Stargardt 2011; Kock 1997). At the beginning of the continuation of the *kinderlandverschickung*, both Goebbels and Hitler determined that it should not be forceful so as to ‘drive down the mood quite hard’, especially for mothers. Rather, with encouragement, the evacuations were to appear ‘from the outside not as an evacuation but as a strengthened welfare program for recovery’, and as Hitler’s secretary Bormann circulated ‘The Leader rather conceptualized the evacuations as a shining example of social welfare precisely for the poor’ (Stoltzfus 2016, 217).

As with the evacuations in Britain and France, many evacuees simply returned from the reception centres. Things came to a head in Witten in 1943 when over 300 mothers protested at an order attempting to deter returning children by withholding ration cards from those who had returned (Torrie 2006). The returning evacuees of mothers and children from reception centres, so frustrating to the Nazi apparatus, would even be mirrored throughout the war by the Poles evacuated to the Generalgouvement returning back to the Warthegau.

**D Conclusion:**

The Nazi genocide forces us to confront ambiguity in one important moment in the genealogy of evacuation mobility. The murky picture we gain during the Nazi deportations, killings and moments of civil protection does not so much clear up the fog of evacuation but make it even more murky. And there is power in illuminating the deliberately fuzzy, overlapping and imprecise use of the names, concepts and practices of mobility, that exclude precisely as they include those under a distorted name of protection.

Just as the camp and the cleared open spaces of *Lebensraum* formed for scholars like Klinke and others, both sides of the same coin of Nazi geopolitical ideology, both pushes within the same drive to concentrate and disperse, to eradicate and to settle, to protect and to kill, evacuation might deepen the story as *the* technical, administrative, practical and elusive measure or route for these drives. Evacuations were the pathways of extreme disciplined, carceral and violent mobilities (Culver 2018; Moran, Piacentini, and Pallot 2012), enabling such diverse and dissonant practices, which are partly what made the camp, *Lebensraum,* *and* the security of the community possible. Evacuation mobilities, in their various versions or forms, must be followed in the process to mobilise the holocaust and the geopolitics of Nazi Germany, as well as to track a broader history of forced or carceral mobilities (Gigliotti 2009). Indeed, as Gigliotti suggests in her critical reading, signified in the evacuation ‘death train’ which carried the bodies of between 2-3,000 prisoners from Buchenwald in 1945, such ‘journeys during the Holocaust are prismatic’ for understanding the mobile and spatial violence of the Holocaust, whilst they are also ‘suggestive’ for engaging with other ‘historical and ongoing examples of the displacement of colonized, indigenous, and oppressed populations’ (2009: 18).

Of course we must insist on care, and the dangers of either reducing the events to a singular exception, or normalising them to the point where ‘the significance of the Holocaust is effectively normalised out of existence’ (Clarke, Doel, and McDonough 1996, 469). Instead, the investigation, troubling and elucidation of the uses of evacuation - as designation, concept and practice - can help us identify when evacuation is not only misappropriated but when its existence helps constitute other terms, concepts and practices. Evacuation must be taken as, but also more than, a euphemism and simultaneously as more than a technical process of moving people from harm. The term is promiscuous as it enters close relations with other labels and, concepts and practices. Evacuation’s power seems to be its ability to evacuate itself and other elements of their intrinsic or contextual meaning. It works, like the train and its apparent rationality, to shuttle between and link disparate and incommensurable ideas and practices. And, like the holocaust deniers, it can insist on the security of some relations, while blurring others, forging evidence, transposing meanings and ideas to a place where they should not belong.

In this sense, evacuation should help to further our understandings of the grotesque rationalities and logics of the Nazis and the holocaust. Our exposure of its workings, at once seems in train with the biopolitical ‘indistinction’ at work in the camp. Evacuation seems to have been wielded so readily because of its logic. A supple and moving tissue holding contradictory processes together, evacuation may perform what Klinke identifies in the process of inversion extrapolated from Germany’s cold-war bunker policy which was ‘devised to protect its concentrated living space inside from the holocaust outside’ in contrast to the racial purification of Nazi living space ‘through the genocidal logic of the camp’ (Klinke 2018, 84). Both versions could co-coexist within evacuation: a pathway of protection from the Allied air raids and fire bombings –albeit excluded to Jews. A roadway of deportation for imprisonment, forced labour or mass killing in order to purify and cleanse the homeland. Both were designated and performed simultaneously, sometimes by utilising the same infrastructure as much as the same name.

As Ann Laura Stoler (2016) has suggested in her genealogy of the colony, there is a point of method to develop here. In that a geography of evacuation, even in this extreme form, is only possible if we seek not the ‘unities’ but what she calls the ‘dispersions’, evacuation’s weak as well as strong ties. For Stoler, this is to press on the ‘uncertainties, the self-evident features of what we imagine a colony is, how we recognize one, and how we come to understand what it “does”’ . Her approach is to center on how “knowledge things’ are disassembled, reassembled, fail or fall apart’, to trace oscillations of ‘deployments in policy and practice between charged political concept and innocuous common noun’. Genealogical work like this, she writes, is ‘to stay on the track of dispersions rather than unities’ (Stoler 2016).

To return to Ophir’s typological project of the apparatus of the catastrophic state, by investigating evacuation as designation, concept and practice, we gain insight into the organization of space, mobility, bureaucracy and law under times of emergency. But there is a longer history to be told of these different kinds of evacuation, and a broader continuum to be established of how evacuations come to exist in their different versions in a wider history of mobilities in emergency, disaster or conflict. The question this might lead to is this: in returning to Wiesel’s words from the epigraph, if we begin to recover and interrogate evacuation as a term, concept and practice, how might we begin to rehabilitate it?

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1. The Nazi geopolitics of evacuation are not quite unique of course. For the urban population of Phnom Penh during the time of Democratic Kampuchea under the Khmer Rouge, the forced evacuations by foot, truck and train, from the ‘debauched’ metropolis, was a violent and murderous eviction (see the excellent Tyner 2014; 2017). Equally, ‘evacuation’ became the name and process of internment in the United States and Canada for both Japanese-Americans and Italians during the Second World War. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. I am referring to the writings of Claudio Minca, Paulo Giaccaria, Trevor Barnes and others who have focused on a combination of political thinkers who were influential in the Nazi regime and the banal administrative, bureaucratic and technical machinery of the Nazi system of killing. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The quote is drawn from the translation made by Julia Torrie (2010). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. I am very grateful to Hartmut Behr for pushing me on this point in a previous version of this paper. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Frontispiece, *Gassschutz und Luftschultz,* 1935, vol, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The historiography of civilian defense in Germany has been relatively limited until recently (Klee 2009). Many still draw on, although they are wary of the work of the General Erich Hampe who became President of the Federal Agency of Civil Defense. Hampe, E (1963) *Der Zivile Luftschutz im Zweiten Weltkrieg,* Bernard and Graefe Verlag, Frankfurt. Despite some of the different terms used within civilian defense, interestingly, Hampe suggests that evacuation (Evakuierung) is taken to mean ‘all measures of relocating the civilian population, as there were no conceptual differences in this area during the war’. [Unter Evakuierung sind hier alle Maßnahmen der Umquartierung der Zivilbevölkerung verstanden, da begriffliche Unterschiede auf diesem Gebiete während des Krieges nicht bestanden] p. 417. I’m grateful to Ian Klinke for leading the way to Hampe and checking my translation. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. D. Nagel, (1935) ‘Das Räumungsproblem im zivilen Luftschutz: 2. Räumung und Unterkunft’, *Gasschutz und Luftschutz*, No 10, October, 249-254. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. D. Grimme, (1937) ‘Die Räumung als Luftschutzmaßnahme’, *Gassschutz und Luftschutz*, No 3. March. 64-66 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. In Galenic medicine can be found ideas of evacuation as bodily regulation and protection, a normalising spatio-temporal imagination at work in the drawing out of dangerous internal accumulations that need to be routinely expelled. The body is heretofore understood as a spatial system of temporally and geographically differentiated causes and symptoms (Grmek, Fantini, and Shugaar 2002, 251), an inner (bodily) space that must be ordered and emptied of dangers in order to preserve a system. In this model evacuation is about the protection of the host body by expelling and regulating internal dangers outwardly. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. See for example David P. Boder Interviews Jürgen Bassfreund; September 20, 1946; München, Germany, *Voices of the Holocaust,* http://voices.iit.edu/interview?doc=bassfreundJ&display=bassfreundJ\_en [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. My analysis draws on the documents, testimonies and paper reports archived at the Vad Yashem Shoah Resource Centre, Jerusalem. See in particular, Lozowick (1999). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)