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“The most ideal form of scientific collaboration”: Applied racial psychology at the Institut für Deutsche Ostarbeit in Kraków (1942)¹

Introduction

In the summer of 1942, Elfriede Fliethmann (1915–1987, Henseling after her marriage in 1943), an anthropologist at the Sektion Rassen- und Volkstumsforschung (Section for Race and Folklore Research,² SRV) at the Institut für Deutsche Ostarbeit (Institute for German Work in the East, IDO) in Kraków, initiated a research collaboration with the Institut für psychologische Anthropologie (Institute for Psychological Anthropology) at the University of Marburg. The native Austrian researcher was interested in methods of the new field of *Rassenpsychologie* (racial psychology). The psychologist Ferdinand Carspecken (1915–2003), an assistant at the Marburg institute, was responsible for establishing a test series, which could later be used in mass investigations in the Generalgouvernement (General Government). The researchers used various standardized psychological tests during a field examination in the Southern Polish town of Witów in August 1942.

¹ This article is largely based on a chapter of the author’s unpublished dissertation (Gottschall 2021a: 176–185). An abridged version was presented by the author at an interim meeting of the working group on the history of ethnology and anthropology at the University of Vienna on March 19, 2021. Translations from German into English by the author.

² *Volkstum* was a highly popular term during the Nazi era. Being jargon of the time, it can hardly be translated. In the concept of *Volkstum* nationality and notions of culture were combined with “biological determinants” (cf. Michel 2000: 149).

In an article later published by Carspecken, he praised the fusion of psychological methods and (racial) anthropology as the “most ideal form” of scientific collaboration (cf. Carspecken 1942: 247 ff.).

While a considerable amount of research has been carried out on the history of the IDO’s SRV (most recently Michel 2000; Schafft 2007; Maj, Trebunia-Staszal 2011; Trebunia-Staszal 2016; Maj et al. 2019; Gottschall 2021a, 2021c), surprisingly, the collaboration with the Marburg institute has not been closely examined. Although previous investigations mention the use of standardized psychological tests during the SRV’s field examination (see for instance Schafft 2007: 104), they were unable to determine the purpose of these tests. Due to the comparably good source situation regarding the former IDO (see further below), the case study presented here gives a rare insight into the actual research practice of a then newly established scientific field, which – due to its fundamental concept – was predestined to serve the Nazi regime: racial psychology. At the interface between psychology and anthropology, the concept of race served as an integrative scientific paradigm between natural sciences and humanities during National Socialism, as Harten (1993: 111) has pointed out. To understand the further development of the concept of race, and thus the foundation of NS ideology, this research approach needs to be studied more closely – even if it seems somewhat abstruse from today’s perspective. While racial psychology is often referred to as pseudoscience (most recently by Pisula et al. 2022: 3) or pure “nonsense” (Schafft 2007: 24), I support Harten’s (1993: 111) argument that its proponents pursued this quite influential scientific paradigm with the self-image of scientists who not only wanted to formulate a world view, but who also strove for its empirical and theoretical justification. Similarly, Etzemüller (2015: 12) describes racial anthropology as a profession that used what, at the time, were scientifically (although not undisputed) recognized methods to produce results which, although understood as pseudoscientific today, had significant repercussions for the lives of countless people. Because human subjects were measured and psychologically examined within the framework of a discursively formatted question, the results of which in turn solidified the discourse, it is worth looking at the scientific practices applied (cf. Etzemüller 2015: 17).

No results have been published from the pilot study discussed here. Therefore, its premises and possible implications can only be derived indirectly from a comparable study that was also carried out in the summer of 1942, not in the Generalgouvernement but in the Reichsgau Wartheland (Warthegau, for short, as Greater Poland/Wielkopolska was known during the Nazi occupation). We have yet another invaluable scholarly source that sheds light on this study by the psychologist Rudolf Hippus (1905–1945) from the Reichsuniversität Posen (Reich University Poznań): in 1945, the Polish psychologist Tadeusz Tomaszewski (1910–2000) analyzed Hippus’s reports and conclusions, which the latter published in Prague in November 1943 as *Volkstum, Gesinnung und Charakter* (Folklore, Disposition and Character). Only recently, in January 2022, Tomaszewski’s article, previously only available in Polish, was translated into English and published

by Pisula et al. (2022) and was thus made accessible to international scientists. By employing a comparative mode of enquiry, I attempt to illuminate previously unknown details about the Witów investigation.

Another aim of this study is to shed light on the “uncomfortable ancestors”³ of anthropology and psychology, who have been (perhaps deliberately?) forgotten. While over the past decades, studies have provided important information on the role of prominent Nazi functionaries and scientists, recently there has been a noticeable shift in research on Nazi perpetrators, with the second-tier functionaries now gradually coming into focus. Applied to the study of the history of sciences, this change of perspective allows us to investigate career paths in academia that have been little explored so far: female scientists (and perpetrators), for example, for whom the Second World War opened new fields of activity. It is beyond the scope of this study to further examine this topic (especially since I have discussed this aspect in detail elsewhere, see for instance Gottschall 2021a, 2022a, 2022b). However, by examining research interests, political agendas, and everyday practices of these protagonists, who were engaged in shaping and implementing the racist Nazi policy in the occupied territories of East Central Europe, I want to contribute to anthropology’s self-reflexive critique.

This article is organized in the following way: A brief presentation of the sources of this investigation is followed by a short historical outline of the IDO’s SRV. The next part is concerned with German racial psychology, while the following sections deal with the SRV’s field investigation in Witów in the summer of 1942. The remaining part of the paper consists of an epilogue and a conclusion.

Archive material

This research (as well as previous studies on the IDO’s SRV) is based on a corpus of sources kept in the Kraków university archives (Archiwum Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, AUJ). Roughly 73,000 pages of administrative papers, publications, manuscripts, and correspondence of the former IDO are kept there – documents that remained in Poland when the institute was evacuated in 1944. Another large collection of files (here marked with the abbreviation AUJ, IDO SRV) was evacuated to Bavaria and later confiscated by the US troops. In 2008, the collection returned to its place of origin (cf. Schafft 2007: 84–88; Stopka 2019).

The source situation regarding the Institut für psychologische Anthropologie in Marburg is less good. In fact, at the beginning of this investigation, it appeared that almost no documents had survived except for a small file from the founding year (1933). By a strange coincidence, only a few hours after I have sent my email

³ A term used at a conference panel hosted by Fabiana Dimpflmeier (University of Pisa) and Reinhard Johler (University of Tübingen). The panel on the topic of “anthropology (not) dealing with totalitarian regimes” was held at the international conference “New Anthropological Horizons in and Beyond Europe” (EASA, Lisbon 2020).

request for access to this material, the psychology department reported the discovery of a box containing unsorted institute files from the 1940s. Unfortunately, no additional documents have re-surfaced about the cooperation with the IDO's SRV in 1942. Nevertheless, the newly discovered sources are now available for future research on the subject.⁴

Ideologically guided research at the IDO in Kraków

Shortly after the invasion of Poland in September 1939, the IDO was set up on the premises of the evicted Jagiellonian University in Kraków.⁵ From the start, the institute had close ties with the German occupation administration. A scientific department with sections for regional studies, agriculture, horticulture, and forestry, and a humanities department with sections for prehistory, history, art history, law, economy, and (particularly relevant here) race and folklore research (SRV) were set up. Branches were planned (and later set up) in Warsaw and Lviv.⁶ Questions to be dealt with were directly related to the regime's ethnic *Neuordnungspläne* (reorganization plans). Moreover, the IDO researchers worked on administrative and economic topics relating to Nazi occupation policy. Although the IDO promised excellent working conditions for scientists (cf. Aly, Heim 2004: 196), director Wilhelm Coblitz (1906–1945) was not very successful in recruiting renowned researchers (cf. Haar, Fahlbusch 2017: 1407), therefore young, mostly inexperienced junior scientists (and National Socialist Party [NSDAP] members) were employed.

At the SRV, the ethnologist and anthropologist Anton Adolf Plügel (1910–1945), an alumnus of the University of Vienna, served as the Head of the ethnology department and was responsible for planning studies and hiring personnel. Before joining the IDO, he had predominantly been interested in ancient Mexican studies. He was an early member of the NSDAP, the Sturmabteilung (SA) and the Hitler Youth (HJ) (for Plügel's biographical details see Gottschall 2021a: 41–73, 2021b).

Heinrich Gottong (1912–1944) oversaw the SRV's anthropology department. He was an alumnus of the Friedrich-Wilhelms-University in Berlin, where he had completed his doctorate under the supervision of renowned racial anthropologists

⁴ On the discovery of the files see *Bestand des Instituts für psychologische Anthropologie erschlossen* 2020. A filing cabinet with approximately 6,000 index cards of the former Institut für psychologische Anthropologie is stored at the Psychologiegeschichtliches Forschungsarchiv (Psychological History Research Archive) of the Fernuniversität (Distance-learning University) Hagen (cf. Straßenburg 2021).

⁵ On November 6, 1939, the university was evicted by the National Socialists, most professors were arrested and deported to the Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps (see for instance Pagacz-Moczarska, Michajlów 2004–2005).

⁶ BArch Berlin, R 4901 690, Organisationsschema des IDO (organizational scheme of the IDO), undated file.

Hans F.K. Günther (1891–1961) and Bruno Kurt Schultz (1901–1997) (cf. Gottschall 2021a: 122–123).

The anthropologist Elfriede Fliethmann was the first female researcher to join the team. Like Plügel, she was an Austrian and an alumna of the University of Vienna. During her graduate years, she had been involved in political agitations, became a member of the NSDAP, and was part of the National Socialist female students’ associations (cf. Gottschall 2021a: 76–89).

The Silesia-born ethnologist Ingeborg Sydow (1915–2009, Lott after her marriage in 1943) was the second woman to be recruited by Plügel. She was especially interested in colonial ethnology and had studied in Frankfurt, Vienna, and Berlin. She had joined the Reichskolonialbund (Reich Colonial League) and was involved in the activities of the Bund Deutscher Mädel (League of German Girls) as well as National Socialist students’ associations (cf. Gottschall 2021a: 89–99).

The SRV researchers – with support from qualified Polish assistants (see Maj, Trebunia-Staszal 2019: 124–131 for details) – collected biometric and ethnopolitical data among village residents in Southern Poland who were perceived as possibly being of German genetic or linguistic background. Poles and Ukrainians, who were scheduled for forced labor in the Reich, were also examined to some extent. In the Tarnów Ghetto, anthropological details of Jews were documented as preparations for the Holocaust set in (cf. Michel 2000; Schafft 2007: 15–24; Maj, Trebunia-Staszal 2019: 119–150; Berner 2020; Gottschall 2021a: 145–161).

The SRV played an important role in the IDO’s applied and politics-serving science. The organizational unit became particularly involved in the racist and murderous Nazi policy due to its close cooperation with government and SS authorities. In May 1942, Anton Adolf Plügel and Heinrich Gottong were drafted into the Wehrmacht and Elfriede Fliethmann (unofficially) took over the management of the SRV. The war-related absence of her male colleagues did not seem to bother her. On the contrary, demonstrably joyful about her newly gained academic independence (see for instance Aly, Heim 2004: 198–203; Gottschall 2021a; 2022a, 2022b), she continued all the SRV’s agendas, led anthropological measurement groups during field examinations, and initiated new studies, such as the cooperation with the Institut für psychologische Anthropologie discussed here. For the latter, she contacted two of the most prominent representatives of the German *Rassenpsychologie* (racial psychology): Gerhard Pfahler (1897–1976) and Erich Rudolf Jaensch (1883–1940) (cf. Gottschall 2021a: 161–176).

Searching for “racial characters”: German racial psychology

Racial psychology was still a young field of research when Elfriede Fliethmann started planning the project. Both Pfahler and Jaensch tried to typologize *Rassencharaktere* (racial characters). Although this research paradigm seems obscure from today’s perspective, it should not be underestimated because, at that time, there was a broad consensus about it (cf. Harten 1993: 112–116). Pfahler’s book

Warum Erziehung trotz Vererbung? (Why Education Despite Heredity?), published in 1935, was reprinted several times and became one of the most frequently cited works of *Rassenpädagogik* (racial pedagogy). Pfahler's theory of human types was based on the work of racial psychologist Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss (1892–1974) and Hans F.K. Günther's *Rassetypen* (racial types) (cf. Geuter 1985: 179; Harten 1993: 113; Ash 2008: 841–842). Jaensch, on the other hand, initially considered linking racial theories to his psychological theory of types to be premature, but when the National Socialists seized power, he not only dedicated his research to the ideology, but, in fact, he became a staunch supporter and hoped that the regime would support his scientific aspirations. Jaensch was primarily concerned with questions on the interaction between a person's physical constitution and mental state. He based his mostly speculative considerations on the assumption that basic character traits were type-determined and thus constitutional. Psychological anthropology, according to Jaensch, was a synthesis of "exact" natural science and philosophical "idealism" and thus should become a new leading discipline, in which the individual was not the sole focus of interest. To capture the "nature" of different "national characters" and to derive "ethnic psychological generalizations," he advocated the use of experimental (perceptual) psychological tests. In 1938, Jaensch published his work *Gegentypus* (Countertype), in which he outlined a "decomposing type" as an "un-German" antipode to the idealized image of human beings in Nazi ideology. With his Marburger Schule (Marburg School) colleagues, Jaensch tried to prove that this type arose from (among other factors) "heterogeneous racial mixtures" that let people "degenerate," resulting in a "culture of dissolution." Unlike Hans F.K. Günther, Jaensch distinguished between productive and pathogenic racial mixtures, thus it is obvious that with "countertype" he was referring to a generalized "Jewish character." However, the term could *de facto* be used for all possible opponents of National Socialism – which, to a certain degree, explains the contemporary success of his concept. Over the years, Jaensch moved further and further away from scientific norms. Nevertheless, he was renowned in the academic world and enjoyed a high reputation. He was not only a member of the German Philosophical Society, the Kant Society, the German Academy of Natural Sciences, and the German Society for Psychology (which he even chaired in 1936), but from 1933, he also was the publisher of the most prestigious journal of the discipline, the *Zeitschrift für Psychologie* (Journal of Psychology). Under Jaensch's aegis, a wealth of literature emerged, including more than 80 publications between 1933 (the year in which he renamed his Marburg institute the Institut für psychologische Anthropologie) and 1940, and he himself also contributed to the popularization of his theory with numerous publications (cf. Geuter 1985: 182–188; Harten 1993: 117–127; Sieg 1994: 314–338; Böhnigk 2002: 97–106; Ash 2008: 837 ff.).

After Jaensch's death in February 1940, his former student Gert Heinz Fischer (1909–1993), who also advocated hereditary and typological studies, took over the Marburg chair. During the war, he invented a large-scale program aiming to provide a racial hygienic "prognosis." Methodologically, he supplemented

Jaensch’s approach, which focused on (optical) perception tests to determine structural “types,” with comprehension, imagination, and motor skills tests (cf. Lenz 1940: 295–298; Harten 1993: 114–115).

Towards a disciplinary extension at the SRV

In June 1942, Elfriede Fliethmann reached out in a letter to Gerhard Pfahler to explore the possibility of a disciplinary extension of the SRV. She wrote:

On the occasion of a discussion about racial psychological investigations, being carried out by the Race and Folklore Research Section (...), I am going to visit Marburg at the beginning of July to see Prof. Fischer, the head of the Institute for Psychological Anthropology at the local university, to discuss the methodological foundations of the examinations that he has already tested in France and Belgium. I would now like to ask you, dear professor, whether I may allow myself to pay a visit to your institute afterwards and ask your advice on how to document psychological processes, including from a hereditary point of view, to expand and supplement the investigations. I am an anthropologist, so a layperson in the field of psychology, but while currently working in the General Government, I am increasingly being pushed towards hereditary and racial psychological issues, which are of decisive importance for the assessment and exploration of the local population in relation to the German people. May I therefore ask you, dear professor, to support me with your advice on these questions?⁷

Fliethmann did not reveal exactly who had pushed her although sources suggest that her (at the time absent) supervisor Anton Adolf Plügel had earlier had such plans. It seems plausible that he – one of the most committed Nazi functionaries among Viennese ethnologists (cf. Gottschall 2021a: 44–66; 2021b: 299–303) – was guiding her behind the scenes. On the other hand, the Nazi occupation authorities also showed an interest in such investigations (cf. Geuter 1985: 176). As already mentioned, Rudolf Hippius conducted a comparative study on Poles and *Volksdeutsche* (Ethnic Germans⁸) in the summer of 1942 (cf. Harten et al. 2006: 250). Hippius not only provided a “scientific” justification for the prohibition of Polish-German marriages (cf. Tomaszewski 1945, as cited in Pisula et al. 2022: 27), but it can also be assumed that his research was “to supplement racial studies and in the future would find practical applications for settlement purposes” (Pisula et al. 2022: 3). Considering Fliethmann’s statement in the above letter, as well as the IDO’s close cooperation with the occupation administration, it seems plausible that the study discussed here had similar intentions.

⁷ AUJ, IDO 70, Fliethmann to Pfahler, Kraków, June 16, 1942, file 229.

⁸ The term was commonly used for Germans living outside the eastern border of the German Reich.

Ultimately, the planned cooperation between the SRV and Pfahler, who was serving as a soldier in the Wehrmacht at the time, was never implemented. However, when Fliethmann reached out to the Institut für psychologische Anthropologie with the above request, she was successful. At the beginning of July 1942, she visited Marburg after having previously contacted Erich Rudolf Jaensch. The psychologist had already passed away by then, but his successor, Gert Heinz Fischer, was willing to share his experience in the field of “folk-politically oriented anthropological psychological studies,” which he had gained during his research in Denmark, Belgium, and France. The psychologist assured Fliethmann that reservations she had evidently expressed (unfortunately the corresponding letter was not found in the archives) could be addressed by means of taking “suitable methodological precautions”.⁹ He then assigned his research assistant, Ferdinand Carspecken, to assist her (cf. Gottschall 2021a: 179–180).

Carspecken had studied psychology, physics, chemistry, physiology, and racial hygiene in Marburg from 1934 and received his doctorate in 1940 under Jaensch’s supervision. Besides working at the Institut für psychologische Anthropologie, he conducted aptitude tests for the Arbeitsamt (Employment Office). He was a member of the SA and joined the NSDAP in the year of his doctorate. In addition to the racial psychological investigation outlined in this article, he took part in similar undertakings in Belgium (cf. Wolfradt 2017: 68–69).

In mid-July 1942, Carspecken sent Fliethmann a detailed work plan for a first exploratory visit to the IDO. He wanted to get an impression of the local Polish residents, before inspecting the field examination area to determine which “psychologically important material” was to be collected there. “I don’t think it’s convenient,” Carspecken wrote, “to define a fixed series of tests in advance, but to adapt the methods to local conditions and, above all, to the mentality of the population.”¹⁰ In the same letter, he requested an order of around 2,000 forms of the so-called Wartegg drawing test.¹¹ Other methods that he intended to use were the Rorschach test, the Müller-Lyer illusion, and a set of skills and abilities tests (cf. Gottschall 2021a: 180 ff.).

We do not know exactly what Carspecken’s intentions were in choosing those particular tests. To my knowledge, he never published any report that could provide further information. As I already mentioned in the introduction, the purpose and possible implications can be derived only indirectly from Hippus’s comparable study. At least two of Carspecken’s test procedures were also used by Rudolf Hippus and his colleagues during the Warthegau study in the summer of 1942: the so-called “completing an unfinished story” and the Wartegg test (cf. Tomaszewski 1945, as cited in Pisula et al. 2022: 12 ff., 17–18). The test sheet for the latter consists of eight fields, each containing the beginning of a drawing: a dot, a short wavy line, dashes of different lengths and in different arrangements, a small rectangle, a dotted semicircle, and a solid semicircle. The subjects’

⁹ AUJ, IDO 70, Fischer to Fliethmann, Marburg, June 20, 1942, file 222.

¹⁰ AUJ, IDO 70, Carspecken to Fliethmann, Marburg, July 15, 1942, files 260 ff.

¹¹ See pictured in Schafft 2007: 104 and between pages 86 and 87 in Maj et al. 2019.

task was to finish the picture in each field using the given form. First published in the *Zeitschrift für angewandte Psychologie und Charakterkunde* (Journal for Applied Psychology and Character Studies) in 1939 (cf. Tomaszewski 1945, as cited in Pisula et al. 2022: 13), the drawing test was highly popular from the late 1930s to the 1950s, even though it hardly withstood critical examination.¹² The intention of the “completing an unfinished story” test was to enable a comparative study of imagination. The subjects were presented with the beginning of a story that they were asked to continue (see the next section, the story in the Warthegau study was different from that used in the Witów pilot study) (cf. Tomaszewski 1945, as cited in Pisula et al. 2022: 17).

Practical implementation: The pilot study in Witów in August 1942

Carspecken’s pilot study finally took place during an SRV research stay in the Southern Polish towns of Szaflary and Witów. Szaflary was considered a place of medieval German settlement and was therefore selected as a site for a detailed investigation. The population of Witów was to serve as a comparison group. Ingeborg Sydow was responsible for the ethnological and folkloric part of the study, while Fliethmann supervised the anthropological measurement group, which collected fingerprints, handprints, hair samples, and took numerous photos. Around 2,500 anthropometric portraits have been preserved, as well as hundreds of pictures of everyday life in the villages, clothing, objects, houses, courtyards, etc. In addition, the researchers collected data on population growth, as well as on individuals’ health and the economic status and living conditions of households. Polish literature and archive sources were used to reconstruct the history of the settlements, and a team of archaeologists carried out excavations in cooperation with the IDO’s own history section (cf. Trebunia-Staszel 2016: 15; Maj et al. 2019: 150–156).

Unlike the Hippius study, where it is not entirely clear how the subjects were recruited (cf. Tomaszewski 1945, as cited in Pisula et al. 2022: 12), we know that in the case of the SRV project they did not participate voluntarily. On the contrary, the German administration procured in advance a complete list of the local population from the respective community leaders. Under threat of penalty, all village residents then had to present themselves for inspection by the “anthropological commission” in local schools or parish houses. Contemporary witnesses

¹² Until the 1970s, both supportive and critical voices agreed that tests like the Wartegg or the Rorschach test generally did not meet the quality standards of psychological test theory. Nevertheless, projective tests are still among the most frequently used methods, despite their methodological deficiencies. Today, however, these tests are combined with other information, such as a detailed medical history. They are, therefore, not used as a sole “measurement,” but are combined with other psychodiagnostic tools. Especially in child and adolescent psychiatry, these exploratory techniques are used because of their playful approach. Adults are usually able to verbally express their problems, while children only have a rudimentary ability to do so (cf. Bauer 2007: 6; Esser 2008: 74).

(from the Podhale region) later testified to massive intimidation and fear as there were rumors that blond-haired and blue-eyed children would be taken away or that the study aimed to select people for forced labor in the Reich (cf. Maj, Trebunia-Staszel 2011: 552-553). It can be assumed that the subjects of the Warthegau investigation were also coerced to participate. Tomaszewski described how the German scientists tried to “put the subjects at ease” to “overcome” their “«fearful disposition» and «unwillingness to perform tasks»” (Tomaszewski 1945, as cited in Pisula et al. 2022: 12). Apparently, in case of the Witów study, this occasionally resulted in turmoil, as can be deduced from the preserved correspondence: while at the end of August 1942, Fliethmann informed Carspecken about a field investigation in Haczów, where the population “didn’t cause any such difficulties [as in Witów – L.M.G.]”¹³ elsewhere she mentioned that it was impossible to examine the entire village population because the people, “who suspected political motives,” were too afraid.¹⁴

Carspecken’s “subject no. 2007,” a man from Gołgowice Górne born in 1924, had solved the given tasks “without asking further questions,” but the examiner noted, without any clarifying explanation, that he was “insufficiently accurate” during the procedure.¹⁵ On the Wartegg test form the subject had sketched flowers, a crescent moon, a person, a broom, and houses. To test the subject’s imagination, he was offered three stimulus words from which he was to form sentences. Furthermore, and he had to complete the following story (in Polish):

We wsi był wielki jarmark. Wszyscy wieśniacy poszli na uroczyście przybrany rynek. Wieczór powoli ogarnął kraj. Na uroczystym rynku był wielki ruch: karuzele, huśtawki, kramy, śmiejące się twarze, weseli ludzie. Tylko jeden człowiek nie brał udziału w ogólnej wesołości. Ze spuszczonego wzrokiem i smutną twarzą szedł on przez tłum ludzi...¹⁶

(There was a big fair in the village. The villagers gathered in the festively decorated town square. Evening came. There was a lot of activity in the village market: merry-go-rounds, swings, stalls, laughing faces, cheerful people. Only one man did not participate in the general merriment. With his eyes downcast and a sad face, he walked through the crowd of people...)

Notes in Carspecken’s pre-printed log sheet indicate that the subject was not married, had no children, and was able to read, write, and count to 100,000. Furthermore, he was described as “tall – eyes greenish – dressed in urban style – bold – sharp – merry.”¹⁷ Besides notes like these, Carspecken recorded

¹³ AUJ, IDO 70, Fliethmann to Carspecken, Kraków, August 26, 1942, files 312-313.

¹⁴ AUJ, IDO 70, Fliethmann to Kreishauptmann (district commissioner) in Krosno, Kraków, July 21, 1942, file 272.

¹⁵ Cf. AUJ, IDO SRV 52/02/15/05, Psychologische Testbögen (psychological test sheets), 1942, images 002-007.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

personal data of the subjects and tests carried out. The second page of the log sheet could be used for making subjective notes, such as the examined person’s “special talent” or their vital, emotional, and mental state. Moreover, the “type,” “race,” and “constitution,” as well as the “attitude” of the subjects “towards performance,” “towards themselves,” and “towards the world around them,” and their facial expressions were assessed. Two empty fields were to be filled with “general remarks” and a “brief personality profile.” Finally, at the bottom of the page, there were questions about whether the subject was a “typical representative” of his or her ethnic group and, if not, how he or she reacted to the attributed *Volkstyp* (ethnic type). On another data sheet that has been preserved (possibly an adapted version of the first draft), the number of children and the knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic were added. Furthermore, there was also a separate field for a “brief description of the external appearance”¹⁸ (cf. Gottschall 2021a: 182–183).

Apart from a short article Carspecken published in the IDO’s own journal *Deutsche Forschung im Osten* (German Research in the East) in November 1942, no reports, nor results of the pilot study have ever been published (to my knowledge). In the article entitled *Die psychologische Anthropologie, ihre Stellung und Aufgabe in der Rassenkunde* (Psychological anthropology, its position and task in racial studies) Carspecken outlined only general considerations on the cooperation and the “mutual complementarity” between psychology and racial studies: The inclusion of Jaensch’s theories enabled not only a “holistic” understanding of the human being, but racial psychology was also able to close the “gap” between the natural sciences and the humanities (Carspecken 1942: 251). A similar view on the matter of the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries had been presented by Anton Adolf Plügel in a report regarding the planning of the SRV’s ethnology department activities in 1941. In contrast to several universities, which by then had already implemented separate disciplines of (physical) anthropology and ethnology (such as in Vienna), the SRV was to “deliberately” return to the “former unification,” since as Plügel stated: their “alienation” was an “absolute” disadvantage. He pleaded for an “integrated perspective,” with racial studies as the leading discipline (he thus clearly promoted the approach put forward by the renowned racial anthropologist Otto Reche [1879–1966] in Leipzig). Plügel outlined the future SRV as a heredity-focused laboratory pursuing different specialty areas: besides positions for morphology and typology, anatomy and histology, biology and pathology, physiology and serology, chemistry, sociology, demography, and forensic biology experts, he also foresaw a research post focusing on psychological questions, especially issues related to “cultural performance” and racial psychology (cf. Gottong, Plügel 1941; Gottschall 2021a: 123–131).

Plügel’s plan for the SRV was not implemented, and the cooperation with the Institut für psychologische Anthropologie of the University of Marburg was not further expanded. Nevertheless, Elfriede Fliethmann and Ferdinand

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

Carspecken apparently considered the pilot study a success. They agreed on further collaboration and, as a next step, wanted to review the methods for their practical implementation in mass investigations. Furthermore, Carspecken was eager to obtain a permanent position at the IDO starting January 1, 1943. Somewhat optimistically, he even sent a list of books to be purchased for him there.¹⁹ No further correspondence between the SRV and Carspecken, dated between September 1942 and the spring of 1943, was found in the archives. In February 1943, Elfriede Fliethmann ordered several thousand Wartegg test forms, which she “urgently needed to carry out psychological examinations on the population of the General Government,”²⁰ as she stated in her request. Sources suggest that Carspecken may have visited Kraków in the meantime.²¹ No further plans were implemented, including the employment at the IDO that Carspecken hoped to secure (cf. Gottschall 2021a: 183–184).

As noted above, since no results of this racial psychological data collection were published, its possible interpretations and political implications remain hidden. However, Tomaszewski’s analysis of the comparable study by Rudolf Hippius may prove helpful in this regard. He showed that the findings were “rather favourable for the Polish subjects” (Tomaszewski 1945, as cited in Pisula et al. 2022: 21), which placed the German scientists in a somewhat disagreeable position. Subsequently, “they put a huge effort into speculation and interpretation” which “leads them to conclusions that are not only broader, but also more favorable for Germans, while being highly dangerous to Poles in their practical implications” (Tomaszewski 1945, as cited in Pisula et al. 2022: 22). Tomaszewski then identified three main strategies that the researchers used to produce the results, which were politically motivated: “(1) Speculation on the basis of unfounded assumptions, (2) Long and complex chains of farfetched interpretations, and (3) Bombastic, ambiguous, pseudoscientific terminology” (Tomaszewski 1945, as cited in Pisula et al. 2022: 22). We know, from other studies exploring the work of racial anthropologists, that they proceeded in similar ways, because their raw data was either not (or at best partially) significant or simply politically undesirable (see for instance Etzemüller 2015: 129–133). When the analysis of an individual’s external appearance became insufficient, “the inside,” the “soul,” became decisive. However, any attempt at deriving racial types from the state of mind or character produced unsolvable difficulties. At the time when the pilot study discussed here brought no results, racial psychology in general was far from offering any plausible explanations and empirically founded solutions (cf. Harten 1993: 127).

¹⁹ AUJ, IDO 70, Carspecken to Fliethmann, Marburg, September 7, 1942, file 318; *ibid.*, Übersicht über die zunächst anzuschaffenden Bücher (overview of the books to be purchased), undated, files 320–321.

²⁰ AUJ, IDO 71, Fliethmann to Institut für Psychologie der Universität Leipzig (Institute for Psychology at the University of Leipzig), February 16, 1943, file 35.

²¹ AUJ, IDO 71, Carspecken to Fliethmann, Marburg, February 16, 1943, file 57.

Epilogue

When the Soviet army advanced west in late summer 1944, the SRV was relocated to Bavaria during the resulting evacuations of the German offices. The IDO was dissolved by the Allied troops at the end of the war.

Upon her marriage in 1943, Elfriede Fliethmann took her husband's surname, Henseling. When the IDO was evacuated, she supported Erhard Riemann (1907–1984), who served as head of the SRV from November 1942, in moving important documents to Bavaria. After the war, she worked as a teacher in West Berlin, where she died in 1987 (cf. Schafft 2007: 191).

Ferdinand Carspecken was drafted into the Wehrmacht in spring 1943. During his service as a soldier, he worked with the SS in the occupied territories. He also took part in *Volkstumsuntersuchungen* (folklore studies) in Belgium. After the war, he was employed at the State Youth Welfare Office in Oldenburg and became a renowned expert on youth welfare issues. He later served as a government consultant and the president of the administrative district of Lower Saxony. He died in 2003 (cf. Wolfradt 2017: 68–69).

The Institut für psychologische Anthropologie was renamed the Institut für Psychologie (Institute of Psychology) after the war (cf. *Bestand des Instituts für psychologische Anthropologie erschlossen* 2020). Its head, Gert Heinz Fischer, was dismissed from his university position in the fall of 1945. Nevertheless, in 1956 he was employed by the Hochschule für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung (University for International Educational Research) in Frankfurt am Main and only a short time later by the Studienseminar (study seminar) in Kassel, where he worked until his retirement in 1974. He died in 1993 (cf. Kumpf 2014).

Although Anton Adolf Plügel, Heinrich Gottong, and Ingeborg Sydow (Lott) did not play a major role in the project outlined here, their whereabouts during and after the war should be mentioned briefly. Ingeborg Lott emigrated to the US in 1956. According to a newspaper article, she graduated from Columbia University and took a teaching job at San Diego State College (“At Huntingdon” 1961). Apparently, she did not pursue her interests in ethnology, as in the 1960s she served as a professor of German language and history at Huntingdon College in Montgomery, Alabama. No further details of her life are known, apart from the notice of her death in Olympia, Washington, in May 2009 (cf. Gottschall 2021a: 201–202; 2022b). Heinrich Gottong and Anton Adolf Plügel did not survive the war. While Gottong was wounded and is believed to have disappeared in Hungary, Plügel died as a soldier in March 1945, in or near Königsberg (Kalinigrad) (cf. Gottschall 2021a: 202–203).

Racial anthropology “did not surrender on May 9, 1945,” as Etzemüller (2015: 197) put it, somewhat polemically. Hardly any of the discipline's representatives have ever been held accountable for their work in the service of the Nazi regime (cf. Etzemüller 2015: 197).

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to shed light on a little-known project, which adopted the (then) newly established paradigm of racial psychology in applied anthropological research in occupied Poland during the Second World War. In the *Generalgouvernement*, (junior) scientists tried testing procedures on numerous people, who had no choice but to participate in such research. The surviving traces of this research project provide insight into how formulating differences and defining categories of inclusion and exclusion were the basis for a “total collective moral disaster” (Tillion 1973: 213, as cited in Todorov 2015: 296) for which researchers – including those second-tier functionaries portrayed here – undoubtedly shared responsibility. Like the Warthegau study, the racial psychological pilot study in Witów aimed to provide “scientific” justification for the regime’s ethnic reorganization plans, and, therefore, remains a “striking example” of the “manipulation of the use of scientific methods” (Tomaszewski 1945, as cited in Pisula et al. 2022: 27) for ideological purposes. It is thus a lesson for us today. Despite using methods, that were considered scientific at the time, and striving for theoretical substantiation, the involved researchers based their investigations on unscientific and ideologically guided premises and conducted their studies under morally and ethically highly problematic circumstances. Their research results would certainly have served the Nazi regime, but since no results of the Witów study were published, we do not know what interpretations Carspecken and Fliethmann would have derived from the collected data and whether actual political decisions would have resulted from their findings. However, considering the overall orientation of the IDO and its close ties with the occupation administration, it is safe to assume that any follow-up studies would have had severe political implications and potentially drastic consequences for their human subjects.

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SUMMARY

“The most ideal form of scientific collaboration”: Applied racial psychology at the Institut für Deutsche Ostarbeit in Kraków (1942)

In August 1942, anthropologist Elfriede Fliethmann and psychologist Ferdinand Carspecken tried various standardized psychological tests during a field examination in the Southern Polish town of Witów. Sources suggest that subsequent studies were intended to provide a “scientific” justification for the regime’s ethnic reorganization plans, similarly to a study in the Reichsgau Wartheland by psychologist Rudolf Hippus in the same summer. By employing a comparative mode of enquiry, the case study presented here gives a rare insight into then newly established scientific field: on the interface between anthropology and psychology, the concept of *Rassenpsychologie* (racial psychology) aimed to close the proclaimed gap between the natural sciences and humanities. Due to its fundamental conception the field was thus predestined to serve the Nazi regime. Investigating specific research practices of the (junior) scientists involved helps us understand further development of the concept of race, and thus the foundation of National Socialist ideology.

Keywords: history of anthropology, racial psychology, Elfriede Fliethmann, Ferdinand Carspecken, Institut für Deutsche Ostarbeit (Kraków), Institut für psychologische Anthropologie (Marburg)