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# Ordinary Women: Female Perpetrators of the Nazi Final Solution

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*Ordinary Women: Female Perpetrators of the Nazi  
Final Solution*

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*In memory of those who's lives were lost as a result of the Nazi Final Solution*

**“We believe in Adolf Hitler, our Eternal Führer”**  
*An Introduction to the Role of Nazi Women*

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Late 1943 into early 1944 marked a turn of the tides in World War II. As it became evidently clear that Germany would soon lose the war, the Allied Powers were faced with deciding how to appropriately bring justice to an entire society that had been responsible for the annihilation of millions. In July 1944, an extremely important, yet largely forgotten, study commissioned by the United States government was published, entitled *Women in Nazi German*. This study, conducted by Ruth Kempner, in collaboration with her husband, Robert Kempner, was written to expose the roles women played in Nazi Germany and served as an informational resource for the de-Nazification of German women, for use by potential prosecutors. It outlined the various female Nazi organizations that paralleled those of men, and was essential in demonstrating that women were also fanatical supporters who had been incorporated into the many facets of the Nazi regime. It was used to prove that men were not solely responsible for the destruction society under the Nazi experiment. Kempner stressed the importance of her work, claiming, “This study has been included in our Administrative Series because of the future demographic and social consequences which will prevail in post-Nazi Germany.”<sup>1</sup> Kempner delves into the variety of ways in which women were inculcated with Nazi ideology and tells readers that women should not be absolved of post-war guilt simply because they are women.

The contents of Kempner’s work expertly outlines the variety of ways women were incorporated into Nazi German. Despite prevalent gender biases, they were not simply housewives, and the report demonstrates just how deeply rooted Nazi ideology was in German society at the time. Nazi women enthusiastically rallied to participate in the *Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft* (NS), or the National Socialist Women’s League, which organized women in a range of activities, from finances to education to training in auxiliary

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Kempner, *Women in Nazi Germany*, (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1944) Cover page.

services. From the young age of six, both boys and girls were put into Nazi training programs, the *Hitler-Jugend* (Hitler Youth, or HJ) and *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls, or BDM), and were trained as “the smallest assistants of Hitler.”<sup>2</sup> Though Kempner’s work is crucial for many reasons, probably the most important aspect was the extensive collection of data outlined in the section entitled, “Classification According to Public Danger.” This section ranked the extent by which Nazi women were seen as a public danger, threatening democratic life.<sup>3</sup>

The first category of women, the most dangerous, consisted of a group of about 3,000 Nazi-trained career Party leaders. These were the women who served as heads of Departments in the Party headquarters, or top women in Eastern districts, who coordinated women’s organizations and “form[ed] the nucleus of the political bureaucracy and [held] full-time jobs in the central and district headquarters of the *NS Frauenschaft*, the *Deutsche Frauenwerk* (German Women’s Welfare Organization).”<sup>4</sup> They were the most dangerous because only a small number of the identities of these Nazi career women were known, thus, if women were not held accountable, Kempner seeks to say that many of these unknown women would easily get away.

The group which posed the second greatest threat to democratic life consisted of about 584,000 Nazi female leaders who participated voluntarily in the political work of the Nazi Party. Like the Nazi career women, this group, too, was trained in Nazi ideology and organizational work, making them no less dangerous than the Nazi career women. These Nazi Party activities included women in positions of power, as local political bosses or deputies of county and local units throughout the country.<sup>5</sup> Aside from the sheer difference in numbers of women in this second group, the only real difference between the 3,000 full-time Nazi Party workers and the

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<sup>2</sup> Kempner, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 46.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

work of the volunteer corps was that those in the former were paid for their service, while the latter were rewarded for their efforts with positions of “political leadership in their community, with all its privileges and financial advantages.”<sup>6</sup>

The next category of women included the approximately 1,600,000 ordinary members of the *NS Frauenschaft*, who joined the Nazi Party before 1936. Unlike the women in the two previous categories, who were trained as political leaders, promoters, and indoctrinators, these women were responsible for “keeping the rest of Germany’s female population in line with the Nazi State.”<sup>7</sup> Another 1,000,000 younger women, serving the same important function as the *NS*, joined the Nazi party after 1936 as members of the *Deutsche Frauenwerk*. These women, differing only in terms of seniority within the Nazi Party, were “no less ardent in their determination to serve the Nazi Party efficiently than the members of the *NS Frauenschaft*.”<sup>8</sup>

Amongst the more than three million female participants described in the three former categories, still another four million girls, aged ten and up, were all highly indoctrinated members of the *Bund Deutscher Mädel*, an umbrella organization under the *Hitler-Jugend* that was dedicated to cultivating the growth of good Nazi girls. Of these four million, approximately 250,000 of them were BDM Leaders<sup>9</sup>—20,000 of whom were career officers with a full-time salary.<sup>10</sup> Seven million girls and women were directly involved in the Nazi Party through the *NS Frauenschaft*, the *Deutsche Frauenwerk*, and BDM, but still eleven million more were indirectly organized as employees of the Nazi state. These women, controlled by the Nazi Party through their membership in the women’s sections of the Labor Front, the Peasant Organization, and other professional work organizations, would contribute to the total of approximately sixteen

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.,61.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, 31.

million organized Nazi women.<sup>11</sup> Through this informational survey, Kempner was able to conclude that of these women, almost one out of “every sixth woman between twenty and sixty years of age is a genuine Nazi.”<sup>12</sup>

Despite Kempner’s impressive and thorough study, which advised for the immediate disbandment of the various programs created through the NS, for reasons of being “detrimental to any form of peaceful development... dangerous to public security in post-War Germany... and... for reasons of public safety,”<sup>13</sup> only a small fraction of these genuine Nazi women were brought to trial for the crimes committed during the Holocaust. Due to the prevailing gender roles of the time, which through the use of Nazi propaganda, had cultivated the façade that all women had been called to return to the *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* (children, kitchen, church), women were able to conveniently hide behind the ideals of femininity, making it unbelievable in post-war society that women—wives and mothers—could have possibly been involved as actual perpetrators of the Nazi Final Solution. This disillusioned reality is what has enabled many female perpetrators to slip through the cracks of justice for the past seventy years without any restitution for the millions of Jewish victims and others deemed “unworthy of life.”

Until recently, the body of historiographical research pertaining to World War II was largely dedicated to the discussion of male perpetrators of the Nazi genocide against Jews and others “unworthy of life.” In 1992, historian Christopher Browning published one of the most important and highly regarded works on this topic, *Ordinary Men*. This study, which analyzed Police Battalion 101, was revolutionary in understanding how “ordinary men” could have committed such heinous crimes.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 78.



Police Battalion 101 consisted of group of middle aged men, thirty-three to forty-eight years old, who were primarily in charge of deporting Polish and Hungarian Jewry for “resettlement” on the Eastern Front. None had belonged to the *Schutzstaffel*, or the SS (Hitler’s private army), most were of working-class background, and only about twenty-five percent were official members of the Nazi Party. The remaining seventy-five percent, given their age, had been exposed to political views and morals other than those of the Nazis.<sup>14</sup> Browning’s work is crucial to the historiographical discussion because, unlike many other Nazi killing units, Police Battalion 101’s roster was complete, and many of the perpetrator’s testimonies had a feeling of candor, which is often absent from the alibi-laden and deceitful testimonies usually encountered through court records.<sup>15</sup> More importantly, the issue of choice was framed both by the course of events of the war and was discussed openly by some of the perpetrators.<sup>16</sup> These men were give the choice not to participate in the point blank murder of the Jews in the Polish village of Józefów, without fear of punishment, yet very few accepted this offer.<sup>17</sup>

If the members of Police Battalion 101, many of whom were older men with well established families, and seemingly beyond the prime age of indoctrination in Nazi ideology, were still willing to carry out mass murder, could it not also be possible that women who were highly indoctrinated with Nazi ideology, also played an active role in Hitler’s genocide? Although historically German women, rendered as the “second-sex,” were believed to be excluded from public life, female members of the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, or the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP), were valued members of Nazi society, even if they were expected to operate within the domestic sphere. Women were seen as the “co-fighters” alongside their men. They were imperative to the success

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<sup>14</sup> Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 48.

<sup>15</sup> Browning, *Ordinary Men*, xvii.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, xvi.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

of the 1000-year Reich, not only in bearing the future leaders of Germany, but also in passing along racist ideals onto their offspring. Women in the NDSAP were supposed to be the “fighters for the German idea... for the restoration of national power and honor... for keeping the Aryan race and consequently for the freeing of the people’s life from foreign influence.”<sup>18</sup> However, contrary to Hitler’s intention, when the war began to take a turn for the worse, women were recruited into the workforce to replace the ever-increasing number of men being sent to defend the Eastern Front. This cultivation of a distinct hatred for the “other,” coupled with new career prospects for females, would enable these “ordinary women” to commit unspeakable crimes, as did Browning’s “ordinary men.”

The lack of historically accurate literature dedicated to documenting the numerous roles played by women outside of the domestic sphere in Nazi Germany has created a large discrepancy in the historical record. In reality, women, just like their male counterparts, were also complicit, and even accomplices, in the genocide of millions. Not only did fear of the conceived threat to German racial purity by the intrusion of “sub-human” races mount under Hitler’s rule, but also, like men, women saw opportunities for both economic prosperity and social gains. This thesis seeks to provide the female equivalent to Browning’s Police Battalion 101. Whereas his study demonstrated how a group of “ordinary men” could be turned into cold-blooded murders, thousands of “ordinary women” were able to become the same. Through the case studies of three women, Herta Oberheuser, Irma Grese, and Ilse Koch, this thesis will explore the extent to which German women were involved with the Final Solution, and prove that, despite the prominent gender biases associated with Nazi Germany, women used the opportunities affiliated with Germany’s declining position in the war to obtain power and status equal to that of their male counterparts.

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<sup>18</sup> Kempner, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 5.

The first study on women in Nazi Germany was published just prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. Authored by Dr. Clifford Kirkpatrick in 1938, *Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life* discusses the role of women in the “Nazi Experiment.” Written in a very matter of fact way, Kirkpatrick showed that Nazi policies were aimed at a “back to home movement” which favored essentially wiping out any progress made by the feminists of Weimar, and emphasized the importance of childbearing. Because of the turbulence and uncertainty of Weimar, many women were too happy to do so. Rather than competing with the men discharged from the army, some women worked within the Nazi framework to maintain control and power in their own sphere of influence. Under the Nazi regime, German women founded various organizations, such as *Frauenwerk*, which attempted to connect and strengthen the loyalty of foreign women of German descent to Germany, and the BDM, which served as the female equivalent of the HJ program for young boys. According to Kirkpatrick, although Nazi ideology called for the separation of spheres between men and women, “Whether or not [the leader of *Frauenwerk*] [Gertrude] Scholtz-Klink is free from masculine domination, there is no denying that a vast and intricate organization of women is under her control.”<sup>19</sup> He claimed that German women were, overall, much happier under the “Nazi Experiment” and National Socialism than they had been during the tumultuous and economically unstable period of the Weimar Republic.<sup>20</sup>

From the start of WWI until the end of WWII, various bodies of literature were dedicated to the plight of German women, not only within the German empire, but worldwide as well. During the inter-war period various Allied-sponsored pamphlets and articles were published that discussed the roles of German women in order to successfully direct propaganda campaigns,

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<sup>19</sup> Clifford Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1938),72.

<sup>20</sup> Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany*, 293.

which might have served as a powerful weapon in the war effort. However, once the war ended, literature dedicated to Nazi Germany almost completely ignored women. It was not until 1966, when historian David Schoenbaum included a chapter called “The Third Reich and Women,” in his work, *Hitler’s Social Revolution: Class and Status in Nazi Germany 1933-1945*, that there was a revival in the interest of the plight of German women. In this work, Schoenbaum describes the situation of females prior to 1933 as a time of “Anti-feminist racism.” While the façade of the campaign against the “western influence” was aimed at demolishing the democratic Weimar Republic, it also served as a rejection of the “New Woman” and the equality of women in general.<sup>21</sup> Although women were excluded from Nazi Party membership in January 1921, Gregor Strasser, a prominent Nazi politician, recognized the importance of women in the economy. By 1932, women consisted of one-third of the total working population. In order to maintain economic stability, Strasser granted women public positions as teachers, nurses, secretaries, within social welfare institutions, and other positions suitable for their gender.<sup>22</sup> However, although Strasser allowed concessions for economic equality, women were still not granted political equality within the Nazi regime. Schoenbaum argued that although, in general, the Third Reich did little to alter the overall status of German women, economically, their status did improve. In fact, “measured against the historic status of women in society, the pressures of the totalitarian state combined with those of an industrializing and industrial society to produce for women... a new status of relative if unconventional equality.”<sup>23</sup>

The initial recognition by Schoenbaum of the plight of German women was significant, but still, the next important work dedicated to Nazi women would not come until almost a decade later. In 1975, Jill Stephenson published *Women in Nazi Society*, written to fill the gap in

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<sup>21</sup> David Schoenbaum, *Hitler’s Social Revolution: Class and Status in Nazi Germany 1933-1945*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), 187.

<sup>22</sup> Schoenbaum, *Hitler’s Social Revolution*, 189.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 201.

the historiographical discussion on Nazi policy towards women. Stephenson's work was crucial in uncovering missing information about the roles of German women in society between the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>24</sup> She discussed motherhood, employment, and education, and stressed the reality of life in Nazi Germany for women, challenging the prevailing historical view that all National Socialist policies towards women were extremely detrimental. When the Nazis came to power and removed women from political life, they claimed they were not subordinating women completely to men. Rather, they were drawing from a natural distinction between the appropriate activities for each sex, so that independently they might better dedicate themselves to performing their specific functions, to the best of their abilities, for the good of the nation.<sup>25</sup> Surprisingly enough, with the Nazis in power, aside from the highly contested anti-abortion laws, German women were given more liberal rights in terms of divorce and having children out of wedlock. Thus, Stephenson supports the contention that women were not passive victims of the Nazi regime, but actually, in many ways, thrived under it.

In 1978 historian Leila Rupp, though agreeing with Schoenbaum and Stephenson that the economic necessity of women helped to determine the Nazi policies directed towards them, claimed they failed to consider the influence of Nazi ideology, which she believed showed that “the image of women did not have to change in response to policy shifts.”<sup>26</sup> In her work *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945*, Rupp claimed that although Nazi policy called upon women to return to the home to give birth to as many children as possible, to secure the future of the 1000-year Reich, Nazi ideology was not actually so rigid. In fact, it actually called for a woman's status to be “upgraded” in order for her to be granted access to higher education. This would be crucial in cultivating the “right kind” of education to

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<sup>24</sup> Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1975), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society*, 8.

<sup>26</sup> Leila Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 13.

be passed down to their children. Further, Rupp claimed that German women garnered great respect. Under National Socialism German women were honored for their service to the nation through the celebration of Mother's Day, the creation of the Medal of Honor for mothers with many children, and *Frauenschaft* sponsored schools, which were essential in teaching child care skills, but, despite the Nazi concept of separate spheres of influence for men and women, women were needed to fill jobs that were considered to be best performed by women. This belief made women instrumental in their roles as teachers, doctors, and lawyers, for other females.<sup>27</sup> Rupp claimed, "What Nazi ideology proclaimed was not necessarily so."<sup>28</sup> As a result, the Nazi party had the potential to attract a wide array of women; the traditional women who were recognized for their skilled and valuable occupations as mothers and wives, and the younger, energetic and ambitious women, who challenged traditional roles and longed for an active role that guaranteed economic freedoms.<sup>29</sup>

The publication of the works of Schoenbaum, Stephenson and Rupp, who believed German women were allotted more freedom than Nazi ideology historically indicated, helped to further the historical research on women and gender in Nazi Germany, causing many to question whether or not women could have been perpetrators of Nazi violence. The transition of World Wars I and II into "total wars," characterized by the mobilization of women on the Home Front, cultivated the view that the roles of men on the Front, and women back at home, were inexplicably related.<sup>30</sup>

However, this starkly contrasted with the view of other historians who claimed that women were victims of the misogynist and oppressive Regime. In the late 1980s the so-called

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<sup>27</sup> Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War*, 39-41.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>30</sup> Karen Hagemann, "Preface," in *Home/Front* ed. by Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Oxford: Berg, 2002), ix.

*Historikerinnenstreit* (“women historians quarrel”) exploded, most notably between German historian Gisela Bock and American historian Claudia Koonz. The crux of the debate centered on the question of whether or not German women were victims or perpetrators of Nazi violence.<sup>31</sup> This *Historikerinnenstreit*, the origins of which dates back to the 1970s, stemming from fractious debates which divided feminists on the question of a woman’s responsibility for their own oppression,<sup>32</sup> reflected the differences between the two countries’ conception of feminism<sup>33</sup> and led to an increase in the amount of research dedicated to women in the Third Reich.<sup>34</sup>

In the spring of 1983, Bock published an article, entitled, “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State,” in which she claimed that women, along with Jews and others “unworthy of life,” were solely victims of tyrannical Nazi policies. Despite social, political, and economic gains for women during the Weimar Republic, under the Nazi regime women were removed from politics and confined to the role of motherhood, tasked with the crucial role of re-populating Germany with the “right” kind of citizens. According to Bock, the problem of “racial degeneration” or “race suicide” that Hitler saw in German culture was associated with the women’s movement, who preferred to have fewer children than previous generations, or who raised their children against the prevailing norms, at

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<sup>31</sup> Raphael Leck, “Theoretical Issues Conservative Empowerment and the Gender of Nazism: Paradigms of Power and Complicity in German Women's History,” in *Journal of Women's History*, (Vol: 12. Issue: 2. Publication Year: 2000), 146.

<sup>32</sup> Claudia Koonz, “A Tributary and a Mainstream: Gender, Public Memory, and the Historiography of Nazi Germany,” in *Gendering Modern German History*, (Berghahn Books: New York, 2007), 151.

<sup>33</sup> Karen Hagemann and Jean Quataert, “Gendering Modern German History: Comparing Historiographies and Academic Cultures in Germany and the United States through the Lens of Gender,” in *Gendering Modern German History*, (Berghahn Books: New York, 2007), 6.

<sup>34</sup> Hagemann, *Home/Front*, 23-4.

the expense of the German community and state.<sup>35</sup> To Bock, German women became the main targets of oppressive Nazi policies.

In essence, Bock, through her article, added to the historiographical discussion of Nazi women by claiming that they were victims of the Nazi regime and could not possibly have taken a more active role in the genocide of millions. Just as Jews and others deemed “unworthy of life” were victims of racism, women, too, were victims of racism that was used to “impose sexism in the form of unwaged housework on “superior” women,”<sup>36</sup> and forced the sterilization of “inferior” women. These Nazi policies resulted in the creation of two extremely oppressive dynamics. The first, “sexist racism” prohibited the procreation of a specific group of women, not just on the grounds of their inferior genes (or race), but because of their deviation from the social or ethnic standards attributed to “superior women.”<sup>37</sup> The second, known as “racist sexism,” demanded the procreation by a specific group of women, not simply because they were women, but because they were of a “superior” ethnic group or social position regarded as valuable to Nazi society.<sup>38</sup> All women’s bodies were property of the state, subjected to one of these two conflicting dichotomies, in order to induce segregation, and keep them from creating a united resistance to the regime—rendering German women nothing more than victims of the Third Reich.

In 1987 Claudia Koonz challenged the view that women were solely victims in her book *Mothers in the Fatherland*. Rather, Koonz began furthering the historiographical discussion of a woman’s true role in Nazi Germany by showing that the women who followed Hitler, similarly

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<sup>35</sup> Gisela Bock, “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State,” in *Signs*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Women and Violence (Spring, 1983), 406.

<sup>36</sup> Bock, “Racism and Sexism,” 419.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 420.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 420.



to men, “did so from conviction, opportunism, and active choice.”<sup>39</sup> Although there were women who attempted to defy Nazi policies, some women aided in the creation of a murderous state in various ways. They turned in names of mentally—and physically—challenged individuals and others they felt were “suspicious;” they left the work force to receive state loans and bear more children for the state; they boycotted Jewish businesses and scorned lifelong Jewish friends. Women also took on more active positions in Nazi Germany as teachers and social workers, who indoctrinated young children with racist Nazi ideals, founded eugenic motherhood schools and took on missionary work to “convert the unconvinced.”<sup>40</sup>

According to Koonz’s research, however, some women went further still. Going beyond working to support the Nazi regime within the sphere of motherhood, some women were active supporters of the Final Solution through their roles as nurses and hospital-staff members. As the war progressed, nurses were also needed on front-lines to aid the wounded soldiers, and the ever-increasing deportations of female Jews to concentration camps called for an opportunity for some women to travel east to become camp guards. Although Koonz claims that the latter were statistically insignificant, she is one of the first historians to make note of, and discuss the reality of, these camp matrons and female guards found in survivor testimonies.<sup>41</sup>

As a result of Koonz’s competing assertion of a woman’s role, Bock, in a scathing review of Koonz’s work, insisted that women could not have been agents of the Nazi regime, because German women had been sterilized and abused by sexist ideology. She went further to claim that because wives and mothers “had preserved humane values within their homes, they had exercised no significant agency in racial crimes.”<sup>42</sup> Koonz responded by agreeing with psychologist Karin Windaus-Walser, who accused some German female historians of blinding

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<sup>39</sup> Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 5.

<sup>40</sup> Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 404.

<sup>42</sup> Claudia Koonz, “A Tributary and a Mainstream,” 151.

themselves to historical truths that demonstrated women's agency in Nazi Germany. She continued her rebuttal by claiming that although it may seem "illogical" to make the claim that Nazi policies forced women into the private "feminine" sphere while allowing those operating within the domestic sphere, to obtain power, according to Koonz, "this is precisely how oppression functions."<sup>43</sup> Just because these "ordinary women" were often victims of misogyny, it did not render them powerless. Rather, they absolutely did benefit from, and even helped to facilitate, racial persecution.<sup>44</sup> By the late 1980s the *Historikerinnenstreit* had come to a close, mostly in favor of Koonz's assertions, and the questions of the extent by which "ordinary" German women participated in the Nazi regime began to dominate mainstream research into women's history.<sup>45</sup>

Elizabeth Harvey supported the position of Koonz through her influential work in 2003, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization*. Harvey was instrumental in solidifying the fact that women were opportunists by showing that women were not only recruited to go "East," but also sought out positions of work on the "new frontier" themselves. Offered roles as pioneers of "Eastward expansion," women were needed as settlers, wives, and providers of German cultural experiences, in order to help make the newly acquired territory viable for settlement. While some women felt pressured into accepting assignments in eastern territories, many women were actually pleased by the prospect and saw the job as an opportunity to gain responsibilities, status, and experience new adventures, as well as to demonstrate their competence as valuable members of National Socialism.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Claudia Koonz, "A Tributary and a Mainstream," 151.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 118.

These women served as agents of “Germanization” by going east to help “civilize” and teach borderland Germans to be more nationally conscious, and also, as Harvey claims, they were direct witnesses of Nazi violence. Of the German women who went “East” many were observers, and even proud proponents of, the destruction of Polish Jewry. Harvey furthers the historiographical discussion by showing that women who went East were no longer subjected to rigidly defined gender roles, but with ideals of racial hierarchy imposed in Poland by Nazi occupiers, women were granted almost equal status to their male counterparts, and superior status to other ethnic groups. With their status as ‘Reich Germans’ women in superior positions were allowed to cross conventional delineations of gender more easily than they would have in the *Altreich*.<sup>47</sup>

With the increasing literature on women’s participation in the Nazi Final Solution and the discovery of a variety of new sources as a result of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, two recently published works not only proved that women who went east did participate in mass murder of innocent people, but this new literature seeks to further the historiographical discussion by attempting to understand how, like Browning’s “ordinary men,” these “ordinary women” could also become perpetrators of Nazi violence.

In 2011, Wendy Adele-Marie Sarti published *Women and Nazis: Perpetrators of Genocide and other Crimes during Hitler’s Regime, 1933-1945*, which analyzed various survivor testimonies, trial transcripts, and other primary source documents that exposed women who took leading and violent roles in the Nazi Final Solution. Sarti not only paints a picture of some of the specific women who were violent perpetrators and aided their male counterparts in ruthlessly slaughtering innocent men, women, and children, but she also attempts to answer the question of *why* these women were so eager to participate. Unlike historians before her, Sarti adds to the

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<sup>47</sup> Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East*, 298.

historiographical discussion immediately in her preface by telling her readers that, with regards to war crimes and crimes against humanity, traditional gender roles must be ignored, and that these genocidal atrocities cannot be segregated by gender.<sup>48</sup>

Sarti focuses her discussion on the roles of women as camp guards in four major camps—Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald and Ravensbrück. Not only does Sarti prove that women, previously thought to be unable to commit crimes against women and children because of their innate motherly instincts, were instrumental in torturing and murdering thousands of concentration camp victims, but she also draws conclusions about the reasoning behind their actions. One major argument that Browning and Sarti agree upon, as she explains in her book, is that these women made a conscious decision to kill.<sup>49</sup> A sort of sadistic feminism constituted this consciousness, and some women actively participated in mass murder because they saw an opportunity for economic and even social equality to that of their male counterparts. According to Sarti's research, Himmler openly admitted that women who agreed to work in the camp systems were to be treated as equals to their male counterparts.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, in a society that favored the separation of male and female spheres of control on the Home Front, out in the "Wild East" Nazism served to create as a sense of identity and collective purpose for these women. According to Sarti, sadistic violence, as seen through the eleven case studies in this work, was a way to assert control and would enable these women to "feel superior in their positions of power, and dominate as well as humiliate those who they were told were inferior or were the enemies."<sup>51</sup> Sarti's work is an important addition to the historiographical discussion on

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<sup>48</sup> Wendy Sarti, *Women and Nazis: Perpetrators of Genocide and other Crimes during Hitler's Regime, 1933-1945*, (Palo Alto, CA: Academica Press, 2011), xv.

<sup>49</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 63.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 192.

Nazi women, because she reveals that women achieved positions of power, not previously believed to be possible.

Finally, the most recent portrayal of female involvement in the Nazi Final Solution is Wendy Lower's work, *Hitler's Furies*. Lower begins her discussion with the growing need for women to go "East" in order to help colonize the new German *Lebensraum*. In order to make the prospect of leaving Germany to travel east to unfamiliar lands attractive, the Nazis used propaganda tactics to portray the east as a place of greater opportunity, travel, and adventure. As a result, many young women were willing to take the risk. Lower is instrumental in exposing hundreds of thousands of German women who went willingly to the "Eastern Nazi Frontier."<sup>52</sup> Whereas Sarti concentrates on women who, in the realm of a concentration camp, were prepared to be exposed to horrific conditions, and taught precisely how to commit heinous atrocities against their prisoners, Lower focuses on women employed in positions not usually associated with violence. Similarly to Browning, Lower shows that these "ordinary women" could easily become witnesses, accomplices, and killers. Employed in the east as teachers, tasked with burning "the racial sense and racial feelings into the instinct and the intellect, the heart and brain of the youth entrusted to it;"<sup>53</sup> secretaries, desk murderers, who read, signed, and typed up orders outlining murder details;<sup>54</sup> nurses, who aided in murdering wounded German soldiers, and often sick Jewish children;<sup>55</sup> and wives, who followed their husbands east and often exposed to daily violence, these women chose to participate to prove they were just as capable as their male counterparts<sup>56</sup> and became some of the most violent and deadly female perpetrators.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Wendy Lower, *Hitler's Furies*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 3.

<sup>53</sup> Lower, *Hitler's Furies*, 39.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 153.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 155.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

Through these two works by Sarti and Lower, we are able to draw a more complete understanding of the roles women played in the Nazi Final Solution. These works are crucial to the historiographical discussion because, not only did they expose many women in Nazi Germany previously thought to be non-existent, but also together they expose the different types of women who held a variety of positions of power in Nazi society. Unfortunately for their victims, however, these studies came too late. Although Kempner's diligent study made it perfectly clear that prosecutors should not discount the roles of women in Nazi society, simply because they were women, when the war came to an end in 1945 and war crimes trials were held, most women were not believed to be capable of such heinous crimes. This allowed thousands of women escaped after having committed various atrocities, unscathed. The few who were captured and tried were painted to be sadistic or mannish, making them an "exception" to the rule. However, they are only the exceptions because they got caught. In reality, there were thousands more women just like them who employed a variety of tactics to escape prosecution. Because this phenomenon was more prevalent than historically portrayed, this thesis seeks to further uncover the motivations behind these "unconventional killers," including those who got away. However, it is important to note that although this work will explore the various appeals of these fervent female Nazi supporters, it does not seek to excuse them, but wishes to give a more complete and accurate picture of the true state of affairs of the Nazi regime.

Chapter One outlines the state of Germany immediately following their surrender in World War I. Many of the terms within the Treaty of Versailles, resulted in great social upheaval, economic instability and seemed to doom the democratic Weimar Republic to fail. This tumultuous time caused many to become disillusioned with the new republic, giving Hitler an opportunity to "get his foot in the door" of the Reichstag, and garner great popularity. This

chapter demonstrates the process by which Weimar rose and subsequently fell, leading to the opportunity for Hitler to legally seize power.

With Hitler finally in power, Chapter Two focuses on the other half of society usually ignored during this time period, the girls who grew up under Hitler and who were subsequently indoctrinated under the Nazi regime. In this chapter I will focus on Nazi funded programs, such as the BDM, which was instrumental in inculcating young girls with Nazi ideology prior to the outbreak of war in 1939. In this section I will discuss the Hitler Youth and show how these programs, the BDM specifically, empowered young women and fostered racist ideology and hate for Jews and others “unworthy of life.” This chapter will use a variety of sources, but most importantly a collection of letters from Otti Hahn, a young German girl growing up under Hitler. These candid accounts demonstrate an accurate view of how young girls perceived the Führer and life in Nazi Germany.

As these young girls became young women, and Germany began its Eastward expansion, women were given the opportunity to explore the “Wild East” as well. Chapter Three seeks to uncover what enticed these young women, who grew up with Hitler, to “go East.” This chapter demonstrates what excited these young women about this prospect, and the opportunities that were available to them once they arrived there. Upon their arrival and seeing first hand, the true nature of the Nazi Final Solution, this section will further discuss what motivated some women to encourage, and even participate in, the mass murders of innocent men, women, and children, alongside their male counterparts.

Chapter Four will specifically hone in on three case studies of female perpetrators of Nazi violence: Herta Oberheuser, doctor turned murderer through her participation of human experimentation at Ravensbrück; Irma Grese, nicknamed the “Beautiful Beast,” one of the youngest and most violent female camp guards; and Ilse Koch, wife of Buchenwald

concentration camp commander Karl Otto Koch, known for turning tattooed human skin into lampshades. By examining these case studies, we will discuss how each woman “achieved” their rank, analyze their roles and actions in the Holocaust, and follow them through their trials and verdicts. Here we will uncover how these “ordinary women” became willing participants of the Nazi machine, and what drove them to commit heinous crimes and murders against fellow women, as well as against men and children.

By examining the roles of these three Nazi women, as well as understanding the various women’s programs that helped to cultivate and further racism and violence against Jews and others “unworthy of life,” this thesis aims to paint a more complete picture of the true role played by Nazi women during WWII, as well as argue that women were not only victims of the Nazi regime, nor were they solely bystanders, unaware of what was taking place in the “Wild East.” Rather, this thesis will demonstrate that women were not only complicit, but were also accomplices, aiding German men in facilitating the Nazi Final Solution. The few women who were tried were not really exceptional, nor did they lack “innate feminine virtues,” classically assigned to women at the time, but rather they were excited about the new opportunities made available to them, resulting from a sort of sadistic feminism. Operating within the intrusively patriarchal society, many Nazi women felt the need to prove that they were just as capable as Nazi men, and found a way to do so under the very system that murdered their victims and oppressed German men and women alike.



**Chapter 1: “Power would tame [Hitler’s] extremism, they said.”<sup>58</sup>**  
*The Rise and Fall of the Weimar Republic*

In the spring of 1918, Supreme Military Commander Erich Ludendorff failed in his valiant effort to successfully end the war by achieving a decisive breakthrough on the Western Front. Coupled with the French and British counter attacks of 18 July and 8 August—the “black day of the German army”—the news of Bulgaria’s surrender on 29 September, along with the virtual collapse of the defense of the Romanian front, and the imminent dissolution of the Habsburg Empire,<sup>59</sup> Ludendorff insisted that the German government surrender to an armistice in order to avoid a humiliating, and complete, military defeat. In the name of upholding German military honor, Ludendorff chose this tactic carefully in order to propagate the image that it was the civilian government and the Home Front which were responsible for the defeat, and not the army itself, propagating a “stab in the back” myth, one which ultimately placed the blame on German women for not being strong enough.<sup>60</sup>

When the war officially ended in November 1918, the introduction of modern war machinery had proven it to be the most devastating international conflict to date, with more than nine million deaths worldwide, killed at an average rate of about six thousand per day, for four straight years.<sup>61</sup> Of the German forces alone, two and a half million were dead and four million were wounded, not including the significant losses suffered on the German Home Front as well, due to starvation during the “turnip winter.” In order to support the German army, the strategy of the German government on the Home Front had been to dedicate all civilian efforts to the war industry. Since the 1860s, Germany had only been involved in the short-lived, limited wars of

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<sup>58</sup> Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), 59.

<sup>59</sup> Hans Mommsen, *The Rise & Fall of Weimar Democracy*, Translated by Elborg Forster & Larry Eugene Jones, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 11.

<sup>60</sup> Mommsen, *Rise & Fall*, 11.

<sup>61</sup> Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 32.

German Unification.<sup>62</sup> As a result, Germany was largely unprepared for the four-year long, and extremely deadly, war. This prolonged industrialized warfare had severe social effects. In just three years of war, a third of German artisan workshops had closed, its owners either conscripted or their raw materials “consumed by massive plants” in the name of national defense, while the salaries of civil servants and white collar workers plummeted in comparison to those of workers in war-related industries. The overwhelming loss of male workers led to the increased need for female manpower, which proved to depress wage rates. As a result of the reduction in salary paid to female laborers for completing the same job, with similar caliber, throughout the war, employers were unwilling to increase the rate of pay to pre-war levels for the men returning from the Front. Due to the nature of “total war” that had become the policy of most nations involved in the war—where every civilian activity was dedicated to the winning the war—industries regarded as superfluous to the war effort, those not dedicating all of their efforts to creating wartime products sank into poverty, while humans seen simply as a burden on society, for instance psychiatric patients or the mentally disabled, commonly succumbed to disease or death due to neglect associated with their low priority status.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to the millions who found their final resting place on the battlefield, close to a million additional civilians casualties resulted from starvation on the Home Front. As of 1915, the Entente Forces had secured a blockade, effectively cutting off Germany imports of food and other necessary war materials.<sup>64</sup> The result of this blockade was so successful that the German population was essentially starved out during the “Turnip Winter” of 1916-17, a period marked by serious food shortages. At this time, civilians were surviving solely on an inadequate diet of bread, thin slices of sausage, and three pounds of potatoes per week, and turnips which were the

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<sup>62</sup> Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 27.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Vincent, *The Politics of Hunger: The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1915-1919*, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985), 45.

only food in abundant supply.<sup>65</sup> By the summer of 1917, it was no longer possible to meet the minimal needs of the German civilian population. As tensions rose between civilians and the civilian governments, the relationship between those living in urban city centers and those living on farms became severely strained. Farmers were often better off than their fellow country men living in the cities because of their ability to circumvent state control of food through the illicit slaughtering of livestock and hiding portions of their crops. While the major cities were being closely monitored by Reich officials, farmers had greater access to supplies traded on the black market, by bartering with the goods they were successful in hoarding. In retaliation, urbanities took to the fields to forage for food on farmlands, and in severe desperation, even ransacked the food-supply trains.<sup>66</sup>

The rift between these two economic sectors further exacerbated the inadequacies of the German state's distribution mechanisms, leading civilians to further distrust the administration, while also markedly increasing racist sentiments. The question of who was fighting, and who shirking, their civilian duties led to the infamous 1916 "Jew count" by the War Ministry.<sup>67</sup> Although the investigation proved that cowardice was not actually "ethnically specific," the presence of Jewish businessmen in charge of industries still able to purchase raw materials from abroad, became scapegoats for civilians who were under the impression that only Jews were prospering while everyone else was dying.<sup>68</sup> A result of massive casualties attributed to trench warfare on the front lines, coupled with reports reaching soldiers about the extremely desperate and demoralized Home Front, the German army rapidly began to implode. Not only did the situation at home, paired with the hardships on the battlefield, result in growing discontent and increased rates of desertion, but also as soldiers began to realize that defeat was imminent, they

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<sup>65</sup> Vincent, *The Politics of Hunger*, 21.

<sup>66</sup> Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 30.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

were no longer willing to sacrifice their lives for the futile war effort. The quickly deteriorating situation of the war left Germany no choice but to reluctantly accept defeat.<sup>69</sup>

Prior to military surrender, the October Reforms were introduced, breaking with the imperial monarchy. The collapse of Second Reich gave way to the foundation Germany's first parliamentary democracy, and on 9 November 1918 the Weimar Republic was founded.<sup>70</sup> Contrary to other democratic countries, where the introduction of democracy positively affected the economic and social development of its citizens, because the birth of the Weimar Republic was marked by a humiliating defeat, and forced acceptance of the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles, the lack of a unifying symbol, paired with severe economic crises, led citizens of the Reich to become nostalgic of the "good old days" of Wilhelmine Empire, effectively dooming Weimar to fail before it even began.

In early November 1918, many Germans who viewed Kaiser Wilhelm II as the only obstacle standing in the way of accepting terms of peace became united in demanding his abdication. With mounting political unrest, Wilhelm and the Supreme Court attempted to restore order to the public through the use of the army units returning from the Front. But when the Kaiser could not rally enough support from the army, and the threat of civil war began to undermine negotiations for armistice, on 9 November 1918, Chancellor Prince Max von Baden announced the forced abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II. As a result, von Baden ended his Chancellorship and made way for the moderate *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD) leader, Friedrich Ebert, to become the first president of a new Germany.<sup>71</sup> The leaders of the SPD, unhappy with the fate of Germany falling into their laps in such a dangerous situation, rather than being elected through parliamentary democracy, invited the *Unabhängige*

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>70</sup> Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classic Modernity*, Translated by Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 3.

<sup>71</sup> Raffael Scheck, *Germany, 1871-1945: A Concise History* (New York: Berg, 2008), 107.

*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (USPD) to aid in establishing a new government to alleviate its radicalism and called for the election of a National Assembly to draft a new constitution.<sup>72</sup> Despite some concessions being made by the SPD to the USPD, this agreement might have gone smoothly were it not for Philipp Scheidemann, a leading SPD member, proclaiming to the public from the balcony of the Reichstag, in face of competing proclamations between the Spartacist Karl Liebknecht, the introduction of a new German Republic.<sup>73</sup> Although Scheidemann was successful in announcing the birth of the new Republic from Parliament, before Liebknecht was able to declare a Socialist state, the fact that the Republic had no legitimizing foundation ritual implied a general lack of commitment to the new German order.<sup>74</sup> From its inception, Weimar Germany was immediately faced with a number of horrific problems: the issues associated with demobilization and rehabilitation of the troops,—many of whom returned home severely wounded and suffering from PTSD—the lack of procuring enough food supplies for the hundreds of thousands of starving civilians, the unsettling terms of the peace negotiations, and the attempts to jumpstart the economy despite massive debts incurred, and rising inflation.<sup>75</sup>

The most immediate and prominent of these issues were of the terms of the peace treaty. Officially called the Treaty of Versailles, this treaty imposed a variety of sanctions on the German government. First, the treaty called for the concession of various areas of the German Reich, resulting in the loss of thirteen percent of her territory, and a tenth of her population.<sup>76</sup> While Alsace-Lorraine, a territory acquired in 1871 as a result of the Franco-Prussian War, was to be returned to France, the Saarland was also to be placed under French control for a period of

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<sup>72</sup> Scheck, *Germany*, 108.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 108.

<sup>74</sup> Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 6.

<sup>75</sup> Mommsen, *Rise & Fall*, 31.

<sup>76</sup> Richard Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004),62.

fifteen years. The rich farmlands of eastern Germany were to be given to Poland, and finally, Austria was not allowed to join Germany. Second, Germany was to be demilitarized. The standing Army was reduced to 100,000 along with a limited Navy, military defense was to be withdrawn from the Rhineland. All remaining articles of war, including approximately 6 million rifles, 130,000 machine-guns, 91,000 cannons, 950 tanks, 15,000 airplanes, and all wartime factories, fortifications, works, and coastal defenses<sup>77</sup> were to be surrendered or destroyed.

Finally, Germans were expected to accept Article 231, the war-guilt clause. Under this article, Germany was forced to accept sole guilt for the outbreak of the devastating war. Because the war was never fought on German soil, and caused no physical damage to the German Home Front, under this article, Germany was to pay compensation not merely for damages that she had directly caused, but also for the entire damages as a result of war as a whole.<sup>78</sup> The result of these punitive financial reparations called for the seizure of over two million tons of merchant ships, twenty-four million tons of coal, and five thousand railway engines, on top of the millions owed in reparations to be paid in gold over the course of many years.<sup>79</sup> For Germany, the Versailles Treaty posed a series of economic, social and political issues.

## **I. Economic Issues**

The German government financed the large military expenditure of the war using only about fourteen percent taxation, with the remaining eighty-six percent backed by war bonds purchased by citizens. These bonds were expected to be redeemed at the end of the war under the expectation that Germany would come out victorious, entitled to huge reparations which

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<sup>77</sup> Otti Hahn to Doris Berry, 3 February, 1933 to 29 March 1936: "Hitler's Appeal against the madness of Versailles," In the *Doris Berry collection*, (Hamburg, Germany), accession No. 2012.89.1.

<sup>78</sup> Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 53.

<sup>79</sup> Evans, *Coming of the Third Reich*, 65.

would have been exacted from Germany's defeated opponents.<sup>80</sup> In order to continually finance the ever increasing cost of the war, once citizens could no longer afford to purchase the bonds, the government simply printed up more money, which caused the annual average rate of inflation to sky-rocket from 1 percent in 1890 to the start of the war in 1914, to 32 percent by the end of the war in 1918.<sup>81</sup> As a result, the German economy at the end of the war was in shambles. Now, not only were Germans responsible for paying back reparations totaling 132 thousand million gold marks (after a reduction from the January 1921 amount of 269 thousand million gold marks), but also the Mark was only worth a third of its pre-war value. This seemingly outrageous figure simultaneously frightened and disgusted the German people, leaving them with a grave vision for the future. Aside from the fact that the unborn generation would be forced to grow up in a society enslaved by severe debt and inflation that they themselves did not incur, the sheer number of physically and mentally damaged soldiers returning from war would only prove to further burden the German Home Front. Young workers and women who were forced during the war to take on the responsibility of replacing men in the factories, would now be disproportionately affected by rising unemployment.<sup>82</sup> The millions of men who would return from the battlefield wounded, disabled, and consequently unable to work, the cost of medical care coupled with rising unemployment and debt, would send Germany spiraling into a period of extreme hyperinflation spanning from 1921-1924.

The worst of the hyperinflationary period took place in 1923. Between Christmas of 1922 and the New Year in 1923, Germany defaulted twice on her reparations payments. As a result, Belgium and France sent seventy thousand troops to occupy the Ruhr area in order to

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<sup>80</sup> Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 28.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>82</sup> Mommsen, *Rise & Fall*, 41.

ensure that Germany would no longer delay payments.<sup>83</sup> In national solidarity, the German government encouraged workers in the area to take a stance of passive resistance. With workers on strike, the usual deliveries of raw materials from the Ruhr ceased, resulting in waves of cutback in production and layoffs elsewhere.<sup>84</sup> The German government, wanting to uphold the movement of passive resistance, used deficit spending to subsidize workers on strike. As a result, unemployment continued to rise from two to twenty-three percent. Tax revenue declined to one percent of total government expenditure, and the volume of money circulating grew exorbitantly. For example, a banknote-printers' bill appeared as 32776899763734490417 Marks and 5 pfennige in a Reichsbank account.<sup>85</sup> As a result, banks were forced to hire more clerical workers in order to calculate the ever-increasing digits. The rate of inflation was accumulating so rapidly that economic production slowed as workers were forced cut short working hours to trundle wheel-barrow laden with one day's pay to banks and shops in order to be able to purchase foodstuffs and other necessities, before the Marks were rendered worthless.<sup>86</sup>

By 1923, the catastrophic hyperinflation that had built up over the year 1922 was so severe that it led to a complete collapse of the German currency.<sup>87</sup> The Mark was so worthless that in the span of a few short hours, it would cost more to deposit a check in the bank than the check was worth. Rather than taking the time to roll wheelbarrows full of cash to the bank, just to have the deposit rejected, people during the winter used it to wallpaper the insides of their homes, serving as insulation when they could no longer afford to pay for heating. While some debtors were able to pay off their debts under the "Mark is a Mark" policy, and small shopkeepers and craftsmen were able to profit from inflation if they operated on the black

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<sup>83</sup> Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 54.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 56.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 56.

<sup>87</sup> Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 62.



market, diligent savers and many elderly were plunged into poverty, and Germans suffering from sickness were so destitute as a result of the hyperinflationary period, that they were increasingly susceptible to tuberculosis or rickets.<sup>88</sup> However, this further division in an already segregated society left profiteers socially marginalized and the target of criminal investigations.<sup>89</sup>

With the German government truly unable to make payments on their debts due to the horrific hyperinflation, in 1923 the Dawes Plan was introduced to help manage the crisis. This plan was instituted to help stabilize and jumpstart the German economy by giving out American loans, and then extracting a sum of reparations from Germany—which would be decided by the degree of economic recovery. The reparations paid by Germany to France and Britain, would help to stabilize European capitalism, as well as enable the latter to pay back their war debt to the United States.<sup>90</sup> Despite the reorganization of reparations that would help stifle hyperinflation, the fact that payments would stretch into the late 1980s did not alleviate nationalist resentments. However, for the time being Weimar appeared to have just barely weathered its greatest hour of crisis.<sup>91</sup>

With the end of hyperinflation, and the radical left and right out of the public sphere of influence for the time being, for the next four years Weimar Germany finally witnessed a period of stabilization, unfortunately one that would be short lived. In 1928 the worldwide economy began showing symptoms of severe economic instability. These indications, resulting from the 1929 Wall Street crash, culminated into a full-scale international catastrophe.<sup>92</sup> Just as Germany was getting back on its feet, the Great Depression in America affected the economy of many

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<sup>88</sup> Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 57.

<sup>89</sup> Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 65.

<sup>90</sup> Scheck, *Germany*, 135.

<sup>91</sup> Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 60.

<sup>92</sup> Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 121.

capitalist countries world wide, and once again, German industrial production fell to 91 percent of its 1913 level in 1930, and the economy collapsed even more so over the next two years.<sup>93</sup>

As a result of constant economic hardships, a great number of people chose suicide as an alternative to living with the utter demoralization any longer. In a speech given by Hitler in 1933, he claimed, “Since the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, which was to be, as a Work of Peace, the basis of a new and better times for all nations, 224900 Germans, men and women— young and old—and children have committed suicide, in almost all cases as a result of misery and distress.”<sup>94</sup> These severe economic downturns would prove to be a permanent mark on Germany’s perception the Weimar period, and as a result, would in many minds, be exclusively associated with democracy. As a result, many Germans, especially young people, whose childhoods were marred by a time of exceptionally high structural and short-term cyclical unemployment, would soon find solace in the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP).<sup>95</sup> In fact, as a result of the severe fluctuations in the value of German currency and lack of stability within the fifteen yearlong Weimar Republic, opposition to capitalism and the new bourgeois Republic, also became more extreme among the unemployed youth.<sup>96</sup> Many, eager to abandon democracy and longed the return to a Wilhelmine era, helped to make Hitler’s National Socialism an extremely attractive option.

## II. Social Issues

The Treaty of Versailles called for the cessions of various territories, which entailed a loss of about thirteen percent of the population under the German Reich.<sup>97</sup> Although some of the

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<sup>93</sup> Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 121.

<sup>94</sup> Hahn, “Hitler’s Appeal against the madness of Versailles,” *Doris Berry Collection*.

<sup>95</sup> Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 94.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 95

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 7

territories lost either had large majorities of non-German speakers, (Poland and Denmark) or had a German-speaking population who have never been fully integrated into the Reich (Alsace-Lorraine), the reorganization of some boundaries proved to be problematic. Although President Wilson insisted on rearranging Europe along lines of nationality,<sup>98</sup> the drawing of the boundary with Poland caused a great deal of resentment amongst Germans. Due to the mixed national pattern of settlements over a large territory, most bordering German-Polish boundaries to guaranteed to leave a sizeable minority on the ‘wrong side,’ rendering Poles the beneficiaries, and Germans the losers.<sup>99</sup> A fundamental alteration in the position of nationalities had taken place in central, eastern and southern Europe resulting in the division of the original three multinational empires into a dozen smaller states. Of these twelve, only Germany, Austria and Hungary had become fairly homogenous in their national makeup; however, a sizable number of their own nationals were forced to live just outside their borders. As a result, the remaining territories whose boundaries were created arbitrarily and not according to nationality, the mix of different national minorities within one state became breeding grounds for conflict.<sup>100</sup> In fact, sometimes these Germans marooned just beyond the borders of the former German Reich faced discrimination by French authorities in Alsace-Lorraine and in the Rhineland, and by Polish troops in West Prussia and Silesia.

One major implication resulting from the loss of territory, and despite German cries for a revision of the frontier boundaries, was the extreme emotional intensification of “*volkisch* thinking.” It provided examples of persecution and suffering, which fueled the belief that Germans culture was in danger and were in need of an ethnically exclusive ‘national

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<sup>98</sup> Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 48.

<sup>99</sup> Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, 44.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

community.<sup>101</sup> Clearly, the result of the boundaries drawn through the Treaty of Versailles helped to cultivate hatred for non-Germans seen as “encroaching” on German territory, and would have many negative implications for Germany’s future under Hitler.

### III. Political Issues

Prior the onset of the hyperinflationary period that spanned from 1921-1924, the Weimar Republic seemed to be functioning well. When the Weimar Constitution was accepted on 11 August 1919, it was progressive for its time. It represented compromise between the Social Democrats, as well as the more liberal democrats, demonstrating that the Republic would be based on class compromise. Still, there were those who continued to pose a threat to the stability of the Republic, those on the far left, the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD), those feared to be Communists, and those on the far right, the NSDAP, seen as anti-democratic, or Fascist.<sup>102</sup> Despite the progressive nature of the Weimar Constitution, two “fatal flaws” are believed to have brought down the Republic after only fifteen years: the proportional representation clause, which allowed parties with small numbers of supporters to get a foothold in Parliament; and Article 48, which gave the president the right to promulgate legally binding emergency decrees, in states of emergency, called at the discretion of the president. The first president of the Weimar Republic, Friedrich Ebert, set an amazing precedent by using the exceptional powers granted to him during the crisis of 1923.<sup>103</sup> From the period between 1919 and 1923, Ebert used his army under Article 48 to declare a state of emergency at least thirty-

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<sup>101</sup> Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, 48.

<sup>102</sup> Julia Sneeringer, *Winning Women’s Votes: Propaganda and Politics in Weimar Germany* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>103</sup> Mommsen, *Rise & Fall*, 56-7.

seven times, and in total more than one hundred and thirty six times,<sup>104</sup> many of which were used under the guise of countering the leftist, Bolshevik, revolution.<sup>105</sup>

Having learned of the extremely violent and bloody Bolshevik revolution wreaking havoc in Russia, many Germans were starkly opposed to Communist ideology. There was a “marked contrast in the brutal way the army dealt with the left and its soft-glove approach to the right, which... posed a greater threat to the republic.”<sup>106</sup> With the disarmament terms of the Treaty of Versailles still unpredictable in November 1918, and given the unresolved question of the fate of the eastern frontier and armed clashes between German units and Bolshevik troops, to Chancellor in November 1918, it would seem that the existence of a standing German army would be necessary to control the extreme-Leftists for some time to come.<sup>107</sup> Within the first four years of the Weimar Republic, assassins had murdered 354 liberal and Socialist leaders, while only 22 far right leaders were killed by assaults from the left.<sup>108</sup> The sentencing patterns similarly reflected the views of those who enforced the democratic laws. While 326 of right-wing assassins were cleared of punishment (the remaining 28 only received mild jail sentences of a few months), of the 22 leftists terrorists, 10 received the death penalty, and 7 received long jail terms, or forced labor.<sup>109</sup>

Clearly, one of the major concerns hindering the establishment of a stable democratic republic was the need to prevent the perceived spread of Bolshevism in Germany. It was a widely held suspicion that the USPD was nothing but an instrument for the Bolshevization of Germany. With this fear of the creation of “Russian conditions” instilled in the minds of more moderate Germans, social prejudices against the radical Left were further strengthened. In order

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<sup>104</sup> Evans, *Coming of the Third Reich*, 80.

<sup>105</sup> Anthony McElligott, “Political Culture,” in *Weimar Germany* ed. by Anthony McElligott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 33.

<sup>106</sup> McElligott, *Weimar Germany*, 33.

<sup>107</sup> Mommsen, *Rise & Fall*, 32.

<sup>108</sup> Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 48.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

to suppress the coming revolution of the radical Left, the People's Commissars<sup>110</sup> accepted the challenge of a counterrevolution to lethally put down the Bolshevik insurgents in fear of the spread of Communism. As a result, the military occupation of Berlin by the far Left triggered "a frantic hunt for the "Spartacist" ringleaders, and ended with the violent suppression of any sign of opposition."<sup>111</sup> This hunt called upon the anti-democratic *Freikorps* (Free Corps) paramilitary forces, also disloyal to the Republic, and resulted in the savage murder of far Leftist leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht on 15 January. This act of violence "bore dramatic testimony to the intolerance, hatred, and glorification of violence that was dominating the German political scene under the motto of getting even with the Spartacists."<sup>112</sup>

The support for the *Freikorps* in the destruction of the extreme Leftists KPD during the German Revolution of 1918-1919 allowed the radical Right to gain a great deal of trust and support by constituents of Weimar.<sup>113</sup> A further repression of the extreme Left took place the following year in Bavaria, when the *Freikorps*, again, enacted extreme violence against the Communists. Although many favored removing the "threat" of Bolshevism, this episode served to demonstrate just how violent the radical Right had become. The *Freikorps* not only called upon older members of the old army, but also began drawing younger members into conscription. This group was compromised of two main pillars. On the one hand it was radically anti-democratic, and on the other, passionately nationalist and opposed to every term of the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>114</sup> Harboring own secret plans to kill Communists and fight France and Poland, the *Freikorps* became an increasingly dangerous to the already unstable Weimar Republic. Despite their occupation of Berlin, the *Freikorps* found little resistance, and the Kapp

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<sup>110</sup> A government office of the USSR, based on Marxist-Leninist socialist value

<sup>111</sup> Mommsen, *Rise & Fall*, 37.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

<sup>114</sup> Scheck, *Germany*, 126.

Putsch, only put down as a result of a general strike by the working class parties. This demonstrated how little the Germany army, dominated by anti-democratic officers, cared for the Weimar Republic. The army, which was content to fight left-wing putschists with great brutality, decided to remain “neutral” toward those of the right-wing.<sup>115</sup> This leniency towards right-wing putschists would prove to have severe implications, just a few short years later.

Towards the end of the hyperinflationary period, in November of 1923, it seemed that currency stabilization and political stabilization might succeed in the near future. Yet not far from Berlin, young Adolf Hitler, with his rancorous anti-Semitism and denunciation of the Weimar Republic, was beginning to successfully establish himself, and cultivate mass support to stage a Putsch in Bavaria.<sup>116</sup> When passive resistance in the Ruhr came to a conclusion, Hitler, along with other right-winged leaders, demanded that the Bavarian government take action against the national government in Berlin. Whereas Communist uprisings would have been immediately and violently shut down, Bavarian strongman Gustav von Kahr, with the aid of Army Chief Lassow and Police Chief von Seisser, promised some form of action against Berlin, in order to keep the right-winged radicals in line. But by 8 November 1923 rightist radicals could wait no more and planned to stage a putsch. The *Sturm Abteilung* (SA), under the command of Hitler and Ludendorff, surrounded a beer hall where Kahr, Lossow, and von Seisser were giving speeches. Hitler and Ludendorff burst into the hall, and declared the beginning of a revolution.<sup>117</sup> Despite negotiations between Bavarian leaders and leaders of the “Beer Hall” Putsch, during the night Bavarian leaders took steps to repress the uprising by use of forces loyal to the Bavarian government. To save their putsch, Hitler and Ludendorff assembled a group of Nazis and marched to the Bavarian government center in Munich, where Bavarian police met

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 132.

them. Without clear indication of who fired first, bullets were suddenly flying in the direction of the Nazis, and though neither Hitler nor Ludendorff was hit, thirteen putschists were killed. The putsch collapsed, and the following day Hitler was taken into custody.<sup>118</sup>

Had Hitler been a Communist, the putsch would have made a dead man out of him. Instead, his leadership in the putsch essentially made him a celebrity to right-wing Germans, and a nationally known political figure to all. During his trial following the failed putsch in 1924, Hitler left people with the impression that he was not only a “selfless and courageous patriot” who had dared to what many others were afraid to do, but also, the judges who shared this opinion of Hitler, allowed him to use this public trial to deliver propagandistic speeches.<sup>119</sup> When asked why he did not honor his promise to the police, to not stage a putsch, Hitler solemnly replied, “Forgive me, but I had to for the sake of the Fatherland.”<sup>120</sup> Pulling on the heartstrings of his fellow countrymen, Hitler receiving a mild sentence of five years in prison (the charges were dismissed after having served just one year), Hitler, through the Beer Hall Putsch, and his unwavering loyalty to the right-wing cause, managed to establish himself as a leading figure on the radical right.<sup>121</sup> In fact, the NSDAP had changed the face of their campaign, and had built up the nationwide party structure committed to Hitler as its supreme leader.

The “roaring twenties” the middle years of the Weimar Republic, became characterized by a period of stabilization, economic recovery and international reconciliation. In 1925, President Ebert died at the age of 54, and was replaced by Paul von Hindenburg.<sup>122</sup> By this time, Hitler had been dismissed early from his prison sentence, and the NSDAP had been busy

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>120</sup> William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 69.

<sup>121</sup> Scheck, *Germany*, 133.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 137.



reorganizing the party with Hitler at its core. Hitler, who recognized the need to play down his extremist image in order to gain the support of a wider range of voters, reduced his use of the SA in conducting violence in public, and toned down his anti-Semitic propaganda. However, by the elections of December 1924, the NSDAP, with Ludendorff as its main candidate, was behind in voter polls, as the economy had begun to rebound.<sup>123</sup> With Hitler's release from prison, and consequent bans lifted on the Nazi Party and its newspaper, he assumed the dictatorial leadership position of the party. Hitler was the first German politician to build a national campaign. Not only did he hire a plane to fly him from city to city, creating the image that he was always present, but he carefully rehearsed his speeches in order to ensure strong delivery, and the NSDAP spent a great deal of money on propaganda advertisements.<sup>124</sup> As a result, Hitler was able to inspire his supporters and encourage the support of new voters.

By the end of 1925 participation rates were just shy of 27,000. Each subsequent year saw significant increases in Nazi Party membership: 46,000 in 1926; 72,000 in 1927; 108,000 in 1928 and 178,000 in 1929.<sup>125</sup> During the election of 1928, just prior to the Great Depression, the NSDAP was able to gain only twelve seats in the Reichstag. Though disappointed in the turnout, Hitler had high hopes for the subsequent election. Coupled with the Wall Street crash in 1929, mid-term election results on 14 September 1930 demonstrated a massive increase in voter turnout for the NSDAP. Although Hitler expected to obtain about 50 seats, quadrupling the number of votes, he was stunned to find that his party had moved up from the ninth, and smallest, party in the Reichstag, to the second largest party with 6,409,600 votes and 107 seats in Parliament.<sup>126</sup> The results of the 10 April 1932 election once again had increased participation, but were unsatisfactory for the NSDAP. Second to Hindenburg, who obtained 53% of the

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>125</sup> Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of Nazi Germany*, 119-120.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 138.

popular vote and securing the Presidency, Hitler garnered only 36.8% of the popular vote.<sup>127</sup> With the economy beginning to rebound, Hitler felt this might be the end of the road for his political career. However, Hindenburg had run mostly as a figurehead, and was becoming much too old to rule. As a result of Hitler's growing popularity, and Hindenburg having named Franz Von Papen as Chancellor, Papen dissolved the Reichstag on 4 June 1932 and set new elections for 31 July.<sup>128</sup> The polls resulted in 13,745,000 votes for the NSDAP, allowing them 230 seats in the Reichstag, making them the largest party.<sup>129</sup> Hitler, aware of his powerful position, called for Papen to grant him Chancellorship or nothing, to which Papen decided he would leave the decision to Hindenburg. On 30 January 1933, Hindenburg conceded and named Hitler Chancellor of Germany. Now in a position of power, Hitler did what many Chancellors did before him. He called a state of emergency on 1 February 1933, dissolved the Reichstag and called for new elections to take place on 5 March 1933. The SA was sent to the streets to "keep order" during the campaign, and with that, Hitler began his purge of opposition, in order to become absolute ruler.<sup>130</sup>

#### **IV. The Rise of Nazi Germany**

On 27 February 1933, shortly after Hitler's induction as Chancellor, the Reichstag was set afire, allegedly<sup>131</sup> by Dutch Communist Marinus van der Lubbe. This gave the Nazi party an excellent opportunity to exploit the Communist party and demonstrated that a communist uprising was imminent, and served to solidify loyalties to the National Socialist party. The

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>130</sup> Scheck, *Germany*, 159.

<sup>131</sup> Fire so conveniently offered Nazis the opportunity to conjure up fears of a communist uprising that some historians suggest that it was actually a Nazi Plot to obtain absolute support.

following day an emergency decree for the “Protection of the People and the State,”<sup>132</sup> was passed by the Nazi party, thereby officially legalizing Nazi terror. With the decree in place, Hitler and the Nazi party were now able to arrest and persecute political opponents and dissolve other political organizations. With this in place, the Enabling Act was passed less than a month later, which further gave the Nazi regime free rein to pursue its political agenda by means of terror and compulsion. Despite the violence associated with the acts, many Germans felt that it was right to “punish” Social Democrats and Communists. Many citizens were all too willing to forgive the violence and injustices as “understandable excesses” that would later be controlled just as soon as the Nazi regime had stabilized.<sup>133</sup>

Faced with little resistance from the German people, the Nazis continued with their agenda and were able to successfully launch their first nationwide act of terror against the Jews. On 1 April 1933, the Nazis issued a decree to boycott Jewish businesses. Just a few days later the Nazi government followed the boycott with the induction of the “Aryan Paragraph.” This law banned Jews and anti-Nazis from careers in the public sector, and soon followed suite by extending the decree into other professions in order to “create an apartheid system where Jews were no longer considered Germans.”<sup>134</sup> The aim was forced emigration of the Jews or the creation of a separate, strictly confined, society.

By the fall of 1933, the Nazis had proven successful in repressing various groups who were seen as “threatening” to German society. Further, most people were satisfied that unemployment had declined, and that the widespread terror had become less noticeable to the public. Because the economy had begun to recover, a trend that began prior to Hitler’s election, and since order had been restored, Germans who were neither Socialist nor Jewish could live the

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<sup>132</sup> the decree permitted the restriction of the right to assembly, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press, among other rights, and it removed all restraints on police investigations. Scheck, *Germany*, 160.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 161.

same, if not better, than they had in the past. This reassured many Germans that they had made the correct choice by voting for the NSDAP.<sup>135</sup> Although this sudden take over at times required a strong arm, more often than not, both Nazi supporters and leaders of non-Nazi organizations were “seized by a contagious mood of hope and renewal,” and were eager to demonstrate their loyalties to the new regime.<sup>136</sup>

With the revolution almost fully under control, in order to solidify support from the German people, Hitler needed to stabilize his rule and make his government cooperate with state administrations, economic elites, and the remainder of the population not in his party. Now Hitler was faced with the same dilemma most leaders of revolutions face after ascending to power; he needed to cultivate a “moderate, restrained, and legal stance,” which was challenged by the extremely violent SA. Although the SA had made the Nazi rise to power possible, with the state police under the control of the Nazis, the SA was no longer needed. The elimination of the violent SA leaders became Hitler’s only remaining major purge that stood in the way of full consolidation of his power.<sup>137</sup> The “Night of Long Knives” on 30 June 1934 resulted in the murder of many SA leaders. While Germans were appalled by the horrific public violence, few Germans felt sorry for those who had been killed, as many SA members were vicious murders themselves. As a result, this final purge increased Hitler’s popularity, not only under the guise that Hitler had returned to law and order by shedding the violent subsection of his own ranks, but army officials were grateful to Hitler for having stood by them, causing them to reaffirm their loyalty to the regime.<sup>138</sup> A means to demonstrate their devotion, the army introduced an oath of allegiance dedicated to Hitler that every Nazi German soldier would be required to swear.

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 163.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 165.

The death of President Hindenburg on 2 August 1934 only a month after the Night of Long Knives led to the utter collapse of the democratic Weimar Republic and allowed Hitler to, once and for all, become absolute ruler of the Third Reich. From now on, Hitler would be referred to as Führer (leader) and Reich Chancellor of the German people. No more popular elections would be held, and the powers of office staff, Chancellor and President would be held by Hitler, and Hitler alone, giving him free reign to control the future of Germany until the collapse of the Third Reich in the summer of 1945.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 165.

## Chapter 2: Hitler's Girls

*“Germans... aim to skim from the population the cream of young manhood and womanhood, and create a supply of leaders imbued with the ideals of National Socialism, capable of assuming positions of authority and responsibility in all ranks and spheres of life.”<sup>140</sup>*

*“In the first place they must become the best soldiers we have: they must be comrades. In the second place they must become fanatical preachers of the gospel. And in the third place we demand of them unconditional obedience.”—Dr. Ley, 1937<sup>141</sup>*

Born 19 February 1919, Otti Hahn of Chemnitz was just over four months old when the Treaty of Versailles was signed in the Hall of Mirrors on 28 June 1919.<sup>142</sup> Although little is known about Otti's life prior to her correspondence with American Doris Berry at the age of fourteen, it is important to note that Otti would spend the greater part of her childhood being raised within the socially, economically and politically turbulent Weimar Republic. With Hitler's rise to power in 1933, Otti would consequently spend the majority of her teenage years, arguably the most malleable of a child's life, under the fascist, anti-Semitic, Nazi rule.

The beginning of the Weimar Republic, though tempestuous, cannot solely be marked by defeat. The Great War, which resulted in the death of millions of young men, at the same time “emancipated” millions of young women. While men were defending the front lines, women were left to preserve the Home Front against the economic and social turmoil resulting from the ravages of war.<sup>143</sup> The very progress that women's rights advocates had been demanding for decades subsequently occurred at a time when German women, as the result of a desperate situation, were given a great deal of autonomy through fulfilling of civic duties left vacant by men off fighting the war. When nearly six million men returned from the front after the

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<sup>140</sup> *Nazi Primer: Official Handbook for Schooling of the Hitler Youth*, trans. by Harwood L. Childs (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1938), xvi.

<sup>141</sup> *Nazi Primer*, xxviii.

<sup>142</sup> Mommsen, *Rise & Fall*, 75.

<sup>143</sup> Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 26.

Armistice in November 1918, a kind of social revolution broke out between the workingwomen, who had grown accustomed to their new roles in society, and the men demanding their jobs back. Middle-class women, who felt it was their duty to reintegrate and aid the veterans, differed from the working class women who had a great deal of difficulty leaving their job posts. After having experienced monetary independence and being praised as vital members of the nation, many women found it extremely difficult to return to their former roles as homemakers.<sup>144</sup> With the introduction of female suffrage at the same time as the Armistice, initially it appeared as though women had entered politics by claiming over ten percent of the delegate seats to the 1919 National Assembly. Despite targeting women through specifically designed ad campaigns in order to obtain votes from the new, and large pool of female voters, much of the propaganda that was catered toward them, portrayed images of women operating within the domestic sphere.<sup>145</sup> Although Weimar propaganda attempted to bring about optimism for the Republic and its possibilities for women, after 1919, an equally strong discourse of defeat set in, and one thing the left and right agreed upon, despite difference in opinion about the causes and solutions, was that Germany was in a state of moral decline.<sup>146</sup> All this would change within a few short years.

### **I. “Although... men make history, I do not forget that women raise boys to manhood.”**

Just six weeks after Hitler came to power, Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels issued a speech for the opening of the women’s exhibition, “The Woman,” which took place in Berlin starting 18 March 1933. Whatever a woman’s previous role in Weimar, the intention of his speech was to clearly outline the “new” role of women under National Socialism. Unlike other parties in Weimar that had sought to integrate women into their parties, National Socialism

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>145</sup> Sneeringer, *Winning Women’s Votes*, 23.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 67.

sought to keep women separate from parliamentary-democratic matters. According to Goebbels, this policy should not be attributed to a lack of respect for women, but rather because they respected them “too much.”<sup>147</sup> One of the immediate policy changes of Nazi Germany, was to remove women from posts attained during the Great War and during the Weimar Republic. Policies which had pulled women away from their “natural and proper” roles as mothers and brought them into the workforce at a time of moral decline and desperation. National Socialism called for a fundamental change, to restore a man’s honor by removing the women, who acted as men, from public life. The most suitable place for a woman was in the family, and her most “glorious duty [was] to give children to her people and nation, children who can continue the line of generations and who guarantee the immortality of the nation.”<sup>148</sup> Whereas men should be the breadwinners, serving as politicians and in the military, women were now expected to leave their wartime roles behind them, and return to home to take their place at the center of the family, as mothers of the German Reich.<sup>149</sup>

Adolf Hitler, a man who wavered on almost every crucial political issue, never digressed from his belief of two biological axioms; that the sexes were to have distinctly separate roles, and that Jews were to be eliminated.<sup>150</sup> *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* (children, kitchen, church), was the prominent policy governing German women throughout the Nazi regime. Whatever alternate spheres women had participated in during the First World War, and the subsequent failed democracy that was Weimar, would be disregarded. Women in Nazi society were to exit the work force in order to make room in the labor market for the unemployed, de-masculinized

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<sup>147</sup> Dr. Joseph Goebbels, “Deutsches Frauentum,” *Signale der neuen Zeit. 25 ausgewählte Reden von*, (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1934), pp. 118-126.

<sup>148</sup> Goebbels, “Deutsches Frauentum,” 118-126.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 118-126.

<sup>150</sup> Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 53.



men.<sup>151</sup> Not only did the so-called “surplus of women” drive down wages, but also the astounding losses suffered by the German male population called for childbearing to become a major national goal, which would be fulfilled through a massive re-education program designed to upgrade the traditional motherly traits that modern life had eroded.<sup>152</sup> In order to facilitate these measures, the National Socialists, who felt the backlash from women who had during the war experienced economic freedom, encouraged women to leave their jobs and raise the birthrate through the use of marriage loans. The marriage loan scheme, introduced as part of the Law to Reduce Unemployment on 1 June 1933, was meant to combat the falling population and high unemployment rates.<sup>153</sup> Couples intending to marry would be given a tax-free loan in the amount of 1000 marks. With every child born to the couple, one quarter of the loan would be forgiven. For mothers who gave birth to four or more children, the entire loan be forgiven, and also they would also be awarded medals, similar to those received by soldiers and veterans in honor of their courage and sacrifice in defense of the nation. Women with an outstanding number of children would also have the opportunity to have a high-ranking official be named the honorary Godfather of the children; Hitler, for example had many.<sup>154</sup> The Nazi policy towards women was one that encouraged women, for the sake of the purity of the “Aryan” race, to breed as many children as possible. Although women and men were to occupy separate spheres, the Nazis instilled a sense of pride in the realm of motherhood.

Many Nazi women believed in this separation of spheres of influence between men and women, and some even shared the same assumptions as other female activists of Weimar. While both accepted the conventional stereotypes about a woman’s nature and worked to improve women’s public status, Nazi women, unlike women in other political movements who took their

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<sup>151</sup> Scheck, *Germany*, 168.

<sup>152</sup> Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 56.

<sup>153</sup> Jill Stephenson, *The Nazi Organization of Women*, (London: Crooms Helm, 1981), 46.

<sup>154</sup> Scheck, *Germany*, 168.

concerns directly into the male-dominated sphere, instead worked outside of the political framework. Rather than compete within the patriarchy, these women accepted their position as the second-sex in Hitler's movement in hopes of protecting their womanly realm against male interference.<sup>155</sup> Elsbeth Zander, the leader of the *NS Frauenschaft*, the first official women's movement aligned under the NSDAP,<sup>156</sup> went further to encourage women to dedicate themselves to tasks they deemed more important than political matters. By "allowing" the men do the brunt work of "cleaning up the streets," women would have the ability to unite in the crusade behind the "holy flame of motherhood." Women would now be charged with taking on the more challenging task of purifying the national culture, and securing the future of the German race, without interference of the men.<sup>157</sup> By disassociating from the male dominated public life, Zander for the first time, won women new freedom to create their own realm of activity.<sup>158</sup> Nazi society, in many ways, set out to equalize men and women by keeping women out of competition with their male counterparts.

Even in their separate spheres, women as the creators of life were faced with extremely difficult decisions. In September 1935 Nazi leaders announced a series of laws known as the Nuremberg Laws. These revoked Reich citizenship for Jews, and made it a criminal offense for Jews to become involved with, or married to, a person of pure German blood. Within a few months, this law was extended to others deemed inferior, or those who might produce "racially suspect" offspring. Propaganda further advocated for the sterilization of those who were "unfit" and seen as a threat to the Aryan population. Women tasked with being protectors of the German race were key in identifying the outliers, and exploiting them to the authorities. Within

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<sup>155</sup> Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 55.

<sup>156</sup> Originally leader of the DFO, Zander, whose major strengths included winning over working-class women, stood out for her stubborn ambition in absorbing all women's movements into one auxiliary Nazi women's movement, elected by Gregor Strasser to become the leader of the NSF. Stephenson, *Nazi Organization of Women*, 39.

<sup>157</sup> Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 74.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

their own families, it was seen as the parent's patriotic duty to forego traditional roles of parenthood in the case of potentially "unworthy" children, in order to improve the quality of life for future "Aryan" generations.<sup>159</sup> The cooperation of women in accordance with Hitler's eugenics experiment early on within their own homes would prove to be crucial with the introduction of state sponsored euthanasia programs later on.

In 1937, when there was a severe shortage of labor in Germany, the policy towards women changed. Suddenly women were now strongly encouraged to join the work force. By the start of World War II, about half of all working-age women were employed in some sector of the economy. War and wartime preparations massively increased the need to fill the labor gap, to the point where Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels considered drafting women into the work force—a proposition which Hitler, always true to his views on the role of women, quickly shot down. Coupled with the racist Nazi ideology that delegated great importance to women as mothers responsible for cultivating and protecting the Aryan race, this new need for female employment further instilled many women with a greater sense of independence than ever previously experienced. Despite the fact that women, legally, were still subordinate to men in the work force, and received lower pay, opportunities for female employment were greater under the Nazis than had been in the Weimar Republic and later in post-war West Germany.<sup>160</sup> Without protest, the Women's Bureau readied Nazi women to expand the notion of feminine roles instilled in them, to include paid employment in factories, offices, and even auxiliary military forces.<sup>161</sup> This valued sense of independence and power would prove to have great implications for a woman's role as the war progressed.

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>160</sup> Scheck, *Germany*, 168-9.

<sup>161</sup> Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 200.

## II. Nazi Youth Organizations

The Nazi party especially appealed to the youth movement, as well as members of the lower middle class, who had been neglected by Weimar. Within the Nazi party, young members had greater opportunities for emancipation than ever before.<sup>162</sup> Between 1929 and 1933, the growing economic hardships, aligned with the failing political regime and unsympathetic parents, left many young men and women with limited options. This lack of parental guidance provided an opportunity that leaders of the Nazi Party had been waiting for.<sup>163</sup> The NSDAP, for many, served as a glimmer of hope, one that had been lacking since the end of WWI. To the Nazi party, the youth movement was indispensable, despite their inability to currently vote or attain party membership along the same lines as incorporating women in order to bear the next generation, the youth would serve to upload Nazi ideology long after Hitler had gone. Although initially Hitler had been skeptical about why anyone in his following would seek to dedicate their efforts to founding a Nazi Students' League, Hitler, by the 1930's, acknowledged, "that young people were needed as recruits and guarantors of the longevity of the movement."<sup>164</sup>

The *Hitler-Jugend* (HJ), or Hitler Youth, was necessary for the continuity of Hitler's 1000 year Reich, and served as a way to indoctrinate millions of young, vulnerable, boys and girls. The HJ, open to children ages ten and above—first voluntarily, then eventually mandatory—promoted key Nazi values. For many, the HJ conjured an important sense of belonging to a larger community, rendering these young children completely void of individuality, making them valuable assets at the disposal of the Nazis. In order to get a large number of children involved, Hitler Youth offered various activities, such as camping, hiking, sports and other games. These activities were meant to serve as premilitary training. Camping

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<sup>162</sup> Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, Translated by Richard Deveson, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 95.

<sup>163</sup> Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 10.

<sup>164</sup> Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 11.

was crucial in teaching its members to read maps and become familiar with a wide variety of terrains in face of battle. This was also done to give the future protectors a view of Germany in all of its glory, that when threatened by those living in the Eastern border lands, these boys would stop at nothing to protect. These young children welcomed the opportunity to engage in various sports, including calisthenics, swimming, fencing, and ball games, which were imperative in furthering a “mutual feeling of community” and allegiance to one another.<sup>165</sup>

While instilling feelings of camaraderie amongst its young and impressionable members, the HJ, was at the same time, honoring the main Social Darwinist principle of the survivor of the fittest.<sup>166</sup> The leaders encouraged, more than any other republican youth league, individual, as well as group, sadism, physical and mental torture, and fostered peer-group hazing. For example, youths were forced to demonstrate their courage by jumping into pools of water from five meters high, when they could not swim. Children were also instructed to climb the sides of ravines without proper safety gear.<sup>167</sup> To further supplement their premilitary training, young boys were taught to use, aim and shoot, small-caliber rifles, intended to “sharpened the boys’ appetite for real-life combat.”<sup>168</sup> Further, the Nazi concept of the superior Aryan race was prevalent in many, if not all, aspects of membership within the HJ. From the moment one joined, youths were indoctrinated with racist Nazi ideology. They were made to believe that Germans were racially superior to other “inferior” races, such as Slavs, Gypsies and Jews.

Indoctrination, while habitually denied by post-1945 apologists of the Nazi youth, in reality, occurred on a large, and effective, scale. Proof of such can be found in surviving HJ propaganda film frames, which had been used to “educate” the Nazi Youth.<sup>169</sup> These visual

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<sup>165</sup> Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 31.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>169</sup> See Image 1.

representations were used to depict exactly what kinds of people were deemed inferior, or “unworthy of life,”<sup>170</sup> and further showed “anti-social brothers,” “cripples,” and “idiots,” on top of photos which regarded Jews as “bastards,” and black people as uselessly “costing 35,000 RM” to keep alive.<sup>171</sup> Without a doubt some of the anti-Semitic and other racial indoctrination took place in homes and schools, but the HJ did its best to supplement and instill these racist ideals into the minds of children in order to use them as future weapons.

Whereas the HJ eagerly recruited young boys, young girls were also integrated into the larger Nazi youth movement. Like boys of the Nazi regime, girls were also led to believe that Hitler took a personal interest in each and every one of them. As a result, a separate branch of the HJ was created specifically for girls.<sup>172</sup> The *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (BDM), or League of German Girls, also originated in the late Weimar Republic as a subsection of the Nazi Women’s Organization and was used to recruit girls to become young assailants of Hitler.<sup>173</sup> Beginning as early as 1921, the development of the *NS Frauenschaft* began as a result of forging together various individual groups of female Nazi sympathizers who often held meetings, collected funds for the Nazi party<sup>174</sup> and gave help wherever they were needed by “lend[ing] medical first aid and post guard at some political demonstrations and pass along warnings.”<sup>175</sup> In 1923, Elsbeth Zander founded the official German Women’s Order while Hitler was gaining political prowess. By 1931 Hitler had recognized the importance of a unified woman’s movement in order to avoid another German defeat, as they had during the Great War. Although the lack of political education of soldiers was an element of this defeat, women’s lack of unity on the Home Front,

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<sup>170</sup> See Image 2.

<sup>171</sup> “Hitler Youth Educational Films,” In the Marion Davy collection, accession No. 1996.A.0260.

<sup>172</sup> Wendy Adele-Marie Sarti, *Women and Nazis: Perpetrators of Genocide and Other Crimes During Hitler’s Regime, 1933-1945* (Palo Alto, CA: Academica Press, LLC, 2011), 15.

<sup>173</sup> Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 73.

<sup>174</sup> Kempner, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 6.

<sup>175</sup> Kempner, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 77.

was also believed to have negatively affected the outcome of the war. The HJ became pragmatic in understanding the importance of the politicization of the female youth.<sup>176</sup> Educating the next generation of German women with Nazi thinking would not only create a new generation of the “right” kind of women, but it would also serve to avoid the struggle of women geared towards the intimacy of family life and those wanting to be active outside of the home. It was believed this duality is what led to the loss of the Home Front during the First World War. As a result, various women’s organizations united under the umbrella organization of the *NS Frauenschaft*, which was taken over by Gertrude Scholtz-Klink when Hitler came to power in 1933. The Nazi organizations for women and girls, although not as comprehensive as organizations for boys and men, encouraged girls to fulfill traditional roles. As popular and fun as they were, it seems that these organizations also were instrumental in giving many women a sense of mission and importance they had not had prior to 1933.<sup>177</sup> As a result, women’s membership in the *Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft*, or the Nazi Women’s Organization (NSF) increased by 800 percent between January and December of 1933.<sup>178</sup>

The most influential of these women were those active in the political life of the nation under the *NS Frauenschaft* and *Deutsches Frauenwerk* organizations. Under the *NS Frauenschaft*’s command, the young female population was politically organized under the *Bund Deutscher Mädel*, which was part of the Hitler Youth.<sup>179</sup> Previously, when there were no independent clubs dedicated to young women, the BDM called for a separate sphere of influence, specifically designed to procure healthy and loyal Nazi girls, as well as to train older women as

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<sup>176</sup> Dagmar Reese, *Growing Up Female in Nazi Germany*, trans. William Templer (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 46

<sup>177</sup> Scheck, *Germany*, 168.

<sup>178</sup> Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 144.

<sup>179</sup> Kempner, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 1.

to become teachers, physicians, lawyers, engineers and more.<sup>180</sup> These girls were treated similar to boys in the HJ, where little planning was made to account for gender difference.<sup>181</sup> In fact, it was for this very reason that many girls became attracted to the BDM, it gave them the opportunity to do what hitherto, only boys were allowed to do.<sup>182</sup> It gave them the opportunities to travel, have fun, and become independent from their parents in the aftermath of the financial crises that most likely marked their childhoods. In addition, whereas some household subjected children to intense parental discipline, girls who felt especially intimidated by their fathers, were given the chance to experience freedom and break out of this pattern of life.<sup>183</sup>

Like boys in the HJ, external appearance for girls was also standardized. Girls were to wear a white blouse, tucked into a navy blue skirt, with a triangular emblem embroidered on the left sleeve, indicating a girl's respective area in the League. The outfit was finished with a black scarf tied together with a brown leather string. In the winter, the outfit was usually complemented by white stockings. Girls wore long brown hoses and laced shoes, and either donned a brown vest, or a black peasant costume jacket.<sup>184</sup> This standardized outfit was worn not only to proudly demonstrate their membership in the pure German community, but it also represented a symbol of exclusion for those outside the League, serving as an unambiguous message, that no member was to deviate from the Nazi norm.<sup>185</sup> Like the young boys in the HJ, their support was necessary to ensure longevity of the Nazi regime. In fact, Hitler's boys and girls were seen as coequals, not only in terms of the way daily tasks were performed, but also in terms of leadership structure and the basic ideological and psychological schooling, which would prove to have great implications for World War II.

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>181</sup> Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 73.

<sup>182</sup> Lisa Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 119.

<sup>183</sup> Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, 120.

<sup>184</sup> Reese, *Growing Up Female*, 21.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 21.



Young girls were drafted to the BDM at the age of ten, provided they were of acceptable racial purity. Like boys in the HJ, many of the girls who joined were extremely enthusiastic. Renate Finckh, writing after the war, reflected on her years as a member of the BDM. Finckh, joined the League at age ten as a result of her parents increasingly time consuming Nazi Party activities, did so in need of friendship. For this young girl, like thousands of others, the group served as an “emotional home, a safe refuge... a space in which [she] was valued.”<sup>186</sup> She, along with others her age, was moved by the idea that the Führer, unlike her parents, needed her in order to form an elite group within the German *Volk* community.<sup>187</sup> In fact, many of the youth members were more concerned with becoming accepted by their peers, and conforming to the ideals of Nazi society, rather than doing as their parents told them. Like the aforementioned post-war denial of Nazi indoctrination of boys, memoirs of women looking back on their time in the BDM also deny any recollection of having received conscious inculcation of any ideology.<sup>188</sup> However, what many do recall was the central importance was sports. Whereas boys were indoctrinated with premilitary training through hiking, shooting and other sports, the use of sports for girls was also in accordance with Nazi ideology. For girls, sports were used to cultivate beautiful and strong women, women who should be “firm and sturdy *for* men, so that those they give birth to can be strong.”<sup>189</sup> Although trained by similar means as HJ members, boys were trained to physically defend the nation, while girls were trained to be physically strong for the nation. The strengthening of their bodies through sports was done simply to provide a sturdy host, able to birth as many children as possible, to maintain the purity of the German race. Their bodies were no longer belonged to the individual, now these girls’ bodies were subordinated to national interests. Through the League of German Girls, similarly to their male

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<sup>186</sup> Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 195.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, 195.

<sup>188</sup> Reese, *Growing Up Female*, 60.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

counterparts, young girls also became part of the “national” community by way of the German youth. They were given the opportunity to be seen as “equal[s] to the Hitler Youth on a plane that was perceptible, local, and real.”<sup>190</sup>

The BDM called upon approximately four million young girls aged ten to twenty-one years of age to join. Two million of which were members of the Inner Hitler Youth. These were the girls who joined voluntarily, or by their parents’ instruction. The remaining two million were drafted into service according to the Youth Service Order of 25 April 1939.<sup>191</sup> No matter the means by which they joined, all of them were believed to be highly indoctrinated.<sup>192</sup> One can assume that when Otti Hahn began her correspondence with Doris Berry of Washington, D.C.,<sup>193</sup> in February 1933—just after Hitler became Führer of the Third Reich—Otti had already begun, or was just beginning, her own indoctrination process. One can also deduce that, as Otti was a participant as early as 1933, she actively joined the BDM on her own free will. What is interesting about this specific case study is that many of Otti’s accounts coincide with Ruth Kempner’s study, *Women in Nazi Germany*.

Otti begins the correspondence by describing herself as coinciding with the Nazi Aryan ideals of beauty, a girl of “about five feet, eyes of greyish blue, and of fair hair... [and] pigtails indeed, you see, as most girls do here.”<sup>194</sup> This first correspondence seems to be nothing out of the ordinary, as Otti describes any normal school day in which she learns “German, English, Arithmetics, Mathematics, History, Geography, Physics, Drawing and Gymnastics.”<sup>195</sup>

Although Otti never explicitly mentions whether or not she goes to a Nazi run school, she would have received compulsory training courses, through the BDM, in the history of the German race

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>191</sup> Kempner, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 31.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>193</sup> Doris Berry donated the letters she received from Otti Hahn to the United States Holocaust Museum.

<sup>194</sup> Otti Hahn to Doris Berry, 3 February, 1933 to 29 March, 1936, In the *Doris Berry collection*. Accession No. 2012.89.1. (February 3, 1933).

<sup>195</sup> Hahn, *Doris Berry collection*, (February 3, 1933).

and the Germanism abroad, national and foreign policy, physical education and gymnastics, social activities, music, home economics, agriculture, and emergency services,<sup>196</sup> for at least two hours weekly. The major goals of the Nazi education system was to first redirect its students' values away from individualism and intellect associated with the decadence of the Weimar Republic, and dedicate themselves fully to the Nazi ideals of self-sacrifice. These weekly classes in racial science and physical fitness would serve to replace the more "effete" studies like Latin and French literature.<sup>197</sup> These teachings were highly racialized and would begin to teach Ottilie that Jews and other "asocials" were a threat to the purity of her Aryan race.

In Ottilie's third letter, dated 4 May 1933, Doris received the first explicit mention of Nazi influence. The Nazi government had declared May 1<sup>st</sup> "National Labor Day" and while planning the celebration with a lively demonstration of pomp and frills, it was simultaneously preparing for the final destruction of the workers unions, set for the following day.<sup>198</sup> In this letter, Ottilie describes the holiday that was celebrated on May 1<sup>st</sup> as a "great national holiday on which 100000s of men demonstrated for the freedom and liberty, and resurrection of our people in Chemnitz as well as in the whole empire. You will certainly have read about."<sup>199</sup> Yet, Ottilie does not mention the subsequent dissolution of the unions following the parade. This "holiday," which seemed to be used as a ploy in order to distract citizens from the following days agenda, is given little to no thought by Ottilie. Although the ramifications of Hitler's strategy to remove any form ideological opposition would soon be revealed, Kempner tells us that "submission to strict discipline has become such an essential part in the lives of these girls, whose immaturity and

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<sup>196</sup> Kempner, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 42.

<sup>197</sup> Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 210.

<sup>198</sup> Dr. Robert Ley, "Staff Chief of NSDAP Political Organizations, on the Action to Coordinate the Free Trade Unions" in United States Chief Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, Volume III (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1946), Circular Letter Nr. 6/33 (April 21, 1933), Document 392-PS, pp. 380- 82. <http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/English7.pdf>.

<sup>199</sup> Hahn, *Doris Berry Collection*, (May 4, 1933).

lack of judgment have transformed them into a very useful tool, [as] the great majority accept their orders without questions.”<sup>200</sup>

About three months later, on 8 August 1933, Doris received another letter. Here Otti describes her summer vacation as well as the process of graduation from high school, which she would do in 1935. At the end of the letter Otti writes, “Enclosed please find Hitler’s Program Speech in the German Parliament. You see, he isn’t the “wild man” you’re press states him to be.”<sup>201</sup> The speech was a demand for the renegotiation of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, followed by an article that portrays the French border as one that was extremely hostile, looking to infiltrate the German border.

One of the most important letters in this collection is the one dated 15 November 1933. Here, Otti makes a few important statements. First, she asks that Doris “please write to me whether news about German cruelties are circulating still over there. What does your family think about Hitler? [Please write frankly!]”<sup>202</sup> Assumedly, Otti was referencing not only Hitler’s usage the “Emergency Decree,” one of the powers afforded to him as Chancellor, which called for the burning of books at the Wilhelm Humbolt University Library in May of 1933, as well as the general expansion of pre-existing anti-Semitism and boycotting of Jewish businesses that had been pervasive since Hitler’s rise to power in January.<sup>203</sup> By this time, Otti had also sent Doris a post-card with an image of Hitler surrounded by many “fans.” On the post-card she writes, “This snapshot shows the enormous popularity of... Führer!”<sup>204</sup>

It is evident through these two letters that Otti is deeply concerned with Doris’ opinion of Hitler. In the BDM, girls are often made to take pledges in honor of Hitler. One pledge Otti

<sup>200</sup> Kempner, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 44.

<sup>201</sup> Hahn, *Doris Berry collection*, (August 8, 1933).

<sup>202</sup> Hahn, *Doris Berry collection*, (Nov. 15, 1933).

<sup>203</sup> Guy Stern, “The Burning of the Books in Nazi Germany, 1933: The American Response,” In *Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance Online*, (Annual 2, Chapter 05), <http://motlc.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.asp?c=gvKVLcMVIuG&b=395007>.

<sup>204</sup> Postcard dated Reichsparteitag in Nurnberg 1933. See Image 2. Image shows Hitler surrounded by many fans.

would have already taken, in celebration of turning eleven years old and graduating from the younger *Kuekengruppen*<sup>205</sup> to join the *Jungmaedel* was the oath, “I promise that I will always do my duty in the Hitler Youth in love and faithfulness to the Führer and to our Flag, so help me God.”<sup>206</sup> Similarly, after having reached the age of fourteen, the *Jungmaedel*<sup>207</sup> is then transferred to become a *Mädel*<sup>208</sup> in the official BDM. As indicated through her letters, Otti had been fourteen for quite some time. Upon admission to the new BDM group, she would have had to pronounce another oath in respect and love of Hitler, “I promise obedience to the Reich Youth Leader and to all Officers of the Hitler Youth. I swear by our holy Flag that I will always try to be worthy of it. So help me God.”<sup>209</sup>

Hitler had publicly displayed his loyalty to these women as well. At a meeting of NS Party Women, Hitler declared:

The fact that millions of the most faithful, fanatic women have joined us as co-fighters for a joint life in the service of maintaining a common life has strengthened the new National Socialist racial community. These women are fighters who fix their eyes not on their rights, but on the duties which Nature has laid upon us all.<sup>210</sup>

It is no surprise that Otti so desperately wanted to convince her friend Doris that Hitler is a man worthy of her praise. Not only do aspects of National Socialism concerned with the position of

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<sup>205</sup> This portion of the BDM is known as the training of the smallest assistants of Hitler, according to Kempner’s study. Prior to 1933, children of Nazi sympathizers were already gathered together and weaned away from the democratic environment where they received training in small groups, however, not all members of the BDM had Nazi sympathizers as parents. When Hitler finally came to power, this group’s influence on young girls increased rapidly, as the Keukengruppen met weekly and young girls learned “comradeship and discipline,” went on hikes and learned the value of physical education and endurance, as one of the basic principles “to serve the Fuehrer.”

<sup>206</sup> Kempner, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 47.

<sup>207</sup> In this section of the BDM, according to Kempner’s study, upon admission the *Jungmaedel* must undergo *Jungmaedelprobe*, a test that proves a girls physical ability for service. This physical fitness test is then repeated after the completion of her twelfth year, to which the girls receive a Certificate of Physical Activity, or *Jungmaedellaistungsabzeichen*.

<sup>208</sup> According to Kempner’s study, this is movement into the Maedel is an extremely important year for the girls, because it signifies the end of their compulsory education in Germany. For most girls the next step is the start of their vocational training or work, and only less than 10 percent of all German girls are given high school education. If, like Otti does, the girls receive high school education, their parents, and not the Nazi party finance this. Education in the Maedel emphasizes the necessity to be come a socially responsible person.

<sup>209</sup> Kempner, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 48.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

women as individuals and citizens by their own right, reveal the “full extent of the individual and political enslavement of German women,” prior to 1933, but to these young girls, National Socialism seemed to present women “a period of freedom and opportunity for development of personality offered to them after World War I,” as long as it was done in the appropriate realm.<sup>211</sup> Hitler gave Otti, and millions of other Nazi women, the respect they felt they deserved, making him worthy of their undying sacrifice and praise.

In the following paragraph, Otti seems to be responding to a question Doris posed about the BDM.<sup>212</sup> Otti reveals details about the program, stating that, “Once a week we have a merry meeting in our club house, where we do stitch work with singing, or history, geography, reading or civics.”<sup>213</sup> It was these very lessons which would prove to be imperative to the indoctrination process of German children.

On 6 April 1934, Otti sent Doris a post-card of the very old town of “Meissen” situated in lower Saxony. In her letter to go along with the photo, Otti tells Doris of her travels to Meissen over Easter with the BDM. Otti writes, “Perhaps you’ve heard of Meissen too, for it’s the place where the making of China was re-invented by the white race about 1400.”<sup>214</sup> Not only do these letters demonstrate that Otti’s personal opinion of Hitler was a positive one, but her description of Meissen expertly illustrates the way in which the BDM was highly racist. Even at the age of fifteen, the BDM had already proven to hugely impact Otti’s development as a “functioning,” thinking, member of Nazi German society. Within a short time, the entire youth movement had impacted millions of other young bearers of the German race. Although the descriptions are short, we are able to see through what she has written, as well as photos of her BDM group, that the BDM enticed many young girls, not only because it was expected of them,

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>212</sup> Hahn, *Doris Berry collection*, (Nov. 15, 1933).

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Hahn, *Doris Berry collection*, (April 6, 1934).

but because they were given opportunities to learn new trades, and travel to far away lands, something that had not been offered to their mothers before them. All of these attractive opportunities for young women enabled Hitler to easily and swiftly gain, not only the support of young boys in the HJ, but also the support of millions of young women.<sup>215</sup>

The most telling Nazi influence on these young women can be seen through two later correspondences. Through Otti, historians are able to see the direct result of Nazi historical myth, portrayed as historical fact. On 20 February 1935, Otti apologizes to Doris for not having written back in a timely fashion, claiming to have been extremely busy, not only with school and the BDM, but also with the VDA. The VDA, as Otti describes it, was known as a “National Union for Cultural-relief of the Germans abroad.”<sup>216</sup> This program employed young girls in securing a cultural connection between ethnic Germans, marooned just outside of German territory as a result of the Versailles Treaty, and the German state, in preparation for future expansion of Germany into eastern lands. Through the creation of German schools in Eastern Europe, the VDA worked to teach its pupils values consistent with the BDM. The VDA looked to “kill the enemy” by indoctrinating their new subjects through the “keeping of propaganda— evenings with Plays and so on,”<sup>217</sup> which demonstrated the importance of segregating themselves from the “other.” According to Otti, there were millions of these Germans who were no longer “German [subjects],” but as a result of the Treaty of Versailles, had been subjected to the rule “foreign races,” such as the Czechs, Polish, Russians, Slavs and Italians.<sup>218</sup> Through this letter it is evident that the teachings of the BDM taught Otti that ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe must be saved from the sub-human races; the “enemies” that needed to be taken care of, even killed.

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<sup>215</sup> Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 80-1.

<sup>216</sup> Hahn, *Doris Berry collection*, (February 20, 1935).

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

One of the final correspondences between Doris and Otti is a letter dated 9 July 1935, in which she apologizes, once again, for her late response. The reason was that Otti had been on a summer camping journey “through Germany, by special trains to our mutilated east (East-Prussia)” to the Eastland Congress of the VDA in Königsberg.<sup>219</sup> As Otti and her fellow members of the VDA wandered along the Polish frontier, she writes to Doris that the trip served as a “Remembrance Act in virtue of the Germans abroad at the National Memorial at Tannenberg, amidst the German—Russian battle fields of the Great War, containing the sarcophagi of our Hindenburg.” From there, Otti continues with a beautifully detailed description as the group

“wandered through the wonderful East-Prussian country blue sky, golden sunshine, golden fields, dark forests, and many, many glittering lakes... The Marienburg a grand old castle, in brick Gothic style, built in the middle ages against the pagan Polish tribes, is, at least to me, beyond all description.”<sup>220</sup>

Like the boys who were taught to camp as a form of military training, girls were also exposed to lands in the east for political reasons. Now, girls too, would be able to recognize the importance of recapturing land taken from them, in order to preserve the German way of life, which was threatened by those currently occupying it.

Through Otti’s letters it is evident that the BDM played a crucial role in her childhood and beliefs, as well as those of thousands of other children. Although unmentioned by Otti, the BDM’s main teachings were that women were the future mothers of the German empire. As such, they must keep themselves racially pure, to successfully complete their roles as guardians of “German blood, German culture, German way of life.”<sup>221</sup> Their experiences, paired with their racial indoctrination within the BDM, were central to the Nazi agenda. Underlying much of the

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<sup>219</sup> Hahn, *Doris Berry collection*, (July 9, 1935). Königsberg was the easternmost large city controlled by Germany until its capture by the Soviet Union at the end of World War II.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 100.



instruction in their time spent with the BDM, girls were left with lasting images of racial aliens as biological foes. Jews were the biggest threat, followed by Gypsies and Slavs.<sup>222</sup> These views were routinely conveyed through teaching sessions in the BDM clubhouses, under a label such as “Race and Volk.” Such as the BDM had an effect on Otti, these principals would resonate with millions of other young girls, some of whom, instead of becoming model wives and mothers on the Home Front, would go onto partake in job opportunities in the “Wild East.” Women willingly participated not only out of support for the war effort, but because, the thought of selecting “racially fit” husbands, cooking wholesome meals, keeping a tidy house, and bearing many children would fail to thrill them after partaking in sports, hiking, camping, and a variety of other adventures that had attracted them to the party in the first place.<sup>223</sup> Having experienced a variety of opportunities that allowed them to view life as exciting and with endless opportunities, many of these young women could no longer be convinced that the role of housewife and mother was their sole calling in life.

The final correspondence between Otti and Doris is dated 29 March 1936, in which Otti begins by apologizing for, once again, not having written sooner, attributing her lack of communication to the preparation for her “final test.” Otti goes on to tell Doris that, having finished with school, she has “made up for [clerkship] and have entered an apprenticeship in the office of a good [newspaper],” in hopes of one day becoming a correspondence clerk in foreign language.<sup>224</sup> This description of her career track is important, not only because most, if not all newspapers at the time were Nazi run, but also because many young women employed clerks in the Third Reich would go on to become secretaries in official Nazi offices, ultimately acting as

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>223</sup> Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 196.

<sup>224</sup> Hahn, *Doris Berry collection*, (March 29, 1936).

accomplices to the murder of millions of Jews. Though we do not know the fate of Otti Hahn, this is the career path many women would go on to choose.

Just before the close of this final letter, Otti makes a quick reference to this particular date, making the observation “The view on merrily colored [crocuses] and other early flowers is checked by waving flags, for this is Plebiscit Day. Germany will prove she trusts in her Führer.”<sup>225</sup> This day would prove to go down in history as the day where Hitler not only received 99% of the popular vote in a referendum to ratify the illegal reoccupation of the Rhineland, but also the day in which Nazi propaganda claimed that 99% of the German population voted in favor of Nazi candidates for Parliament.<sup>226</sup> With that, Otti writes her goodbyes, asking Doris not to make her wait so long for a reply, and includes one last photograph of herself, donning her BDM sports uniform.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> “What happened on March 29,” *Dates in History*, 2011. <http://www.datesinhistory.com/mar29.php>.

<sup>227</sup> See image 3. Hahn, *Doris Berry collection*.

**Image 1: “The Jew is a Bastard”**

In this photograph, found within the Marion Davy collection housed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, demonstrates an example of an image taken from a Hitler Youth Film reel that would have been shown to thousands of young boys and girls. Through this photograph, one is witness to the extreme racism of which young children were indoctrinated. Here we see that to Nazi German officials creating the film, that Jews are the bastard children of four other sub-human “races.”



“Hitler Youth Educational Films.” In the Marion Davy collection. Accession No. 1996.A.0260.

**Image 2:**  
**Postcard demonstrating the popularity of Hitler.**



Hahn, Otti. Otti Hahn to Doris Berry, 3 February, 1933 to 29 March, 1936. In *Doris Berry collection*. Accession No. 2012.89.1.

**Image 3: Otti Hahn in Uniform:**

In this photograph, sent by Otti Hahn to Doris Berry, we see the typical sport uniform worn by girls in the BDM.



### Chapter 3: Hitler's Girls Go East

After the Second World War began, and the Nazi regime called upon women to participate in the war effort, women jumped at the opportunity to serve their beloved Führer. As Hitler's empire expanded, women were expected to take on more tasks. No longer were they solely destined to manage farms and households, but now they were needed to participate in government systems and private businesses. As Germany conquered more and more land to the east, women gladly accepted the chance to survey the new frontier, where "anything was possible." Comparably to the American "Wild West" for Germans, the "Wild East" evoked all of the violence of the cowboys-and-Indians stereotypes in literature and film of the time, and the romance as well.<sup>228</sup> In Nazi ideology, the eastern *Lebensraum* (living space) served as the area into which Germany would continue to expand and sustain the 1000-year Reich. In order to turn the idea into a concrete reality, the terrain, which was currently seen as a hostile environment inhabited by savage inferior races, was to be conquered in order to reduce the threat to all Germans security and racial purity. To fulfill the "General Plan East," the recasting of the east entailed the complete destruction of Jews and the displacement of Poles, and the settlement of the territory by Germans to ensure their racial dominance.<sup>229</sup> These beliefs became the rationale behind the mass murder of Jewish men, women and children, along with others "unworthy of life."<sup>230</sup>

In order to see that this "pedagogical mission" be carried to fruition, ethnic Germans would need to be monitored and mobilized, requiring intervention from the inside out. The process would begin by sculpting a proper German home, which would in turn, be carried over

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<sup>228</sup> Wendy Lower, *Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 35.

<sup>229</sup> Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>230</sup> Lower, *Hitler's Furies*, 38.

into public life. This type of education was believed to be matters that required fundamental “womanly expertise.” In order to effectively foster Reich culture in ethnic Germans, women from the west would be expected to go “East” to intervene. To effectively, and ruthlessly, promote Nazi territorial expansionism, womanly tasks needed to be reinterpreted in order to create a space in which women would feel compelled to transcend traditional gender roles, to cultivate the *Lebensraum*. Given the opportunity to venture east, oftentimes women willingly accepted the challenge. Eager to ensure *Deutschtum* domination, which was thought to be compromised by the presence of rival, yet subordinate, cultures, women took on various projects under the guise of orderliness and cleanliness, and were responsible for the cultivation of the “correct type” of domestic sphere. In order to successfully build German national identity and defend the German land claims in spite of the presence of other nations or peoples, German women were often forced to take on endeavors in the public realm as well.<sup>231</sup> Whereas within the German state, women were traditionally viewed as having a subordinate position to men in the public sphere, in the eastern territory, racist doctrines allowed women to be placed on par with their fellow countrymen, as the “racial superiors” to the colonized populations. This opportunity to go “East” meant building a society based on the complementarity of the sexes. Here, all “pure” Germans, no matter one’s sex, were equally committed to racial exclusion and, as a result, were equal in their struggle against the common enemy.<sup>232</sup>

With these new ideals in mind, approximately nineteen thousand young German women were sent to various territories in Poland to aid in resettlement operations as teachers, secretaries, nurses and even as camp guards.<sup>233</sup> Many women were enthusiastic about the prospect of obtaining “exciting” new work in the east, which seemingly offered a great deal of adventure,

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<sup>231</sup> Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East*, 3.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>233</sup> Lower, *Hitler’s Furies*, 38.

travel and opportunity. They viewed this “calling” as a way to circumvent Nazi limitations of women.

## II. Teachers

Women who had been discouraged from pursuing a professional career prior to the outbreak of war in 1939 were now being recruited back into the work force. While there were positions available within the German state, cultivation of the eastern territories was crucial to develop relationships with the ethnic Germans living outside of the territory. No matter the risks to these single women, Nazi leaders were determined to pursue their “civilizing mission” in the east. One of these jobs that would be crucial in indoctrinating ethnic Germans, would be teachers, many of which would be filled by women. The schools located in Poland were crucial for converting ethnic Germans to the Nazi cause, while at the same time creating a racial hierarchy, which removed non-Germans from school, and helped to develop a new elite group of female educators.<sup>234</sup> As described by Hitler, a proper education was one that burned “the racial sense and racial feeling into the instinct and the intellect, the heart and brain of the youth entrusted to it,”<sup>235</sup> and in order to do so successfully, the teachers going east also needed to be indoctrinated with Nazi ideology ahead of time. In accordance with a 1934 Nazi education reform, German youths were to be educated in the service of the National Socialist spirit. In order for children to be taught such lessons, teachers were also to receive such training. To effectively communicate these values to their pupils, two-thirds of all German teachers were subject to physical and ideological exercises within German training camps.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 39.



Teachers were instrumental in reinforcing the exaggerated, even completely concocted, Nazi history— a history which ranked Hitler amongst a “pantheon of heroes,” some of which included Charlemagne, Frederick the Great, and Bismarck.<sup>237</sup> While history lessons focused on German military dominance and past empires, language “discussions” concentrated on recognizing differences in speech as racial variants, rather than attributing them to regional differences. Sociology lessons took it one step further, where students were taught how to “spot” a Jew, based on his way of walking, his hand gestures, as well as movements made while speaking.<sup>238</sup> In order to further instill racism in children, mathematics was used to justify mass murder by having children calculate the extra government expenditure spent on welfare costs for the disabled and “useless eaters.” For example, one common mathematics question students might be asked to solve was,

Every day, the state spends RM. 6 on one cripple; RM.  $4 \frac{1}{4}$  on one mentally ill person; RM.  $5 \frac{1}{2}$  on one deaf person; RM.  $5 \frac{3}{5}$  on one feeble-minded person; RM.  $3 \frac{1}{2}$  on one alcoholic; RM.  $4 \frac{4}{5}$  on one pupil in care; RM.  $2 \frac{1}{20}$  on one pupil at a special school; RM.  $\frac{9}{20}$  on one pupil at an ordinary school... What total cost do one cripple and one feeble-minded person create, if one takes a lifespan of forty-five years for each... Calculate the expenditure of the state for one pupil in a special school, and one pupil in an ordinary school over eight years, and state the amount of higher cost engendered by the special school pupil.<sup>239</sup>

Clearly, the implications of mathematics questions such as these were to demonstrate to children the amount of RM being spent on undesirable people, further associating education with the destruction of the “other.”

Some teachers also took their students on field trips to visit psychiatric hospitals. According to the 1933 Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring, teachers were supposed to actively report the children suspected of having a disability. By bringing young

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>239</sup> Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*, 52.

children to these hospitals, not only could they appreciate their own “racial health,” but also this trip would serve to help other children in identifying outsiders amongst themselves. In one Bavarian village of Reichersbeuern, a teacher by the name of Frau Ottnad had had a pupil who would sometimes fall ill to seizures, as the young girl suffered from epilepsy. When Frau Ottnad could no longer tolerate the girl’s disruptions to the class, she reported the young girl to Nazi officials, who was “sent away” from the village, never to return.”<sup>240</sup>

As teachers showed no remorse for the innocent children they reported, their peers were also coached not to feel sympathy for these children of “inferior” racial design. Nazi socialization actually *encouraged* the gaze at the inferior as affirmation of one’s own superiority.<sup>241</sup> For those children who did not conform to the new tenets of teaching, beatings were commonly dealt as a punishment for their disobedience to authority.<sup>242</sup> In one instance, a young teacher named Ingelene Ivens, posted in Poznań, Poland, was witness to a troubling sight. Upon gazing out the window of her one-room schoolhouse, she noticed two Jewish laborers who had escaped from a nearby camp, and were seeking refuge. Under the impression that children would be sympathetic to the frightened men, they were shocked to find that the children, instead, began throwing rocks and shouting at the men, as they had learned through their elementary education.<sup>243</sup>

Whereas traditional roles of teachers are to support the educational and personal growth of young malleable children, teachers under the Nazi regime were used to manipulate the children and indoctrinate them with Nazi ideology. Rather than challenging these teachings, many educators, ironically, followed the curriculum blindly, purely for the sake of obtaining

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<sup>240</sup> Lower, *Hitler’s Furies*, 40.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*, 40-1.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

greater opportunities. As a result, teachers, especially those stationed in the Nazi East, were instrumental in carrying out the regime's genocidal campaigns. Not only did they exclude non-German children from schools while privileging and indoctrinating the ethnic German ones—they were ever so willing to educate the “racially valuable” children that local SS policemen in Poland and Ukraine sometimes spared. If children looked “Aryan” enough, during slaughters of entire villages, the SS would kidnap them. These children would then be brought to the schoolhouses and the teachers would be responsible for indoctrinating them with Nazi ideology. At the end of the war, when Nazi policy was to retreat from the Eastern Front and back to the German state, teachers simply abandoned these children, many of whom were orphans, full well knowing they would probably be killed by the advancing Red Army.<sup>244</sup>

### III. Secretaries

Secretaries were another large group of women who were eager to take advantage of employment opportunities in the east. Most of these women proved to be the largest group of willing contributors to the day-to-day operations of the Nazi genocide. In spite of Nazi ideology, which called for women to remain in the domestic sphere, a lack of labor called for women to abandon their traditional roles as housewives and agriculturalists, and enter the work force.<sup>245</sup> To keep in line with Nazi policy, however, women were often mobilized into active public service in positions which continued to separate women from political and economic concerns of men.<sup>246</sup> Although the occupation of secretary was well within a woman's expected abilities, this subsection found itself directly in the midst of political action, not only due to the increasing number of offices opening up in the “Wild East,” as a result of the annexation of Poland, but also

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>246</sup> Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 177.

because these white-collar clerical positions required that women sign off on military orders, or organize lists of names of people to be deported and even killed.

Among some of the thousands of secretaries who volunteered to leave Germany in face of new opportunities in the administrative field were women like Liselotte Meier and Sabine Dick. Meier, a young woman seeking adventure, practically jumped at the opportunity to become a secretary in the East, rather than be forced to work in a factory in Leipzig.<sup>247</sup> In her training program designed to familiarize her with office work, Meier was also taught to shoot a pistol. While stationed in Lida, Belarus, Meier was not a passive witness, but was instrumental in helping to organize the massacres. She was one of the most knowledgeable people in the office, and she often had more information than many of the other male officials in the office. From the time the first massacre of a Jewish ghetto took place on 8 May 1942 until the end of 1943, Meier was present at more than one of these shootings.<sup>248</sup>

Lover turned personal secretary to SS Hermann Hanweg, Meier was given a great deal of responsibility. She was trusted with access to the office safe where secret orders were kept, she had the power to write up orders herself, and was in possession of the coveted office stamp that gave her the authority to sign orders on behalf of the commissar.<sup>249</sup> One survivor recalled a time when, one Sunday, Jews in the nearby ghetto were instructed to clear out the rabbits hiding in the bushes of a nearby forest. Suddenly Hanweg and his staff, accompanied by Meier, appeared in carriages, drunk and wielding guns. At one point, the survivor says the officers began shooting their rifles in the direction of the Jews in the forest, some of which struck and killed them.<sup>250</sup>

Sabine Dick, another secretary, was working in the Reich Security Main Office in Berlin when, hoping to advance her position and receive a higher salary, she was offered the position at

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<sup>247</sup> Lower, *Hitler's Furies*, 100.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>249</sup> The commissar had the authority to certify whom, and who was not, a Jew. Ibid, 104.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 106.

the office of secret police in Minsk, Belarus. Dick soon became an undeniable asset to her boss, Georg Heuser. She always wrote up his orders for *Aktions* against Jews, which included detailed information about those who were participating, types of weapons used, and the food and drinks allocated for each particular massacre.<sup>251</sup> Although SS policemen were expected to participate in the massacres of Jews, if he refused to participate, or chose instead to stay in the office on the days of the shoots, no punishment would be given.<sup>252</sup>

When new transports of Jews arrived in Minsk, their personal effects were taken away from them. After having heard a colleague speak of a warehouse where these items were kept, just eight miles from her post, Dick decided to visit. When her brother died, she went on an outing to the warehouse in order to obtain a black dress to wear to the funeral. Another time, after having received a document certifying she needed gold fillings for her teeth, she obtained three gold wedding rings from Heuser, who kept a stash of Jewish valuables in the office safe.<sup>253</sup>

With the annexations of Poland and Austria, the growth of Nazi Germany depended on young women to do their part as clerks, stenographers, telephone operators and receptionists. Though initially there was uneasiness between men, and the women who represented a cheaper source of labor, “fears and prejudices had to be put aside once women were needed in the office to take the place of men called into battle.”<sup>254</sup> It is believed that thousands of single German women were employed in the East in various military posts and administrative and private business offices. The best and the brightest secretaries, those working in the most notorious offices in the Nazi terror apparatus, however, had to fit a certain profile. Most were active party members prior to their relocation in the east, and were serious, self-assured women who envisioned the new frontier as an attractive place to work. They received better pay in these

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, 112-113.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 61.

jobs, but more importantly the security of being on the inside, rather than the outside, of the Nazi cause.<sup>255</sup>

Witnesses to the various atrocities in the east, such as ghetto liquidations, some post-war accounts describe their initial reactions to the violence as ones of shock and distress. Yet many of these secretaries chose to turn their heads to the viciousness, claiming there was nothing they could do to stop it. For example, when the *Einsatzgruppen A* (the most murderous of the mobile killing units) spread out over the eastern-occupied territories liquidating Jews, Bolsheviks, and others “unworthy of life,” there were thirteen secretaries who accompanied them. Although they did not directly specifically pull the trigger, their presence at these sites made them invaluable accomplices.<sup>256</sup> These women believed themselves to be German patriots, simply doing their civil service, and what they received in return for their complacency, and through the exploitation of the Nazi system was better pay, adventure, a great deal of responsibility, and a world of “opportunity.”<sup>257</sup>

#### IV. Nurses—“Angels of the Front”

In the mid 1800s nursing was limited to middle and upper class women. While men were off fighting for the Fatherland, it was expected that women would do their part by utilizing their maternal instincts to care for ailing German soldiers in the many field hospitals. During World War II, Nazi Germany now offered a different expectation of women. With the overall negation of class differences prevalent in the past, the new racial hierarchy and the call for national unity determined that social standing no longer mattered. Women were now mobilized by the masses regardless of socio-economic status; they were trained as nurses through home care courses as

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>256</sup> Brown, 9

<sup>257</sup> Lower, *Hitler's Furies*, 53.

well as through the BDM. Whereas many women had become unable to practice medicine as doctors, young girls and women were excited by the prospect of becoming nurses due to the increased opportunities available to them.<sup>258</sup> Teens growing up under Hitler were especially eager to become nurses, because it offered them an opportunity for a life outside their small village. Having already received plenty of indoctrination of Nazi ideology and racial biology through their mandatory childcare courses and through the BDM, with the Nazi annexation of Poland, some fifteen thousand women turned out in the recruiting drives of late 1939 and early 1940s.<sup>259</sup>

These “angels of the front,” whose traditional virtues as nurses were supposed to sanctify all human life through sacrifice, discipline and loyalty, were now taught to cultivate hate for the enemy and were used as pawns in furthering the war effort.<sup>260</sup> As early as 1936, a secret Reich committee for the registration of serious hereditary diseases and illness was established. This committee, made up of three experts in the medical field, discussed the possibility of euthanasia. In 1939, the committee introduced a law calling for the “destruction of life unworthy of life.”<sup>261</sup> This document served as a legal sanction to kill those suffering from virtually any mental or physical ailment. In the first clause of the law, a person can request the mercy killing by a doctor. In the second, those with incurable mental illness, unable to sustain an independent existence, and deemed incompetent to make informed decisions in their best interest, could be prematurely terminated through medical recommendation.<sup>262</sup>

As a result, it became compulsory for physicians, nurses, and midwives to report to the Ministry of Interior any child born with a malformation or ailment. This information was then

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>261</sup> Susan Benedict, Jochen Kula, “Nurses Participation in the Euthanasia Programs of Nazi Germany,” *Western Journal of Nursing Research* vol. 21 no. 2 (1991): 248-9, accessed April 20, 2015, doi: 10.1177/01939459922043749.

<sup>262</sup> Benedict and Kula “Nurses Participation in Euthanasia,” 249.

passed along to three referees, two of whom were pediatricians and one the director of a psychiatric institution, who were to decide whether the child would be killed. These decisions were made solely on the basis of the written diagnosis made at the discretion of either the midwife, the nurse or the physician. If chosen to die, children would be sent to specialized killing centers where nurses and doctors assured the parents the child was being taken care of. Shortly after their arrival, the child would undergo starvation, or would be given an overdose of Luminal, or injected with an overdose of morphine.<sup>263</sup>

Nurses staffed within the pediatric unit were forced to swear an oath of loyalty. To cope, they forced themselves to believe that what they were doing was for the greater good of science. Once accustomed to the killings, many of these women continued with their crusade because they felt it was an opportunity, not only to further their medical careers, but also because of the compensation they received. Many nurses in these clinics received 25RM a month starting salary, and they were often given Christmas bonuses, for their “diligent” work. Sometimes, they also were given celebrations when a certain number of orders had been carried out. For example in 1941, when Hadamar celebrated the cremation of its 10,000<sup>th</sup> patient, “a special ceremony, where everyone in attendance—secretaries, nurses, and psychiatrists—received a bottle of beer for the occasion.”<sup>264</sup>

In 1939, Hitler furthered the call to rid German society of all mentally ill patients, and expanded the euthanasia program to include adults. Officially named Aktion T-4, there were seven killing centers set up in existing hospitals to carry out the order, one in Charlottenburg (a district of Berlin, and six others in Grafeneck, Brandenburg, Bernburg, Hadamar, Hartheim, and Sonnenstein. Female (and male) nurses were crucial to the success of the euthanasia programs. At another killing center, the pediatric unit of Haar, led by senior nurse Emma D., and two

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid, 249-50.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid, 250.



younger women, Emma L. and Maria S. These women were instrumental not only in convincing mothers to give up their “flawed” children, but were active participants in killing thousands more. In fact, an estimated 5,000 children were killed in the euthanasia programs.<sup>265</sup> They worked to selected patients who were to be killed, administered the lethal injections, prepared fraudulent death certificates, and prepared the bodies for cremation.

Although Aktion T-4 was shutdown as a result of public outcry, doctors and nurses who worked within the euthanasia program had learned a great deal about the means of murder, which would be crucial to the death camps opened later in the war. During the war, many of these nurses were called upon to go east to care for wounded soldiers. Being on the Eastern front, these women were witness to the murder of Jews, as well as Soviet prisoners of war, and worked within the ghetto and concentration camp settings. In fact, nurses proved to be the largest contributors of direct female involvement in the Nazi genocide. Not only were they instrumental in counseling ordinary women about “racial hygiene and hereditary diseases,” but also they helped select mentally and physically disabled civilians, and led innocent people to the gas chambers, or administered to them, lethal injections.<sup>266</sup> Of all the female professions, nursing contained the highest concentration of documented crimes in Nazi Germany, either through euthanasia programs on the Home Front, or as aids in medical experiments in the camps.<sup>267</sup>

Whereas many women, such as Annette Schuking and Erika Ohr, took on a less direct role, other nurses, such as Pauline Kneissler, played a more active part in the genocide. Born to a well-off ethnic German family in the Odessa region of Ukraine<sup>268</sup>, upon obtaining her German citizenship in 1920, went to nursing school in Duisburg. In 1937, she joined the Nazi Party as a

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>266</sup> Lower, *Hitler's Furies*, 43.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, 50.

member of the National Socialist Women's League, the National Socialist Welfare Association, and the Reich Nurses' League, amongst others.<sup>269</sup> After landing a position as a municipal nurse in an asylum in Berlin, in 1939, she was summoned to the Columbia House headquarters, where she was directly assigned to the Nazi euthanasia program. Here, Kneissler witnessed and participated in the selection of patients to be killed, many of whom were "not all particularly serious cases... [or were] in good physical condition."<sup>270</sup> Kneissler, like many other nurses, became a "career killer" on German sites such as Grafeneck. As she was involved early on, Kneissler was one of the many women who assisted with gassing procedures, starving patients, and administering lethal injections to the mentally and physically ill.<sup>271</sup>

When asked why nurses willingly participated, one finds more than just wanting to further their career, or the desire to increase their income. Another reason, as given by Helene Wiczorek, explained that it was her duty as a German civil servant, especially during wartime. Many women believed that by aiding in the war effort, that once the war left Germany victorious, Hitler would make a place for them in public life, an opportunity that prior to Hitler, many women did not have. Whether true or not, these women selfishly and viciously used the lives of thousands, even millions, to gain status. Allowing them to slip through the cracks of history unnoticed, is a truly disservice to all those who fell victim to the Nazi regime.

## **V. Camp Guards**

Concentration camps were first established in Germany just after Hitler became chancellor in 1933. The camps were set up by the NSDAP to house political prisoners in order to eliminate suspected adversaries of National Socialism, most commonly for use against

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid, 51-52.

Communists. These people were taken, at first, under the guise of “protective custody.” Although initial Nazi terror seemed to be singling out only those who were perceived enemies of the state, as the course of Hitler’s regime came closer to the brink of war, it became clear that concentration camps were a place where those who were deemed an inconvenience to Nazi society, or were hated for reasons other than political, could be sent.<sup>272</sup> The number of concentration camps continued to grow.

Concentration camps not only served as an area to hold internees against their wills, but they aimed to exploit the inmates by making them work like slaves until their death. Many prisoners were sent straight to the gas chambers upon arrival at death camps, and for those most unlucky, it was Himmler’s wish to “further the alleged progress of humanity by scientific experiments on a large scale.”<sup>273</sup> A great number of internees were subject to torturous medical experiments.

Female camp guards, for the most part, demonstrate one group of women who moved on, in post-war life, with almost no repercussions. Despite this large gap in Holocaust studies, there were actually quite a few women who were served their male counterparts as concentration camp guards. Approximately 3,000-5,000 German women became concentration camp guards during the Holocaust.<sup>274</sup>

Unfortunately, despite this relatively large pool of female camp guards, the Nazi women’s files rank far below those of the enlisted men’s files in regard to completeness and accuracy. Whereas enlisted men’s personnel files are not nearly as complete as those of commanding officers, it begs us to question, just how limited the information is on women who

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<sup>272</sup> *Indictment in the Proceedings against Koch, Ilse for Murder*, by the Chief Prosecutor of the Landgericht for the Chief Prosecutor of Augsburg, translated by Lili Raihofer, Bamberg, Germany, 4 JS 360/49 (0 JS 1/49), May 10, 1950, accession No. 1996.A.0513, 11.

<sup>273</sup> *Indictment in the Proceedings against Koch, Ilse*, 12.

<sup>274</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 40.

held similar roles.<sup>275</sup> According to Brown, the SS men were reluctant to begin accepting women into the concentration camp setting as camp guards, resulting in a large discrepancy between what “Nazis envisioned for women and what ultimately occurred.”<sup>276</sup> Because women arrived at the camps in a position of employment much later, many of the female names that were found, were written only on guard rosters, or on work orders, and not on service cards. The reason, Brown explains, is because background data on these women became much less significant to the SS as the military situation rapidly deteriorated. Rather than taking the time to properly train women as camp guards, the Nazis were more concerned with getting men to the eastern front, and having women quickly replace them.<sup>277</sup> Though some have argued that, because there were only 3,000-5,000 female prison guards, compared to the more than 51,500 SS men that served in the camp systems, studying the role of female guards might be inconsequential, some who survived the horrifying camp treatment have made the claim that the *SS-Aufseherinnen* were arguably more brutal than their male counterparts. Survivor Jolana Roth supports this contention. Although in her time interned at Auschwitz, she only ever saw a few women female camp guards, she claimed, “the ones you did see—they were worse than men.”<sup>278</sup> In fact, it is possible those women were so cruel to their internees as a result in the irony of the Nazi system. German women were so degraded by their fellow men, that she would be unable to exert any form of leadership or individual initiative without being coined anti-Nazi, that was, with the exception of becoming a concentration camp matron. It was Heinrich Himmler himself who gave German women the one true genuine occasion to demonstrate leadership, to become an SS

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<sup>275</sup> Daniel Patrick Brown, *The Camp Women: The Female Auxiliaries Who Assisted the SS in Running the Nazi Concentration Camp System* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 2002), 235.

<sup>276</sup> Brown, *The Camp Women*, 10.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

camp woman, or for those exceptionally “talented” women, the chance to become an *SS* senior overseer.<sup>279</sup>

If a woman did decide to work within the *SS* as a concentration, or extermination, camp guard, there is no doubt that she would have been acutely aware of the exact motives behind the camps. And whether or not these women were conscripted to, or volunteered for, the position, each one made the conscious decision to treat internees cruelly. As a result, these women gained temporary societal authority within the camps, and those who were excessively cruel were even promoted by their male superiors.<sup>280</sup>

The process of becoming an *Aufseherin* was surprisingly selective. Paradoxically, a woman seeking the position could not have any prior criminal record. They were intensively interviewed, screened and pre-trained at the all women’s camp, Ravensbrück. Next, these women underwent a period of educational instruction, which varied in length and scope. Having learned the basic tenets of Nazi policy, only some women would be called in for another interview, in order to determine the woman’s attitudes, personal values, and, above all, what she knew about the regime.<sup>281</sup>

If a woman passed the screening processes, and was chosen for the position, women received full training, a decent salary, a new uniform, and were given a place to live. The training to become an *Aufseherin* entailed being able to analyze a series of potential situations that might arise within the camps, from preventing escapes, learning to control prisoners, and the guidelines for proper punishment of internees. After this period of basic training, an *Aufseherin* would be assigned to shadow an *Oberaufseherin*, who served as their camp mentor. Once the

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>280</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 42.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, 43.

training was complete, women would either continue to work in Ravensbrück, or would be assigned to another camp to proceed with their work, which became their “de facto home.”<sup>282</sup>

Once an official *Aufseherin*, the daily duties included calling *Appelle* (or roll call of prisoners), processing prisoners upon their arrival to the camps, and disposing of bodies of those who had been killed. Most *Aufseherin* were given some variety of weaponry, anything from a pistol to a whip or other blunt object, or even a trained attack dog. Violence was encouraged despite camp “policies,” and pay ranged from 30RM to 185RM per month. For exceptional female guards, there was also possibility of promotion, which included higher pay, but most importantly, greater respect, and greater power. Although there were dozens of camp structures exclusively housing women, some *Aufseherinnen* also worked in camps that held men.

The lack of a pre-existing paper trail on many of these women, combined with the frantic destruction of as many official files, which were diligently recorded by Nazi officials throughout the Third Reich, allowed many women to slip out of sight post-war. In addition to women having the luxury of re-marrying and changing one’s last name in order to avoid reprimand, when the files on female camp guards fell into the hands of the Allied Powers, many female guards who lacked complete files were simply ignored. Often, though, those that were detained and tried by Western countries tended to be treated with leniency during trial.<sup>283</sup>

The cases of Herta Oberheuser, Irma Grese and Ilse Koch, are the outliers. These women serve as a testament to the atrocities committed by many women. Surely there were many more who treated prisoners with extreme cruelty, but maybe the reason for them being so well known, and consequently brought to trial, was because unlike many of the other women working within the camp system, these women saw their position as more than an opportunity for adventure, freedom and increased pay. These women saw an opportunity to launch their careers, to

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>283</sup> Brown, *The Camp Women*, 10.

command respect and obtain power, but most importantly, these women wanted to prove that they were just as capable as men.

#### Chapter 4: The Case Studies of Herta Oberheuser, Irma Grese & Ilse Koch

The cases of Herta Oberheuser, Irma Grese and Ilse Koch demonstrate three women who attained great power under the Nazi regime in the concentration camp settings. Although all of the concentration camps were deadly, these women seem to have contributed to the historical memory of the surviving prisoners of the four camps where they carried out their reign of terror. These women were not unique in their participation, but were nonetheless, believed to be outliers. However, they are only regarded as such because they were of the few women tried in some of the most famous post-war Nazi trials. We are able to discuss the roles of these three specific women because they were captured and put on trial, but there were many more like them who managed to escape justices' grip.

The first case study focuses on the Nazi Doctor's Trial, under the Nuremburg Trials beginning in December 1946. This first trial featured one young female physician, Dr. Herta Oberheuser, who was stationed at Ravensbrück, where she conducted a variety of experiments on camp subjects. Ravensbrück was one of the first Nazi camps designated for female prisoners,<sup>284</sup> and also served as the primary training location for female Nazi recruits, thousands of whom would successfully obtain the position of *Aufseherin*.<sup>285</sup> As opposed to other camps, Ravensbrück was unique in that it was almost entirely run by *Aufseherinnen* under the direction of Dorothea Binz, one of the few women to obtain title of chief overseer.<sup>286</sup>

The second case study focuses on the Bergen-Belsen Trials beginning in August 1945. *The Trial of Joseph Kramer and Forty-Four Others*, featured sixteen women, one of which was Irma Grese, the youngest woman to be executed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century under British law. Irma who came to be known as the "Beautiful Beast," began training as female camp guard at

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<sup>284</sup> Michael J. Bazylar and Frank M. Tuerkheimer, *Forgotten Trials of the Holocaust* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 133.

<sup>285</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 54.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid*, 56.



Ravensbrück, at the youthful age of eighteen, before she was transferred to Auschwitz-Birkenau, and subsequently Bergen-Belsen before her capture in 1945 by British forces. She was known to for her sadistic tendencies, and extremely cruel treatment of prisoners.

The final case study focuses on the 1947 Dachau Trial under the American military court, specifically case #000-50-9, *The United States of America vs. Josias, Prince zu Waldeck, et al.*, which featured the trial of Ilse Koch, wife of Buchenwald Camp Commander Karl Otto Koch, for her crimes committed at Buchenwald.<sup>287</sup> Though older than Oberheuser and Grese, Koch also spent time at Ravensbrück, like other female camp guards in training, but being older than the others, was quickly transferred to Sachsenhausen, where she met Kommandant Koch. Here they were married and with his subsequent promotion to Commander of Buchenwald, she was able to use her powers as an SS wife to carry out a number of monstrous atrocities against inmates.

The use of these trials in the case studies of these three women, Oberheuser, Grese and Koch, will prove to be crucial re-exposing the roles played by these women to the historical discussion, decades later, and demonstrate the extent of the horrific crimes carried out against innocent men, women and children, in order to gain various social and economic opportunities, amongst the obtainment of other sadistic pleasures, in the patriarchal Nazi society.

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<sup>287</sup> Fern Overbey Hilton, *The Dachau Defendants: Life Stories from Testimony and Documents of the War Crimes Prosecutions* (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers: 2004), 170.

### The Case of Herta Oberheuser:



*“When I asked Dr. Oberheuser why I was going to be operated on she replied that, since I belonged to the Polish resistance, it gave the Germans a right to carry out experiments on me.”<sup>289</sup>*

Born on 15 May 1911 in Köln, Germany, Herta Oberheuser was raised in an educated, Christian, middle-class household. In 1935, at the age of twenty-four, Oberheuser joined the ranks of the BDM as a “block leader,” whose duty it was to teach younger girls basic medical skills, but only officially became a Nazi party member two years later.<sup>290</sup> Although there were women in co-ed physicians’ leagues, interestingly enough, female physicians’ presence was greater proportionately within the separate Nazi Students League for women and the BDM

<sup>288</sup> Photograph from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives. Photo # 41017, (Nuremberg, Germany: Aug. 20, 1947). <http://digitalassets.ushmm.org/photoarchives/detail.aspx?id=1040824>.

<sup>289</sup> “Deposition of Janina Iwanska,” *Caroline Ferriday collection, 1952-1983, Applications for restitution*, RG-10.204, accession No. 1994.A.0334.

<sup>290</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 169.

beginning in the late 1930s. Female representation within the male-centered Nazi Physicians' League began to dwindle, due to the exceedingly competitive and segregated environment between men and women at the time. The value of such membership within an auxiliary sphere, as opposed to directly competing with men in the Nazi Physicians' League, was ideal for demonstrating their political loyalties to the Nazi party, but also, paradoxically, allowed for greater leverage for women seeking to thrive in spite of the restrictive male dominated medical world.<sup>291</sup>

When Hitler became Chancellor in 1933, many women were removed from various public posts, including professions within the medical field. Typically, women serving under Hitler, and formally educated in medical sciences, were primarily granted access only to the nursing field. Those women who were able to successfully graduate with a degree as a physician, did not actually practice medicine, but rather remained at home.<sup>292</sup> It was rather rare in pre-war society for a woman to become a practicing doctor, such as Oberheuser. Only in the early 1940s, when the circumstances of the war became unfavorable to Nazi Germany and required more men to join the ranks on the front lines, that were women reluctantly called upon to fill positions predominantly held by men. Now, for every seventy-four men who entered the work force upon graduation from medical school with a physician's license, twenty-six women did as well. What significantly affected female medical graduates, however, was although they were granted license to practice, they were always given less of a chance to establish themselves as independent practitioners, compared to their male counterparts.<sup>293</sup> Having been on a somewhat level footing with men prior to the start of the Weimar Republic, young women freshly out of medical school began to face a variety of impediments, which carried over into the

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<sup>291</sup> Kater, *Doctors Under Hitler* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 107.

<sup>292</sup> Kater, *Doctors Under Hitler*, 89.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

Third Reich. Under the Nazi regime, women practicing medicine had less than half the chance to successfully establish herself in her career, than did her male counterpart.<sup>294</sup>

After attending medical school in Bonn, Oberheuser graduated as a doctor of medicine only to become a member of the National Socialist Physicians, as a contracted physician. In 1940, Oberheuser volunteered for the position as camp doctor in the all women's camp, Ravensbrück, where she was instrumental in carrying out experiments for the benefit of Germany's Armed Forces, and where she stayed until June 1943.<sup>295</sup> At this time she began working at Hohenlychen Hospital, just outside of Ravensbrück, where she remained until the end of the war (Irma Grese also worked here), and was appointed the position of assistant physician to SS doctor Karl Gebhardt. Here, the two continued to carry out experimental trials on humans. Next, she worked with Dr. Enno Lolling, the Chief of Office IIID, who was responsible for assigning doctors to their medical posts at various camps. Through Lolling, Oberheuser, along with a number of other male doctors, received her post at Ravensbrück.<sup>296</sup>

Herta Oberheuser, one of the few women employed by the SS as an *Ärztin* (female doctor), was arrested on 8 May 1945, just eight days after the liberation of Ravensbrück by the Russian army. Charged for committing Counts II (war crimes) and III (crimes against humanity), with an added clause of having taken "special responsibility" in procuring

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>295</sup> James M. McHaney, Alexander G. Hardy, et al., *Military Tribunal No. I Case No. I: Closing Brief for The United States of America Against Fritz Fischer and Herta Oberheuser* (Nurnberg, Germany: June 16 1947), 1. Part of the Nuremberg Trials Project (Harvard University), [http://nuremberg.law.harvard.edu/php/pflip.php?caseid=HLSL\\_NMT01&docnum=16&numpages=11&startpage=1&title=Closing+brief+for+the+United+States+of+America+against+Fritz+Fischer+and+Herta+Oberheuser.&color\\_setting=C](http://nuremberg.law.harvard.edu/php/pflip.php?caseid=HLSL_NMT01&docnum=16&numpages=11&startpage=1&title=Closing+brief+for+the+United+States+of+America+against+Fritz+Fischer+and+Herta+Oberheuser.&color_setting=C).

<sup>296</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 172.

experiments using sulfanilamides,<sup>297</sup> Oberheuser was the sole female defendant present at the Nuremberg Medical Trials, which began in October 1946 and lasted until August 1947.

The Doctors' Trial was a murder trial of the most unusual kind. All twenty-three defendants were professional doctors or scientists who stood trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity.<sup>298</sup> According to reports made by the doctors, as well as gruesome testimonies made by the few survivors, twenty-six different types of experiments were conducted for research purposes on concentration camp inmates. Among some of the studies carried out on human subjects were: high altitude decompression and its effects on the human body; attempts to create drinkable forms of sea water by forcing inmates to consume water with varying levels of salinity; the use of sulfonamides for the treatment of gun-shots and other possible combat wounds; the removal of human bone, muscle, and joints for experimental transplantation purposes; the effectiveness of shots of phenol (gasoline) as a euthanasia agent, amongst other experiments, such as injecting patients with varying strains of typhus, and treating them with variations of different drug cocktails in order "find a cure."<sup>299</sup>

Although Oberheuser was, through and through, a Nazi doctor, due to the circumstances of her birth, which rendered her female, she was not officially granted status as a member of the SS. Rather, Oberheuser was considered to be a highly valued employee of the SS, which was demonstrated by the fact that she was assigned to the same positions as her male SS Doctor counterparts. Oberheuser, like many other women of the Third Reich, took advantage of the "opportunity" granted to them within the untraditional concentration camp domain. To prove to

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid, 175. A new class of antibiotics that was tested on prisoners in Ravensbrück. Dr. Oberheuser was said to recreate the circumstances of possible combat wounds by rubbing saw dust, rusty nails, dirt, amongst other things into the wounds of prisoners in order to investigate the effectiveness of sulfonamides for the prevention of gangrene.

<sup>298</sup> Michael Grodin, "Mad, Bad, or Evil: How Physician Healers Turn to Torture and Murder," in *Medicine After the Holocaust: From the Master Race to the Human Genome and Beyond*, ed. by Sheldon Rubinfeld (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 49.

<sup>299</sup> Arthur L. Caplan, "The Stain of Silence: Nazi Ethics and Bioethics," in *Medicine After the Holocaust: From the Master Race to the Human Genome and Beyond*, ed. by Sheldon Rubinfeld (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 86.

herself, as well as to the other men, that gender played no role in her competency as a physician, she often acted on her own accord with regards to the treatment and use of patients while conducting her own research on effects of pain on the human body. Despite her sex, Oberheuser, through her affiliation with the Nazi party, was granted access to “medical research” and possibilities for experimentation that she otherwise would never have been able to conduct. A perverse, but nonetheless ambitious, female physician, Oberheuser used her post at Ravensbrück as an “opportunity”—by completely disregarding human life—to keep up with her male counterparts, who otherwise may have easily replaced her with another, just as capable, male doctor.<sup>300</sup>

Despite the common explanation that “orders were orders,” and that disobeying said orders would surely result in concentration camp imprisonment, or death, of his or her self, according to historian Christopher Browning,

“No defense attorney or defendant in any of these hundreds of postwar trials has been able to document a single case in which refusal to obey an order to kill unarmed civilians resulted in the allegedly inevitable dire punishment.”<sup>301</sup>

Dr. Herta Oberheuser was no exception. Upon assignment at Ravensbrück concentration camp, she had every right to refuse participation in the human experiments, without fear of consequence. Yet she, like the other doctors, came to Ravensbrück by her own free will.<sup>302</sup> Here, alongside her male counterparts, Oberheuser conducted truly heinous crimes against innocent civilians who did not consent, and were unable to resist. Prisoners who did attempt to question or resist experimentation were often beaten into submission by medical orderlies or by

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<sup>300</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 172.

<sup>301</sup> Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 170.

<sup>302</sup> McHaney, *Military Tribunal*, 4.

doctors themselves, and even sometimes faced subsequent death for disobeying “official” SS orders.<sup>303</sup>

There are many speculations as to not only why ordinary men and women commit murder, but also why these gifted “healers” could so easily use their talents for evil. One explanation for why these doctors were able to commit such horrific acts is the theory of “Splitting.” Physicians-in-training are taught to act quickly and efficiently when dealing with patients whose lives are in their very hands. In order to make the best medical decision under stressful situation, doctors are taught to “medicalize and dehumanize” their patients, “splitting” their emotions from the situation in order to more efficiently process what they have to do in order to save the lives of those depending on them.<sup>304</sup> To ensure the sanctity of human life, doctors are made to swear the Hippocratic oath, a vow which doctors take promising to treat their patients without any consideration of religion, nationality, race, or political or social beliefs, which might interfere while making medical decisions. It further maintains that doctors will uphold the utmost respect for human life, and that even under threat of injury or death, doctors cannot use their knowledge, “contrary to the laws of humanity.”<sup>305</sup> This oath, which as we will soon see, many Nazi doctors surely disregarded. The second of the various theories, which was most telling in the case of the Nazi Doctors, is known as the “Psychology of Groups of Perpetrators.”<sup>306</sup> This theory explains that these doctors identified themselves with a larger machine, working to further the human condition. To conduct such horrific experiments at the costly toll of human lives, Nazi doctors in accordance with Nazi ideology, convinced themselves that those they ruthlessly operated on were lesser humans—as Dr. Oberheuser was quoted saying

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<sup>303</sup> Walter Poller, *Medical Block Buchenwald* (London: Corgi Books, 1961), 128.

<sup>304</sup> Grodin, “Mad, Bad, or Evil,” 58.

<sup>305</sup> A Meyer, “Medical War Crimes,” *British Medical Journal* v. 2, 5090 (July 26, 1958): 247 accessed April 20, 2015. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2026087/?page=1>.

<sup>306</sup> Grodin, “Mad, Bad, or Evil,” 54.

in regards to her female Polish human experiments, “Those girls are new guinea pigs.”<sup>307</sup> Others also operated under the assumption that a few lives of worthless prisoners was nothing compared to the hundreds to thousands of German soldiers dying daily to defend the Fatherland. Within the Nazi regime, these doctors employed such euphemisms to achieve a group unity. They saw themselves as part of an elite and important group, one which cultivated a great sense of belonging.<sup>308</sup>

In her official affidavit concerning the medical experiments carried out in Ravensbrück on Polish inmates, knowledgeable of the sexism that was deeply rooted in Nazi ideology, Oberheuser attempted to minimize her role in the camp by claiming that she was only involved to the extent that her gender would allow, as an assistant to camp physician Dr. Schiedlausky. Though she admits having detailed knowledge of experiments using sulfonamide and bone transplants, she attests that her main role was screening the experimental subjects who were named on roster given to her by the camp administration. Once in possession of the lists, Oberheuser asserted that her sole role was to determine the state of the prisoners’ health. If believed to be insufficiently healthy for experimental operation, based on her brief examination of their skin and heart rate, she claimed she would have notified the camp physician, who would have ordered “fresh patients.” Once the girls had been replaced by healthier inmates, Oberheuser claimed that it was Dr. Fritz Fischer, another camp physician, who performed the operations. While she maintained that she only sometimes “helped and assisted at these operations,” her only other duty was to monitor the patient’s post-operative care.<sup>309</sup>

In order to further deflect the blame, while on trial Oberheuser claimed that during her time at Ravensbrück, she observed harsh maltreatment of inmates by Dr. Walter Sonntag, who

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<sup>307</sup> Vivien Spitz, *Doctors from Hell: A Horrific Account of Nazi Experiments on Humans*, (Boulder: Sentient Publications, 2005), 129.

<sup>308</sup> Grodin, “Mad, Bad, or Evil,” 54.

<sup>309</sup> McHaney, *Military Tribunal*, 4.



showered the ill prisoners reporting to the sick ward for treatment with a barrage of ruthless beatings. For those who were already in death's grip, which she claims was of no rarity at Ravensbrück, lethal injections were often given, to which she admitted to having given "5 or 6 such injections."<sup>310</sup> Further using to her advantage the fact that, as a woman, she was only eligible to take on the duties of a doctor's assistant, she repeatedly explained that she either could not recall the depth of the wounds given to the patients, or which muscles or bones were used for the purposes of the experiments. She went on to claim that she was unable to say with certainty how many persons suffered permanent injuries, only that three died as a result of the experiments, and "as far as [she] can remember, a total of 40 persons was used for these experiments"<sup>311</sup>—accounting for only a fraction of the hundreds subjected to the deadly experiments.

Despite Oberheuser's attempts to belittle the role she played under the guise of femininity, and deferring the responsibility to the male doctors throughout the trial, the cross-examination of various witnesses, women who did not perish from the horrific experiments painted a different picture. These women, brave enough to face their accusers, were indispensable in exposing Oberheuser as being just as merciless as the male doctors, often in charge of monitoring patients' post-operative care. On 20 December 1946, thirty-seven year old Polish patient Vladislava Karolewska came to Nuremberg to testify at the Doctor's Trials. A patient of experimental sulfanilamide "treatments," and bone, muscle, and nerve transplants, she identified the defendants Gebhardt, Fischer and Oberheuser sitting in the dock.<sup>312</sup> As a "messenger" in the Polish Resistance Movement, Karolewska was arrested by the Gestapo on 13

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>312</sup> Spitz, *Doctors from Hell*, 120.

February, 1941 at the age of thirty-two.<sup>313</sup> On 25 July 1942, Karolewska, among approximately seventy-five other prisoners from the Lublin transport, were summoned to the chief of the camp, where they were they were told they could no longer work outside of the camp. A few weeks later, on 14 August, Karolewska was given an injection by a German nurse, and woke again at a later time with one of her legs swollen from her toes to her groin and with an increasing temperature. A few days later, Karolewska says she was taken to the operating theatre again, where Dr. Fischer made an incision so deep she herself could see the bone.<sup>314</sup> While in recovery, after her second procedure, she says Dr. Oberheuser and Dr. Schiedlausky examined her leg. She continued, “While I was in the hospital, Dr. Oberheuser treated me cruelly,”<sup>315</sup> by the order of Oberheuser, many patients were denied any form of medicine or morphine.<sup>316</sup>

The affidavit of another patient, Zofia Baj, countered Oberheuser’s claim that it was only Sonntag who brutally treated sick prisoners. Rather, Oberheuser often participated in the routine concentration camp atrocities by “beating up and throwing out women who had come to have their legs looked after which had been badly cut during their work.”<sup>317</sup> For those who complained of post-operative pain, Oberheuser was said to make the women rise from their beds, in excruciating pain without help of nurses. Once on their feet, the girls were made to report to her in another room, only to send them back to bed without any medication, as a form of punishment for their complaints.

Baj further brings to light Oberheuser’s participation in the experiments with a short anecdote. Oberheuser, who previously laid the claim that it was Schiedlausky who had treated

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<sup>313</sup> Spitz, *Doctors from Hell*, 122.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid*, 127.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid*, 127.

<sup>316</sup> “Testimony by Karolewska,” *Caroline Ferriday collection, 1952-1983, Applications for restitution*, RG-10.204, accession No. 1994.A.0334.

<sup>317</sup> “Testimony of Baj,” *Caroline Ferriday collection, 1952-1983, Applications for restitution*, RG-10.204, accession No. 1994.A.0334.

prisoners with such atrocious behavior, in Baj's testimony she recalls a time when she asked Oberheuser to help relieve her pain. When conferring with Schiedlausky about what she could do to relieve Baj's suffering, he succinctly replied, "Do not operate on them and they will not suffer."<sup>318</sup> Through Schiedlausky, more often than not, was depicted by various patients as unrelentingly cruel, Baj claims it was this doctor who came every morning for two weeks to bring the girls "calmative tabloids," and ordered that the German nurses refrain from reporting the use of the medication to Oberheuser, who was monitoring the women to study their pain sensations.<sup>319</sup> No such claims of humane treatment were made about Oberheuser.

In the late 1950's, American humanitarian Caroline Ferriday had learned of a group of Polish women who were survivors of Ravensbrück and dedicated herself to their plight. She "took the trouble to interest [herself] in the problems of the Polish survivors of the surgical brutalities practiced by Nazi physicians,"<sup>320</sup> and pooled together a great deal of funds for these survivors of experiments at Ravensbrück, and assisted them in traveling to the United States to receive a pro-bono diagnoses and operations, by willing American doctors. In order to receive the trip, these Polish women, called Lapins (French for rabbits) were required to submit an official affidavit containing what had happened to them in the concentration camps, along with the completion of a detailed questionnaire, photographs of body parts permanently affected as a result of the experiments, and a recommendation from a local doctor to make the journey.<sup>321</sup> Testimonies found in these post-war files are crucial for uncovering Oberheuser's role in the Nazi Final Solution

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<sup>318</sup> "Baj," *Caroline Ferriday collection*.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>321</sup> See Image 1.

Within the Caroline Ferriday collections<sup>322</sup> is one of the most important pieces of evidence exposing Dr. Oberheuser's role. Prisoner Zofia Maczka, upon her arrival at Ravensbrück, was assigned to the *Revier* (hospital) as an X-ray technician. In her testimony Maczka provided detailed explanations of the conditions of the hospital and procedures that took place for the restitution project of Caroline Ferriday. Maczka provides the court with various examples of the direct role played by Oberheuser. She explained that the nature of the conditions under which experiments were performed were atrocious. Not only were the assistants unqualified but also,

“The bandages were unsterile. After the experiments the patients were completely neglected... In the sick rooms the stench was terrible. When changing bandages, under the eyes of the doctors, dirty instruments and unsterile dressings were used.”<sup>323</sup>

In description of the actual operations, Maczka explains that there were two main groups in which girls were placed, Group A and Group B. The first group was subjected to “experiments that would develop an infection,” resulting from the injections of various bacteria, such as tetanus and gangrene. On these test subjects, treatments of sulfonamide injections were used to study the effectiveness of the drug. The second group was assigned “sterile operations,” which consisted of removing pieces of bone or muscle in order to observe the resulting nerve regeneration and/or damage.<sup>324</sup> Maczka claimed that although her observations were only made through the use of a small keyhole, because prisoner employees of the *Revier* were strictly forbidden in the operating room during experimental operations, she was able to give names of the patients, as well as exact measurements regarding the length and depth of the wounds, whereas Oberheuser, in her affidavit, could simply “not recall.” For example, in the “bone

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<sup>322</sup> Housed at the USHMM

<sup>323</sup> “Testimony of Maczka,” *Caroline Ferriday collection, 1952-1983, Applications for restitution*, RG-10.204, accession No. 1994.A.0334.

<sup>324</sup> “Maczka,” *Caroline Ferriday collection*.

sliver” experiment, Maczka recalls that “an indentation of 2 x 5 centimeters on the lower part of both shin bones” was made.<sup>325</sup>

Maczka was one of the most crucial witnesses in exposing the discrepancies between Oberheuser’s actions in the camps, and her official affidavit. Whereas Oberheuser previously made the claim that if some women were found to be unsuitable for experimentation, after a pre-operative examination, she would report to the camp physician and have these women switched out for healthier “candidates,” Maczka told a different story. In one instance, Maczka, upon examining of a set of X-rays, noticed that there were two non-Polish women, with abnormally unhealthy bones. When she presented this information to Oberheuser, she replied, “It is to our interest to discover what influence such previous pathological alterations may have on the bone structure.”<sup>326</sup> Further, whereas Oberheuser stated that there were only 40 girls experimented upon, Maczka, along with the survivors of the experiments, all remember 74 Polish prisoners had suffered through operations, without accounting for those who had died during the process.

All problems regarding ethical testing aside, not only did these young women suffer great agony at the hands of these doctors, but because the consequences of the operations were not accurately examined, there were no medically significant scientific outcomes that could be proven. According to Maczka, research into the regeneration of cells would have taken several months, if not years, yet the experiments on human women carried out at Ravensbrück lasted only a matter of weeks, producing little, if any scientific value. Oberheuser even admitted to the lack of scientific importance, stating unintentionally, “These experiments had at least one advantage; I learnt a bit more about operating in view of obtaining a better situation at Hohenlychen.”<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> The medical center situated outside of the camp. Ibid.

In yet another testimony submitted to Caroline Ferriday for restitution, we find further evidence of Oberheuser directly working, as an equal, alongside her male colleagues. In the affidavit of Zofia Sokulaska, she indicated that Oberheuser, along with Schiedlausky, Rosenthal, and the others doctors from the SS Sanatorium in Hohenlychen, were all active and present during the operation of 74 women, many of whom were submitted to at least two operations.<sup>328</sup>

In this specific account, Sokulaska remembers a time she was taken into the operating theatre by nurses Frieda and Fina Pautz. Presently waiting in the theatre (whom she pointed out sitting in the dock at the actual Nuremberg Doctor's Trial) were Doctors Fischer, Oberheuser and Rosenthal. Sokulaska goes on to describe the specifics of the operation in which her left leg was fully bent at the knee, and tied into place. It was Oberheuser who proceeded to give her an injection into a vein in her arm. After the operation, Oberheuser appeared in room No. 4 to tell the young girl that her operation had been minimal and that she would walk in eleven days. Only eight days later, however, Oberheuser and Fischer removed her plaster, and though Schiedlausky was present, he served "merely as an onlooker."<sup>329</sup> While recovering from her second operation, Sokulaska claimed to have seen Oberheuser personally select patients who were taken by nurses into a small room in the *Revier*. At a later time Oberheuser, accompanied only by either nurse Gerda Quernheim or Fina Pautz, but without any of the other male doctors, she entered into the room where she gave the women lethal injections.<sup>330</sup>

Sadly, few women lived to tell what had happened to them inside the walls of Ravensbrück medical block. Those who did survive often did so with the help, or at the expense of, others. The testimony of Jania Iwanska revealed one of the many heartbreaking realities that were prevalent within concentration camps. To rid of any evidence of these atrocities, Iwanska,

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<sup>328</sup> *Ibit.*

<sup>329</sup> "Deposition of Sokulaska, Zofia," *Caroline Ferriday collection, 1952-1983, Applications for restitution*, RG-10.204, accession No. 1994.A.0334.

<sup>330</sup> "Sokulaska," *Caroline Ferriday collection.*

amongst a few others, were assigned to go to the gas chambers after having survived various horrific human experiments. Desperate to survive, these girls took to hiding as best they could within the concentration camp barracks where they came across three French and two Norwegian women, who volunteered to switch numbers with the girls in order that they would survive as proof of what the Germans had done to them.<sup>331</sup> It is thanks to the brave women such as these that Herta Oberheuser was proven guilty of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity, and that her atrocities, alongside her male counterparts, were exposed.<sup>332333</sup>

Like many other women charged with war crimes, Oberheuser attempted to use her gender to convey that she was incapable of participating in such heinous crimes, or only acted because it was her “duty” to do so. Thankfully, she was aware of the falsity of this defense, and the prosecution rested their case against Oberheuser with the following statement,

“The only question is whether the defendant participated in the crime, not whether it could have been prevented by the defendant... A concentration camp guard can say with considerable truth that, if he had not committed a certain crime, someone else would have. But this is simply no defense; nor is it a mitigating factor. There may well have been other persons as willing to commit crimes as Fischer and Oberheuser, but the significant point is that Fischer and Oberheuser did in fact commit them.”<sup>334</sup>

Hoping to leverage her career, in order to become a successful physician, Oberheuser willingly conducted these horrific experiments on human subjects without their consent, which, for those who were not murdered in the process, often resulted in permanent, and very painful, disabilities.

Under the order of Hitler, at the beginning of the Nazi regime many women had been denied the

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<sup>331</sup> “Deposition of Jania Iwanska,” *Caroline Ferriday collection: 1952-1983, Applications for restitution*, RG-10.204, accession No. 1994.A.0334.

<sup>332</sup> *OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT OF THE MILITARY TRIBUNAL IN THE MATTER OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AGAINST KARL BRANDT ET AL, DEFENDANTS, SITTING AT NURNBERG, GERMANY, ON 21 NOVEMBER 1946, 1000--1110, JUSTICE BEALS PRESIDING*. Medical Case Transcript (Nurnberg, Germany: Nov. 21 1946), 5. Part of the Nuremberg Trials Project (Harvard University) [http://nuremberg.law.harvard.edu/NurTranscript/TranscriptPages/5\\_05.html](http://nuremberg.law.harvard.edu/NurTranscript/TranscriptPages/5_05.html).

<sup>333</sup> See Image 2.

<sup>334</sup> McHaney, *Military Tribunal*, 6.

opportunity for higher education, and had been pushed out of various positions of employment, forced to return to their “proper” place in the home. When women were needed to re-enter the workforce, the oppressive nature of Nazi ideology had created a lack of female physicians, providing a relatively small and uncompetitive pool of women able to return to the medical field. This clearly appealed to Oberheuser as an “opportunity” that she would use to prove that she was just as qualified as her male counterparts.

The Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals under Control Council Law No. 10 in Nuremberg issued the death sentence to seven men and life imprisonment to five. Herta Oberheuser, the only woman present in this trial, was issued a sentence of up to twenty years imprisonment, despite the incriminating evidence against her. Disturbingly enough, Oberheuser was released just after five years for good behavior.

In 1956, nine years after the conclusion of the trial, Dr. Oberheuser was recognized by one of her former Ravensbrück victims, as she had successfully resumed practicing medicine as a pediatrician in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany.<sup>335</sup> Outraged by this absurd discovery, an article summarizing the event was published in a London newspaper, the *Daily Express* on 4 March 1958, and was subsequently brought to the attention of British doctor M. H. Armstrong Davison. Davison brought the case of the re-instatement of Oberheuser’s medical license and subsequent return to practice, to the attention of the British Medical Association. Because the Nazi Doctor’s Trial had been conducted by British officials under British law he presenting his case to the BMA, in hopes that the board would use their due processes of law to influence German authorities to revoke Oberheuser’s license once and for all. Davison was instrumental in opening up a discussion about the lack of recognition of victims of Nazi terror.

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<sup>335</sup> Lower, *Hitler’s Furies*, 151.



In 1951 the Federal German Government to begin granting assistance to special cases of survivors of the inhumane experiments, thought maintaining their denial of any *legal* obligation to victims of Nazi experiments, of the 1,537 claims submitted, only 427 cases had been accepted, 403 applications had been rejected, and 707 were still outstanding. While those who were granted compensation received on average about 500 Euros, no claimants received any form of pension for their disabilities caused by the inhumane medical testing. While the victims who were lucky enough to survive the horrific experiments conducted by Herta Oberheuser et al., were left to suffer life long disabilities without aid from the government, Oberheuser had somehow, resumed a normal life, and recommenced the practice of medicine, unmarred by her past actions.<sup>336</sup>

As a result of the publicity, Herta Oberheuser was called to the High Court in Schleswig, where the Minister of the Interior, Herr Helmut Lemke, in August 1958 revoked her license and shut down her practice at Stocksee near Kiel. Lemke was able to do so on the grounds that Oberheuser was in violation of the Hippocratic oath, having carried out “barbarous, pseudo-medical, murderous assaults on helpless innocent people.”<sup>337</sup> However, by 9 November 1960, Oberheuser had sued for various appeals in a number of courts, successfully obstructing the implementation of the loss of her medical license.<sup>338</sup> Finally, in December 1960 Oberheuser’s appeal to the Schleswig-Holstein administrative court was rejected. No longer would she be able to practice medicine, and she would be forced to pay various fines as punishment.<sup>339</sup> Although she would never again practice medicine, it is believed that Oberheuser was employed at a pharmaceutical laboratory in 1967. From here on out, history seemed to lose track of her, until

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<sup>336</sup> M. H. Armstrong Davison, “Medical War Crimes,” *British Medical Journal* v. 1, 5079 (May 10, 1958): 1211, accessed April 20, 2015. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2028747/?page=1>.

<sup>337</sup> Meyer, “Medical War Crimes,” 247.

<sup>338</sup> “Medical News: Herta Oberheuser,” *British Medical Journal* v. 2, 5212 (Nov 26, 1960): 1612-1614, accessed April 20, 2015. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2098387/?page=1>.

<sup>339</sup> “Medical News: Herta Oberheuser,” *British Medical Journal* v. 2, 5214 (Dec. 10, 1960): 1747-1749, accessed April 20, 2015. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2098276/?page=2>.

her life finally came to an end on 24 January 1978, at the age of sixty-six, in Linz am Rhein, Germany, where she died in a nursing home.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 184.

## Images:

### Image 1: From the Caroline Ferriday Collection, 1952-1983, housed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. RG-10.204.

These images demonstrate the applications for restitution women were required to fill out. This particular example concerns Mme. Wacława Andrzejak-Gnatowska, one of the victims of the “so-called” scientific experiments in Nazi concentration camps. Translated from Polish, these images demonstrate the variety of questions needed to determine the validity and extent of the operations. In this particular case, Gnatowskaw had just turned 21 years of age when Oberheuser, at Ravensbrück, injected the young woman in the lower right shin with some kind of infectious substance. As a result of said experiment, the injection caused the extremity, not only a considerable amount of pain, but also to turn blue, as she endured a temperature of 40 degrees Celsius. When the report was published in April 1957, the patient, at just 37 years of age, continued to complain of severe suffering, resulting in traumatic neurosis, chronic rheumatism of the joints, and heart trouble. Examination by a Red Cross doctor, conducive with patient claims to be unable to engage in any regular occupation, estimated Gnatowska’s official disability to be 60% as a result of experiments.

<p style="text-align: center;">26 April 1958</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Particulars concerning Mrs. Wacława Andrzejak-Gnatowska a claimant under Council Resolutions 355 (XII) and 386 (XIII) relating to victims of so-called scientific experiments in Nazi concentration camps. (Prepared by the Secretariat of the United Nations on the basis of information furnished by the claimant).</p> <p>I</p> <p><u>Name:</u> Wacława ANDRZEJAK-GNATOWSKA</p> <p><u>Address:</u> ul. Tuchalska 11, m.33, Warsaw 32, Poland</p> <p><u>Nationality:</u> Polish</p> <p><u>Place and Date of Birth:</u> Chelm-Lubelski, Poland, 15 September 1921</p> <p><u>Marital Status:</u> Divorced</p> <p><u>Occupation:</u> Housewife</p> <p>II</p> <p><u>Residence at time of imprisonment:</u> Chelm-Lubelski, Poland</p> <p><u>Occupation at time of imprisonment:</u> Student</p> <p><u>Imprisonment:</u> (Date and Place) Arrested on 20 July 1941 at Chelm-Lubelski. In prison at Lublin till 21 September 1941; then transferred to Ravensbrück concentration camp under No. 7718.</p> <p>III</p> <p><u>Date and Place of Experiment:</u> November 1942 - Ravensbrück</p> <p><u>Type of Experiment:</u> Injection of some kind of infectious substance in lower right shin, which caused leg to turn blue and to pain considerably, as well as a 40°C temperature. Later given a series of intravenous injections of some kind of medicinal substance. Injections were given by doctors from Hohenlyuben, and by the camp doctor, Oberheuser.</p> <p><u>Present Complaints:</u> States medical treatment has brought about no change in disability. Suffers from traumatic neurosis and chronic rheumatism of the joints, accompanied by heart trouble. See copy of medical certificate stating that claimant requires long treatment and medical observation. She states she is unable to engage in any regular occupation.</p> <p><u>Medical Report:</u> Examined in 1945 by a Red Cross doctor at Chelm-Lubelski, who certified that claimant was 60 per cent disabled. Examined in 1946 by Dr. E. Kiszka, head of Surgery Clinic of the Danzig Academy of Medicine. Examined in May 1957 by the Polish Medical-Legal Commission, which reported on her case. See copy of medical certificate dated 11 April 1957, of Dr. Stanisław Nakowski, attached.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">- 2 -</p> <p><u>Remarks:</u> Father was arrested at Chelm-Lubelski in 1941 and executed in Auschwitz on 17 March 1942. Claimant states she has received no assistance other than a disability pension of 500 zlotys a month under the Polish social insurance regulations. Expresses the need for financial and medical assistance (medicine and treatment in a sanatorium outside Poland).</p> <p><u>Enclosures:</u> 1</p>
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**ANDRZEJAK-ONATOWSKA Wacława**  
 ul. Tucholska 11, W.33  
 Warsaw 32,  
 Poland

37 years old  
 married (divorced ?)  
 1 child 8 years,  
 shoe size 8 1/2 C  
 clothes size medium

Has no preference concerning a family and city in the USA.

High school education.

LC - quiet and pleasant.

Injection group, official disability 60%.

**DIAGNOSIS:**

1. Status post criminal experimental injections into right leg. Alleged disability 60%.
2. Chronic Cholecystitis with possible calculi.
3. Chronic polyarthritis rheumatica.
4. "Neurosis universalis" diagnosed by Polish medical commission.

**SIGNIFICANT CLINICAL FINDINGS:**

Injection Case.

B.P. - 110/60  
 Bl. Count - Hb : 80g  
 WBC : 4,300,000  
 WBC : normal  
 Bl. chem. - not done  
 Sed. time - 6 mm  
 Urine - neg.  
 X-ray Chest - neg.  
 X-ray Bones - neg.  
 OGD - neg.

**CONCLUSIONS:**

The polyarthritis rheumatica and the neurosis must be regarded as off-shoots of the criminal pseudo-scientific injections at Ravensbrück.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

To be accepted for journey to the USA  
 To evaluate presence of cholelithiasis by Graham test in the USA  
 To evaluate medically the existence of chronic polyarthritis and its pathogenetic relationship to the barbaric injections of the pseudo-science practiced by the infamous doctors of Ravensbrück.

Translated from Polish

Andrzejak-Onatowska

Questionnaire on Flight of Victims of so-called scientific experiments

1. Wacława Andrzejak-Onatowska, ul. Tucholska 11, Apt. 33, Warsaw 32.
2. 15 September 1921, Chełm Lubelski, Poland
3. Polish
4. Divorced
5. With parents (student), Chełm-Lubelski, Poland
6. Arrested at Chełm-Lubelski on 20 July 1941. Put in prison at Lublin and kept there until 21 September 1941. Transferred on 21 September 1941 to Ravensbrück concentration camp. My no. #7713.
7. Experiment carried out on me in November 1942 at Ravensbrück concentration camp.
8. In November 1942 I received an injection of some kind of infectious substance in my lower right shin.
9. As the result of this injection a large swelling developed in my leg, and the leg began to turn blue and to pain considerably. A rise in body temperature to 100. was an indication of general poisoning and of a condition that could have been fatal. I was then given a series of intravenous injections containing some kind of medicinal substance. This treatment lasted ten days. Two months after the first injection, the swelling in the extremities went away, but a stiffness of the joints in walking persisted for months. I was incapable of any work in the camp until June 1943. Both the first and the subsequent injections were given by doctors from Hohenlysen, and by the camp doctor, Wehrmayer.
10. In 1945 I was examined by the Red Cross doctor at Chełm-Lubelski, who certified my disability was 60 per cent. In 1946 I was examined by Dr. E. Michałda, the head of the Surgery Clinic of the Damski Academy of Medicine. Like a "guinea-pig" I am frequently examined by doctors and technicians. My state of health was recently dealt with in a report drawn up by the medico-legal commission in May 1957. The medical treatment that I have been receiving has not so far brought about any change in my disability. The experiment brought on a general poisoning of the system that could have been fatal. I was sick for seven months. I am still suffering from traumatic neurosis and from chronic rheumatism of the joints accompanied by heart trouble.

- 2 -

11. A medical certificate is attached.
  12. I returned to Poland on 21 May 1945 and have lived there continuously since that time.
  13. Housewife.
  14. I am unable to engage in any regular occupation.
  15. Up to the present time I have not received any compensation. I only receive a disability pension amounting to 500 zloty a month to which I am entitled under the Polish social insurance regulations.
  16. Permanent financial and medical assistance ( medicine and treatment in a sanatorium)
  17. At the same time that I was arrested in July 1941, my father, Jan Andrzejak, was also arrested at Chełm-Lubelski as a member of the resistance movement. He was executed in the Auschwitz concentration camp on 17 March 1942. His number in the camp was 21,185.
- Warsaw, 2 February 1953

(Signed) Wacława Onatowska

Translation of medical certificate

Physician's statistical number: 8595  
 Stamp of Medical Institution: PR. DE. P.N. Warsaw - Centre Health Section (illegible)  
 Surname and given name of patient: ONATOWSKA Wacława  
 Rp: Under treatment for chronic rheumatism and general neurosis. The patient's state of health requires long treatment and medical observation.  
 Date: 11 April 1957  
 Physician's stamp and signature: (illegible)  
 Doctor Stanisław Makowski  
 Stamp of pharmacy: W.O.P.N. Dispensary

**Image 2: Photographs from the collective medical examination of Lapins, Warsaw, Poland, 1958 in the Caroline Ferriday Collection, 1952-1983, house at USHMM, RG-10.204.**

These photos, taken by Erica Anderson, Inc., were used as part of the last collective medical examination of the Lapins in Poland, Warsaw in 1958 for the Caroline Ferriday project. These photos were also received by the Human Rights Division at the U.N., in order to catalogue evidence of the atrocities committed on humans at Ravensbrück. The following images demonstrate two women, Stanisława Cirykowska-Bajie and Halina Pietrzak-Skilinska, respectively. (Names are somewhat illegible) Both of these women suffered, and survived, transplantation of bones and muscles at the hands of Dr. Herta Oberheuser and her male colleagues. In these photos, doctors are examining the patients, and determining their percentage disabilities.







**The Case of Irma Ilse Ida Grese, #9**  
“Let them die, why should you care.”—Joseph Kramer



341

*Major Cranfield—Will you explain to the Court on what occasions you struck prisoners, and the reason why you did it?*

*Irma Grese—In the beginning every prisoner had two blankets, but when the crowds became bigger I had to see that everybody got a blanket and therefore each prisoner only got one. We found they had cut up all those blankets and made all sorts of this out of them—shoes, jackets, etc. I gave strict orders that everything which had been made out of blankets was to be returned at once, but I got nothing at all, so then I ordered the control of all the*

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<sup>341</sup> Image taken from Hadassah Rosensaft collection, Bergen-Belsen related record, RG-08.002. This is an image of the Infamous Irma Grese taken during her time working at Bergen-Belsen.

*blocks and also personal searches of prisoners. On those occasions I used my whip.*<sup>342</sup>

*Major Cranfield—Several witnesses in their depositions say that you were the worst S.S. woman in the camp?*

*Irma Grese—Yes, they say so. They are all lying. These people exaggerated and made an elephant out of a small fly.*<sup>343</sup>

Born 7 October 1923, in Wrechen near Mecklenburg, Irma Ilse Ida Grese was one of five children. Although the order of her birth is unknown, and the names of most siblings have been forgotten, Grese was the older sister to Helene, who was often present at her trial.<sup>344</sup> Grese's father, Alfred, was an agriculturalist, conservative, church-going man. When Grese was twelve her mother, Bertha Grese, passed away, the circumstances of which are unknown.<sup>345</sup>

Grese was nine years old when Hitler became German Chancellor in January 1933. A few months later the Enabling Act of March 1933 was instituted, which drastically remodeled the German education system to convey Nazi ideology.<sup>346</sup> This same year, despite her father's protests, the BDM became essentially mandatory to all "Aryan" youth, and she, eligible to join at the age of ten, was especially excited. To Grese, the BDM served as an escape from the boredom of farm life and her oppressive father.<sup>347</sup> For many girls, like Otti Hahn, Grese would grow fond of the BDM for the friendships, excitement, and various adventures and opportunities it afforded to the "right kind" of young women. More importantly, however, the BDM was crucial in preparing these malleable girls to become the mothers of National Socialism, and further gave girls an opportunity to play sports and develop other skills suitable for motherhood, such as teaching or nursing. After five years of continuous indoctrination with Nazi ideology by

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<sup>342</sup> Raymond Phillips, ed, "The Belsen Trial: Trial of Josef Kramer and Forty-Four Others," *War Crimes Trial* Vol. II, ed. by The Right Hon. Sir David Maxwell Fyfe (London: William Hodge and Company, Ltd., 1949), 250.

<sup>343</sup> Phillips, *Belsen Trial*, 259.

<sup>344</sup> Daniel Patrick Brown, *The Beautiful Beast: The Life & Crimes of SS-Aufseherin Irma Grese* (Ventura, CA: Golden West Historical Publications, 2004),9.

<sup>345</sup> Brown, *Beautiful Beast*, 9.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid*, 15.



the BDM, Grese, at the young age of fifteen, attempted to pursue her career as a nurse at the SS convalescent Hohenlychen Medical Hospital, where Dr. Herta Oberheuser was also working. At the outbreak of the war in 1939, until mid-1941, Grese apprenticed as an assistant nurse's aide,<sup>348</sup> under the guidance of the infamous Dr. Karl Gebhardt.<sup>349</sup>

In awe of Gebhardt's reputation and influence, but also witness to the success of Dr. Herta Oberheuser, who, within Hohenlychen hospital, was just as respected as her fellow male doctors, there is no doubt that Grese would also have seen an opportunity to rise through the ranks, despite the sexism of Nazi ideology. Although Grese did not succeed within the medical field, Gebhardt, recognizing Grese's "ambition," wanted her to put what "talents" she did have to work in furthering the success of the Third Reich. Gebhardt took a special interest in Grese, and put her in contact with friends at Ravensbrück. When a position at the all-women's camp for a new female-guard became available, eighteen year-old Grese took the job. Having been trained by extreme anti-Semites, and previously exposed, even de-sensitized, to the Ravensbrück experiments through Oberheuser and other SS doctors at Hohenlychen, the young, impressionable girl would stop at nothing in order to be seen as an equal to her male counterparts, no matter the human cost.<sup>350</sup>

Grese was officially hired at Ravensbrück in July 1942, where she trained to become an *Aufseherin*. A distinguished *Aufseherin*, and one of the youngest, Grese enjoyed a great deal of status and authority compared to other women who worked for the SS. Although her initial pay was a mere 54 RM per month, Grese had already been noticed by *Oberaufseherin* Maria Mandl,

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid, 20-2.

<sup>349</sup> Dr. Karl Gebhardt, professor of sports medicine prior to the first world war, had developed sports for the disabled at Hohenlychen and was the President of the German Red Cross. During the war he served at Heinrich Himmler's personal physician and was responsible for both organizing and conducting human experiments on prisoners of Auschwitz and Ravensbrück. He attempted the transplantation of limbs from victims of the concentration camps to German soldier on the Eastern front. In 1948 he was tried at the Nuremberg Doctor's Trial and was sentence to death. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22184577>

<sup>350</sup> Brown, *Beautiful Beast*, 25-6.

as she proved herself to be not only exceptional female guard and extremely useful to the SS machine, but also someone who could be easily promoted. Promotion of female SS guards was relatively rare, especially for someone as young as Grese.<sup>351</sup>

In March 1943, Grese left Ravensbrück and was transferred to Auschwitz-Birkenau, assigned specifically to *Lager C*. At this point during the war, more and more men were being sent to the Eastern Front, and women were needed to replace those on the Home Front, as well as in the extermination camps in the east.<sup>352</sup> Though initially Grese was given the old job of Elisabeth Volkenrath in the mail censoring office, Grese came to be in charge of approximately thirty thousand female inmates, at which point, it is believed Grese was responsible for the deaths of, on average, thirty or so prisoners each day. Grese, being promoted so quickly, was at one time, even assigned the charge of a men's compound.<sup>353</sup> Here at Auschwitz is where Grese became deeply involved with Dr. Josef Mengele, the man who directed the selection of arriving transports and was notorious for conducting "twin studies" in the medical block.<sup>354</sup> Grese remained in Auschwitz-Birkenau until January 1945, when she was returned to Ravensbrück for about two months, before her transfer to Bergen-Belsen under the command of Joseph Kramer, the "Beast of Belsen," husband of Ilse Koch, where she remained until the end of the war. While serving under Kramer, Grese would prove to demonstrate such "initiative" that she would be promoted to the position of *Oberaufseherin*.<sup>355</sup> Women like Grese who used excessive violence to impose authority, were trained to work with men such as Mengele and Kramer. These women, who saw an opportunity to rise in the ranks, were in turn, taught by male SS hire ups, not only how to effectively prevent escapes, and administer punishments to prisoners, but also were

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<sup>351</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 113.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>354</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1986), 347.

<sup>355</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 113.

well versed in camp administrative management practices. Although the number of women who were responsible for the camp administration was certainly small with respect to men, some women, such as Grese, saw an opportunity to rise through the ranks, within the twisted, excessively violent, hyper masculinized concentration camp setting.<sup>356</sup>

Irma Grese became infamous for her unbridled sadism, which was said to include various forms of torture, sexual abuse, and used brute force to beat prisoners to death.<sup>357</sup> In a post-war memoir written by Dr. Gisella Perl, she recounts her time spent at Auschwitz. Having encountered “Irma Greze” on various occasions, and most certainly scarred by the memory of her, Perl dedicates an entire section to her.<sup>358</sup> Perl describes “Greze,” the highest ranking woman in the SS at Auschwitz, as one of the most beautiful women she had ever seen, and yet, as one of the most “depraved, cruel, imaginative sexual pervert [she] ever came across.”<sup>359</sup> At one time, Perl remembers Grese entering the hospital while she had been performing an operation on the infected wound of a woman who had been badly whipped across the breast. Because Perl only had access to a blunt knife, and no anesthetic at all, the patient convulsed in pain throughout the entire procedure. Grese took great interest in this encounter, and looked on with abundant enjoyment at the sight of human suffering. According to Perl, Grese swung her body “back and forth in a revealing, rhythmical motion. Her cheeks were flushed and her wide-open eyes had the rigid, staring look of complete sexual paroxysm.”<sup>360</sup>

From that day forward Grese proceeded to walk around the camp, jeweled whip in hand, and slashed beautiful women across the breast in hopes of inducing an infection. Grese was consequently present at each one of Perl’s operations, which gave her “orgastic spasms which

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>357</sup> Bill Yenne, *Hitler’s Master of the Dark Arts: Himmler’s Black Knights and the Occult Origins of the SS* (Minneapolis: MBI Publishing Company, 2010), 232.

<sup>358</sup> Difference in spelling due to a matter of translation.

<sup>359</sup> Dr. Gisella Perl, *I was a Doctor in Auschwitz* (New York: International Universities Press, 1948), 60.

<sup>360</sup> Perl, *Doctor in Auschwitz*, 61.

shook her entire body and made saliva run down from the corner of her mouth.”<sup>361</sup> Perl describes one final encounter with Grese, in which she ordered Perl to give her an abortion. Although it was illegal for a prisoner to touch a guard, an act punishable by death, fearing execution at the hands of Grese, Perl complied anyways. When the operation was over, she remember Grese saying to her, “You are a good doctor... What a pity that you have to die. Germany needs good doctors.”<sup>362</sup> Because of the stark contrast between her striking beauty and her extreme violence, Grese became well known by the prisoners she tortured under an array of nicknames, including “The Beautiful Beast,” “The Blond Angel of Death,” or “The Hyena of Auschwitz.”

When Bergen-Belsen was liberated by British troops on 15 April 1945, the conditions they found were indescribably horrific. First hand accounts by survivor Dr. Hadassah Bimko Rosensaft,<sup>363</sup> tells us that Bergen-Belsen was one of the most violent and deadly of the concentration camps. Upon liberation of the camp, due to filthy and overcrowded conditions, thousands of people who “survived” were found to be nothing more than barely living skeletons. Thousands had already perished, and thousands more, even upon liberation, were beyond help as they had been so severely starved, that their bodies rejected nutrition. A multitude of diseases were running rampant throughout the camp, and many suffered infections from wounds they had received by the hands of their cruel torturers.<sup>364</sup> Contrary to the excitement of the prisoners upon liberation at other camps, there was no joy at the liberation of Bergen-Belsen. According to Rosensaft, liberation had come too late, not only for those who had died, or were still dying, but

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>363</sup> Also known as Ada Bimko, who was one of the main witnesses for the prosecution during the Trial of Josef Kramer and Forty-Four others. She not only saved hundreds of lives in both Auschwitz-Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen, but once the British arrived and began setting up medical care for the inmates of Belsen who had survived, she was a crucial asset in aiding the British with treatment.

<sup>364</sup> “Bergen-Belsen, 1945-1950,” in the *Hadassah Rosensaft Collection, Bergen-Belsen Related Records*. RG-08.002\*11, accession No. 1989.126, 5.

also for those who survived. Although they had been liberated, thousands of prisoners were left with no place to go, and no one waiting for them. To Rosensaft, although they had been “liberated from death, from fear of death, but fear of life,” had just begun.<sup>365</sup>

When the British arrived, the number living in Belsen was about 58,000 people, 13,000 of which would die post-liberation from complications of their circumstances in the camp, 90 percent of whom were Jewish prisoners. In addition, there were approximately 10,000 or so corpses simply left lying around the camp and about 30,000 others that had been buried in mass graves.<sup>366</sup> Just a few days after the liberation of the camp, and prior to the start of the *Trial of Josef Kramer and Forty-Four Others*, also known as the Belsen Trial, on 17 September 1945, various publications in worldwide newspapers began to expose the horrors of Bergen-Belsen. Though some may have been sensationalist, titles such as “CANNIBALISM IN PRISON CAMP,”<sup>367</sup> “17,000 DIED IN CAMP IN MARCH,”<sup>368</sup> “BELSEN SURPRISES BURGOMASTERS,”<sup>369</sup> “S.S. WOMEN TIED DEAD TO LIVING,”<sup>370</sup> and “M.P.s View the Horror Camp, Indictment of Belsen’s Bestial Women,”<sup>371</sup> aroused public protest and called for an official investigation, and subsequent trial, of both SS men *and* women, by the War Crimes Commission.

Monday, 17 September 1945, marked the start of the *Trial of Josef Kramer and Forty-Four Others*, the Belsen Trial. The indictment of the perpetrators included two charges of “Committing a War Crime.”<sup>372</sup> The first count charged defendants with the ill-treatment of

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<sup>365</sup> “Bergen-Belsen, 1945-1950,” 5.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>367</sup> Hadassah Rosensaft, “Bergen-Belsen related records: Scrapbook, 1945-1947,” in *Hadassah Rosensaft Collection*, RG-08.002.10, accession No. 1989.126. Newspaper clipping from the *Manchester Guardian*, by Reuter, 4/18/45.

<sup>368</sup> Rosensaft, “Bergen-Belsen related records: Scrapbook, 1945-1947,” newspaper clipping from the *Daily Express*, by Reuter, 4/21/45.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid*, newspaper clippings from the *Manchester Guardian*, by David Woodward, 4/24/45.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid*, newspaper clipping from the *Sunday Times*, by R.W. Thompson, 4/22/1945.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid*, newspaper clippings from *News of the World*, 4/22/45.

<sup>372</sup> Phillips, *Belsen Trial*, 4-5.

various persons interned, which sometimes resulted in the death of various named Allied nationals, amongst others unrecognizable. The second count charged defendants with violations of the law and usages of war, as the ill treatment of prisoners resulted in the death of various named Allied nationals, as well as Allied national whose names remain unknown.<sup>373</sup> Under the Hague Convention of 1907, of which Germany was a signatory, the law in question was The Laws and Usages of War. This law, which provided for the proper treatment, not only of prisoners of war, but also of civilian citizens of nations that are occupied by a belligerent, was greatly violated. Amongst the defendants stood twenty-one year old Irma Grese, who was active in Bergen-Belsen between the dates 1 October 1942 through 30 April 1945.<sup>374</sup>

It was well known in Germany that the proper treatment of prisoners of war are such that he/she cannot be “starved, beaten, arbitrarily punished, killed, and none of these things, in any event, can happen to him without proper trial.”<sup>375</sup> And as outlined under Chapter XIV, paragraph 383 of the Manual of Military Law, it is the duty of the occupant to see that the lives of the citizens of the occupied territories are,

respected, that their domestic peace and honour are not disturbed, that their religious convictions are not interfered with, and generally that duress, unlawful and criminal attacks on their persons, and felonious actions as regards their property, are just as punishable as in times of peace.<sup>376</sup>

Under that very same Chapter XIV, section 59 further states that “Women shall be treated with all consideration due to their sex...” and that “Family honour and right, individual life and private property, as well as religious convictions and worship must be respected.”<sup>377</sup> The Nazi

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid, 16.

regime, and specific individuals more so than others, were in blatant violation of all of these laws.

Grese attempted to explain her involvement with the Nazi atrocities in the court-ordered affidavit she and the other defendants were required to state. In the affidavit she describes her various positions within different camps. Grese first went to Ravensbrück in July 1942, where she began her training as a female camp Guard. Less than a year later she was transferred in March 1943 to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where she remained until January 1945, at which point, women were now being recruited as guards, not only in women's camps, but because to the labor shortages of men as a result of the turning point in the war, *SS-Aufseherinnen* were also recruited to killing centers in Poland.<sup>378</sup> In January, she returned to her post at Ravensbrück for a short period of time, and finally in March was transferred to Bergen-Belsen, where she stayed until the end of the war.<sup>379</sup>

Grese explained that she had been aware of the gas chambers at Auschwitz. Further, she claimed she was cognizant of the fate that some of the prisoners, the older men and women and young children, might face upon their on the transport trains. Though to her it was evident that Dr. Mengele was selecting healthy prisoners for work, and the old, young and weak, to be gassed, there was nothing she could do except passively participate in "fear" of disobeying orders. For example, one time Grese was seen listening to what a Jew had to say. Because this was deemed an inappropriate course of action, she was confined to her quarters for a period of two days as punishment.<sup>380</sup> In Grese's mind, she like the prisoners, also "suffered," at the hands of the SS, in reality, her "suffering" was nothing compared to that of her victims.

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<sup>378</sup> Brown, *Beautiful Beast*, 39.

<sup>379</sup> "Erklärung von Erma Grese," In the *Peter Clapham collection relating to War Crimes, 1933-1984*, trans. by Harrison Lawrence (Sept. 12, 1945), RG-10.232, accession No. 1994.A.0022. A special thanks to Harry Lawrence for his help in translating the affidavit written in German.

<sup>380</sup> "Erklärung von Erma Grese," *Peter Clapham collection*.

While in Auschwitz, Grese claimed she witnessed various *SS* men abuse prisoners. In one such instance, Grese describes a scene where two *SS* men, Tauber and Dreschel, began hitting inmates in her presence. As she looked on, Dreschel turned to Grese and said to her that she could also hit prisoners, as long as it were “appropriate,” although she remained adamant that she did not participate at that time. As we will soon see, to Grese the term “appropriate” was used quite loosely. Though she seemed to recognize that the conditions were unsuitable for the inmates, Grese also suggested that the camp conditions were bad for everyone, including the *SS* who worked in Ravensbrück, Auschwitz, and Belsen.<sup>381</sup> While working in Belsen, Grese claimed that she appealed to her superior officer twice in regards to fixing the terrible conditions of the prisoners. In further attempt to minimize her role as a perpetrator of Nazi violence, Grese concluded in this section of her affidavit with, that although she was guilty in the sense that she was present, it was Heinrich Himmler, already deceased, who was responsible for everything that occurred within the camps, and unfortunately, there was nothing she could do to stop violence from occurring.<sup>382</sup>

Within Grese’s affidavit is a series of initial questioning. In her first statement, she claims that at Belsen, she “never hit anyone or mishandled any prisoners. I said I didn’t do it and I spoke the truth.”<sup>383</sup> She maintains this fact regarding her innocence at Belsen, throughout the initial questioning, and only admits to hitting women in the face in Auschwitz. In respect to the circumstances surrounding the incident in which she would use force against prisoners, she goes on to say that she would only hit women on the face, only with her hands, and only if they were being “hysterical.” Most surprisingly, though, Grese said that she handled the prisoners very well and did not believe anyone else could say otherwise in describing her manner while in

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.



Belsen. Not only was she not hostile at all towards the prisoners, but also the prisoners were not, in the slightest, hostile towards her either. On the occasion that they were, it was because they were dissatisfied with the SS, and not because she had harmed them.<sup>384</sup> From time to time, Grese maintained that she would help women in one way or another. Like many others, it seemed as though Grese used the SS higher-ups as a scapegoat for the crimes she herself committed, independently of official orders.

One of the most important witnesses for the prosecution in the Belsen Trial, not only for her previously used detailed description on the conditions of Belsen, was Dr. Ada Bimko, also known as Hadassah Bimko Rosensaft, but as they address her in court as the former, we will address her here as such.<sup>385</sup> Born 26 August 1912, Bimko, a Jewish Doctor of Dental Medicine from Poland, was deported to Auschwitz on 2 August 1943. Upon the arrival of she and her family at Belsen, her parents, husband, and five year-old son were immediately sent to the gas chambers.<sup>386</sup> In her cross-examination by one of the members of the counsel for the prosecution, Colonel Backhouse, asked Dr. Bimko to relate the selection process to the court. She explained that there were three methods of selection. The first was of the prisoners who immediately arrived at the camp, the second was of the healthy prisoners within the camp, and the third was made in the hospital amongst the sick. Those contributing to the selection process, she continued, were the camp doctor, with the help of other SS men and women, who were always present. In Bimko's description, SS men and women were imperative to the selection process, in which they sometimes, "pointed with a finger to one or the other, point out others who should join those people who were condemned to death."<sup>387</sup> When asked to name those sitting on trial

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ada Bimko is Hadassah Rosensaft, who's collection found that the USHMM was crucial to this discussion.

<sup>386</sup> Menachem Z. Rosensaft, "Hadassah Rosensaft: 1912-1997," *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, (1 March 2009), accessed April 20, 2015. <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/rosensaft-hadassah>.

<sup>387</sup> Phillips, *Belsen Trial*, 67.

in the dock, who she witnessed participating in this process, she pointed to fifteen individuals, six of which were women, including Irma Grese, who Bimko says was responsible for the *Appelle* (roll call).<sup>388</sup>

On the eighth day of the trial, witness Dora Szafran supported Bimko's statement. Szafran, who had arrived at Auschwitz in June 1943, also remembered seeing Grese participating in the selection of women, alongside Kramer, Hoessler, Tauber, Drechsler, Dr. Klein and Dr. Mengele.<sup>389</sup> In further cross-examination by the defense, Major Cranfield questioned the validity of a statement made by Szafran. She recalled a time in Belsen, when Grese, although not the kitchen Kommandant, came to the kitchen. Upon inspection, Szafran recalled, she proceeded to beat a girl with a leather riding-whip. Although Grese had, hitherto, denied carrying any weapons at Belsen, Szafran responded, "In Auschwitz she wore a pistol and in Belsen she went about with a riding-whip. She was one of the few S.S. women who had a permit to carry arms."<sup>390</sup>

In the final re-examination by prosecutor Colonel Backhouse, Szafran left the court with an extremely damning image of Grese. When asked by backhouse whether she could remember any other instances of Grese's camp conduct towards prisoners she replied with the following statement:

"In Camp A, Block 9, Blockaelteste Ria and Hoessler and Dr. Enna, the prison doctor, made a selection for the gas chamber, and two selected girls jumped out of the window and Grese approached them as they were lying on the ground and shot them twice. She was always active at the camp gate making inspections and if any of the prisoners wore another sock or shoe or anything like that, he or she would be beaten up. I cannot remember with what she used to beat them because I had to stand at attention."<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid, 90.

When the time came for twenty-one year old Grese to take the stand, not only did her answers change drastically from her initial affidavit, but also the phrases “I do not know,” “I do not remember,” and “It is a lie,” were often employed throughout her trial. In face of the mounting evidence against Grese, the defense attempted to portray Grese as a young, naïve and incapable woman. On the twenty-sixth day of the Trial, 16 October 1945, Grese took to the stand and was cross-examined by defense attorney Major Cranfield. Whereas witnesses of the prosecution claimed Grese to have had an active, and in some instances, a leading role in all three camps, Ravensbrück, Auschwitz and Belsen, Grese paints an entirely different picture of herself.

When asked about her duties in Auschwitz, Grese claimed she was assigned to telephone duties in the Blockführer’s room, although this fact was contested by the court who claimed there were no telephone duties assigned to camp guards. During 1943 she was in charge of the Strassenbaukommando, then for two months in autumn, was in charge of the gardening working party. In December 1943, she went on to take the place of Volkenrath in the parcel office, censoring mail. From May through December 1944, she claims she was senior in “C” *Lager*. From there she was transferred to be in charge of two male blocks in Auschwitz No. 1.<sup>392</sup>

When the defense attorney questioned Grese on the behavior of the prisoners, she says, at first, when given enough to eat, “They were quite alright.” When numbers under her control rose to between twenty and thirty thousand, and food was “a bit” more scarce, Grese claimed, “They behaved like animals... at nearly every corner there were 20 or 30 people who waited to pounce”<sup>393</sup> on those who were tasked with carrying the food to the blocks for distribution. Consistent with racist Nazi ideology, the humans under her care were easily reduced to animals. In an oral history with Alice Cahana, a prisoner of Auschwitz also remembers Grese. Whereas

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid, 248.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid, 249.

Grese admitted to reducing prisoners to animals, this equation was certainly known to her prisoners. Cahana explained that the beautiful woman walked around them in such a way that made them feel that they were “less than animals. We [were] not human beings anymore.”<sup>394</sup>

Despite various witnesses’ claims that Grese had used her position as a female camp guard to beat and murder prisoners, when asked about the events later in the trial by Cranfield, as to whether or not she had ever had beaten a prisoner until she drew blood, or whether it was true that once a prisoner had fallen to the ground that Grese would continue to kick or strike said prisoner, she simply replied “Never.” When questioned further about whether she, at Belsen, had ever struck a prisoner at all, she now agreed that she had, but only with her hand, and only on the prisoners face. Her beatings of prisoners were limited, she claimed, because to Grese, the prisoners already were in such horrific shape that one “had almost a horror of them.”<sup>395</sup>

Cranfield continued his series of questioning about the selections. Although various witnesses, such as Szafran and Bimko, were able to identify Grese immediately in the dock, and by name, as having been both present and involved with the selections, when asked if she knew what the parades (Appelle) was for, she simply replied, “No,” although she was aware that prisoners were being gassed, not due to commanding orders, but, supposedly, from speaking with the prisoners themselves, a point, which starkly contradicts her the statements of her initial affidavit.<sup>396</sup>

As cross-examination continued, when asked if Grese, at either Auschwitz or Belsen, had ever planned with Josef Kramer, or any other person, to put prisoners to death or ill treat them in any other fashion, Grese retorted: “No. I am not capable of making plans and I never made a

<sup>394</sup> Alice Cahana (Interviewee) and Linda Kuzmac (Interviewer), *Interview with Alice Cahana*, (Dec. 4, 1990), RG-50.030\*0051, 18. [http://collections.ushmm.org/oh\\_findingaids/RG-50.030.0051\\_trs\\_en.pdf](http://collections.ushmm.org/oh_findingaids/RG-50.030.0051_trs_en.pdf).

<sup>395</sup> Phillips, *Belsen Trial*, 250.

<sup>396</sup> This is an interesting point. In her initial affidavit, Grese claims that she had been punished at the start of her career at Ravensbrück for speaking to a Jewish prisoner. However, she now claims that she had heard about the gas chambers from the prisoners directly. Yet, if she had been seen talking with the prisoners again, she surely would have been punished again, yet she makes no mention of this.

plan to kill the prisoners.” Attempting to cover up her atrocities, and downplay her role in the murder of innocent civilians, it seems Grese was attempting to frame herself in the context of traditional gender roles. Because women worked as auxiliaries to men within the camps, it might have seemed to the judge, utterly impossible that Grese would challenge the role of a Nazi men, by making a plan without consulting her superior. Further, an *SS* man would certainly not have consulted a “lowly” female camp guard in making such drastic decisions. By claiming her inability to make such a plan, she would try to foster the belief that she could not have played such a violent role in the camps.<sup>397</sup>

A follow up question posed by Cranfield later on in his cross-examination, draws attention to an incident reported by one witness, Stein. During this particular selection during the summer of 1944, some prisoners, in fear of being selected for the gas chamber, tried to hide. Unfortunately for one woman, Grese had noticed her. As a result, according to Stein, Grese ordered an *SS* man to shoot the woman, to which he conceded. Cranfield asked whether it were, in fact at all possible, that Grese could have had the authority to issue orders to and *SS* guard, to which Grese merely replied “No.”<sup>398</sup> Once again we see that the defense was desperately attempting to poke holes in the prosecution by laying the claim that a women under the Third Reich, and especially in under the authority of the *SS*, could not possibly have had the power to issue an order to a man.

Whereas Grese used her time on the stand during her cross-examination by defense attorney Cranfield, as an attempt to “explain” her actions, quite the opposite occurred during her questioning by prosecutor, Colonel Backhouse. Irma Grese was cross-examined by the prosecution on the twenty-seventh day of trial. One important initial question Backhouse asked was about Grese’s salary. While working on a dairy farm prior to entering Ravensbrück, Grese

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<sup>397</sup> Phillips, *Belsen Trial*, 253.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid*, 251.

said she was paid between 40-60 marks per month. When she arrived at Ravensbrück, however, the position only offered her 54. When asked why she received “so much less than the others,” she attributed the wage gap to her youthful age. As a young eighteen-year-old girl, seeing all of the older women get paid a higher salary, while at the same time using harsh treatment, Grese may have been looking for an opportunity to earn greater pay. Surely, being as cruel as possible to the helpless inmates would command Grese great respect from the other women, as well as from the *SS* men, exploiting an opportunity for her to obtain a pay raise, which she would gladly have welcomed.<sup>399</sup> As opposed to the types of answers garnered by Cranfield, Backhouse immediately received extremely short, and detail-less, responses. As Backhouse began discussing the particulars surrounding her stint as the leader of the Strafkommando, the punishment commando, in which prisoners were ordered to bring in stones from outside of the camp, there was a great sense tension between the two. When queried about her charge of the Strafkommando, Grese retorts, “I explained already that I was in charge for two days of a Strafkommando which was working in bringing in stones from outside the camp, and that was a punishment for myself.” To which Backhouse quickly replied, “I know what you told us, and I am suggesting you did not tell us the truth.”<sup>400</sup>

For much of the remaining questioning by Backhouse, Grese gives simple “Yes” or “Nos.” When asked questions such as whether women had to be carried back to camp after a hard day’s labor, Grese would reply “I never saw it.” Another somewhat common variation of responses Grese used, was blaming her victims of lying under oath. For example, Backhouse suggested to her that while out with the working parties she made a habit of beating and kicking women, and enjoying it, Grese replied “And I say that you are badly informed about me, and that

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid, 253.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid, 254.

is a big lie.”<sup>401</sup> When further questioned about this incident, as witness Gertrud Diamant made in her deposition that it was, in fact, Grese’s favorite activity to beat women until they fell to the ground, where she would proceed to stop them with her heavy boots, she again retorts: “That is a lie. Perhaps it is her habit to lie.”<sup>402</sup>

Grese’s constant use of phrases such as I cannot recall, and amounting evidence to simple lies, seemed to be an attempt to separate herself from the crime. If she cannot remember, or can create the slightest amount of unreliability in the witnesses by attacking their characters as liars, Grese attempted to cultivate a sort of empathy from the judge under the barrage of questioning.

In the closing arguments for Irma Grese, the defense employed gender stereotypes as a sort of final attempt to discredit various witnesses and to cultivate a reasonable doubt that Grese would have never, based on her gender, have been able to commit such heinous atrocities. This first attempt was made when Cranfield attempted to discredit, entirely, the affidavit of Helena Kopper who stated that Grese had been in charge of the Vistula Kommando, a punishment commando. Cranfield claimed that if this were true then Grese would have been in charge as, “the only *Aufseherin* of a Kommando 800 strong, with an S.S. man... under her.”<sup>403</sup> Cranfield further attempted to make a mockery of the possibility that a woman would be in charge, by undermining the statement of Stein. Cranfield asked the court to truly question the likelihood that an *Aufseherin* would actually have had “any power to give an order to an S.S. guard to shoot a woman?”<sup>404</sup> This was quite an absurd possibility in accordance with subversive Nazi ideology. Cranfield goes on to take one final stab at the question of gender in the case. He pointed out that all five deponents were young Jewish women from Central Europe. Having been in the same camp, and having experienced the same horrific conditions together, they must all have been

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<sup>401</sup> Ibid, 255.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid, 256.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid, 533.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid, 533.

driven by the desire for revenge. Whereas many women who stood trial showed “remorse” through crying, and demonstrating their motherly instincts, often resulting in a lesser sentencing, these five female witnesses, by acting hysterical and demonstrating a great deal of pain, were also attempting to “trick” the male court officials into feel sorry for them—which, Cranfield seemed to say, would result in the wrongful conviction of Grese and others.

In the end, the prosecution made many compelling arguments. The most captivating of which was the question of whether the court could, “for one moment believe that the [accused]... did not know that what they were doing was wrong and contrary to every law and custom of war?”<sup>405</sup> As a result, #9 Irma Ilse Ida Grese was found guilty by the Court, of the first and second charges brought against her. Grese was sentenced to suffer death by hanging, and became the youngest woman to be executed under British law in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>406</sup>

Irma Ilse Ida Grese was moved from her prison cell in Lüneberg to Hameln prison where she remained until her execution on 13 December 1945. Hameln became the final resting place of Grese and two other female camp guards, Elisabeth Volkenrath and Juana Bormann.<sup>407</sup> As she was led to the gallows, following the hanging of fellow camp guard Elisabeth Volkenrath, Grese took a moment to kiss the crucifix. Upon her final breaths, she gave one final command to her executioner Albert Pierrepoint; “*Schnell*, “(quick), she said.

Although Grese herself would never be heard from again, even in her death, she would be remembered for her ruthlessness. During the Eichmann Trial of 1961, about sixteen years after the execution of Grese, witness Vera Alexander, while describing her time spent in Auschwitz, recalls meeting the infamous woman. One time, because Alexander had been assigned to be the leader of *Lager C*, she claimed that one day SS woman Irma Grese had given her a whip to use in

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid, 590.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid, 642.

<sup>407</sup> Sarti, *Hitler's Furies*, 124.



“disciplining” inmates, though she never did.<sup>408</sup> The next time Alexander came in contact with Grese, it was after a group of Hungarian women came into her block with a young girl. Afraid they might send her to the gas chambers, Alexander agreed to hide the a young girl in the block for a few weeks. After some time, Grese came to learn about the girl and reported it to the SS. As a result, the young girl was taken away and thrown into the crematorium.<sup>409</sup> Even in death, Irma Grese, the young, sadistic, “Beautiful Beast,” is still remembered and feared.

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<sup>408</sup> Oral History with Vera Alexander, “Eichmann Trial—Session 71—Witness Vera Alexander,” *Capital Cities Broadcasting Corporation*, Stephen Spielberg Jewish Film Archive & Israel State Archives, (Jerusalem, Israelf: July 6, 1961), time 20:34. [http://www.ushmm.org/online/film/display/detail.php?file\\_num=2305&clip\\_id=DFA0A47F-1A14-4CC8-8838-D95A658A9031](http://www.ushmm.org/online/film/display/detail.php?file_num=2305&clip_id=DFA0A47F-1A14-4CC8-8838-D95A658A9031).

<sup>409</sup> Alexander, “Eichmann Trial—Session 71—Witness Vera Alexander,” time 20:34.

### The Case of Ilse Koch



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*“In my camp there are no sick; there are only the healthy and the dead.”<sup>411</sup>*

Ilse Koch, nee Köhler, was born 22 September 1906 in Dresden. One of three children, Koch was the only daughter of Anna Kubisch and Max Köhler, a social democrat and factory foreman, who died in 1934.<sup>412</sup> Koch completed eight years of schooling before enrolling in the public commercial school in Dresden. Her first professional experience consisted of unpaid work as a clerk in a bookshop. Next, she became a steno-typist, and worked with several different companies, including a wood wholesale firm, an oil company, and then with Reemtsma, one of

<sup>410</sup> This photograph is housed at the USHMM and shows Koch testifying at her own trial at Dachau. Part of the USHMM collection, Photo # 43014 (Dachau, Germany: July 8, 1947), <http://digitalassets.ushmm.org/photoarchives/detail.aspx?id=1040530>.

<sup>411</sup> Saul K Padover, “The Ilse Koch Case,” *The Nation* v. 167, 19 (Nov. 6, 1948), 520.

<sup>412</sup> Lili Raihofer, trans, *Indictment in the Proceedings against Koch, Ilse for Murder*, by the Chief Prosecutor of the Landgericht for the Chief Prosecutor of Augsburg (Bamberg, Germany), 4 JS 360/49 (0 JS 1/49), (May 10, 1950), accession No. 1996.A.0513, 37.

the major tobacco producers at the time. Her last profession prior to her marriage was with the Reichsgruppe Handel (National groups trade) in Berlin.<sup>413</sup> With the encouragement of her father, who is known to have told Ilse that she must be “part of the time that you are alive in,” she became a Nazi party member on 1 May 1932.<sup>414</sup> Taking her father’s advice, and becoming deeply involved with the National Socialists, Koch began working at Sachsenhausen concentration camp in 1934, where it is believed she first met her future husband, nine years her senior, Karl Otto Koch.<sup>415</sup>

Karl Koch, born 2 August 1897 to the son of a local government bureaucrat, was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class for his time served in World War I. Prior to his membership in the SS beginning in 1931, the avid anti-Semite and anti-Communist had spent time in jail for embezzlement. Despite his criminal record, Koch became a devoted party member, and as a result established himself and rose fairly quickly through the ranks.<sup>416</sup> When Ilse met Karl he was “leading the 3. Standarte”<sup>417</sup> of the political emergency troops. Having proven his loyalty to the SS, through his involvement with overthrowing the SA and his hand in the death of Ernst Röhm in early 1934, one year later Koch was promoted to commander of the guards at Esterwege concentration camp, where Ilse often visited. Koch was then transferred to Columbia-House concentration camp in Berlin, and promoted to the position of camp commander. In 1936, Koch was further promoted to camp commander of Sachsenhausen concentration camp. The following year on 25 May 1937, Karl and Ilse were married in the camp. A few months later, on 1 August 1937, Koch would be transferred, as camp commander, to the newly founded Buchenwald concentration camp, where they would settle into Villa Koch, situated just outside

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<sup>413</sup> Raihofer, *Indictment against Koch, Ilse*, 37.

<sup>414</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 142.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid*, 142.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid*, 142.

<sup>417</sup> Raihofer, *Indictment against Koch, Ilse*, 37.

the gates of Buchenwald.<sup>418</sup> This camp would serve not only as the place the couple would give birth to three children, Artwin, Gisela and Gudrun—who died in infancy while they lived in Buchenwald—but also where Ilse Koch would claim the title, the “Beast of Buchenwald.”<sup>419</sup>

It is well known that Ilse played a significant role in Koch’s career in his various posts as camp commandant. Ilse was the one who encouraged a committed relationship, for she was fully aware that the marriage to a major *SS* officer would alter her own status and agency. Becoming a Koch, Ilse would prove to use her husband’s connections within the Nazi party to further her own advancement and use her position as Koch’s wife to pursue her own goals, no matter how cruel.<sup>420</sup>

Unlike the other women studied through this thesis, Ilse Koch did not participate in the same indoctrination process through the BDM as younger girls had, but this did not make her any less ambitious or aware of the possibilities for women under the Nazi regime. In fact, although not an official camp guard at Belsen, Ilse, encouraged by her father to seize opportunities offered to women, spent some time training in Ravensbrück along with other *Aufseherinnen*. Although she would come to acquire the title of *Chief Oberaufseherin* in 1941, she was unique in her participation in the Holocaust, in that she used her marriage as an opportunity to gain status.

The holy matrimony of Karl and Ilse is one of great interest. It illustrated a prime example of how the intrusive and oppressive nature of Nazi ideology, in turn, presented this couple with an opportunity to exploit the very organization that fostered them, through the concentration camp setting. Not only would Koch utilize the system through his extremely brutal treatment of prisoners, making himself a stand out, resulting in a quick rise through the

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<sup>418</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 144.

<sup>419</sup> Raihofer, *Indictment against Koch, Ilse*, 37.

<sup>420</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 144.

ranks, but many witnesses claimed that the Kochs “ruled together.” The reality of this situation lends itself in support of the fact that Ilse was able, contrary to the normative behavioral construction of typical SS wives, to alter her agency as an SS wife. And because she was able to do so, alludes to the fact that Kommandant Koch allowed, her to reinterpret her role as a wife, turning their marriage into a corrupt partnership, unique of the typical SS marriages of the time.<sup>421</sup>

Buchenwald was an especially horrific camp, and Kommandant Koch ruled with impunity. He was known for his extremely brutal and deadly treatment of prisoners, who were often beat informally with a wide range of objects, from fists to riding crops, rubber truncheons to dogs, or whatever else was on hand. For formal beatings, serving as demonstrations to the entire camp, victims were often stripped naked and tied to a table-like whipping bench, called a “Bock.”<sup>422</sup> Other times, prisoners would have their hands tied behind their backs and would be hung by their hands a few inches off of the ground, often times for hours, and public executions by hanging were nothing out of the ordinary.<sup>423</sup>

Serving as further torment to the prisoners was the construction of the camp zoo for SS families. Created by order of Kommandant Koch on 8 September 1938, the Buchenwald zoological gardens were created to provide a diversion and form of entertainment for families in their leisure time. Most of the time animals were fed by starving prisoners, who were subjected to feeding them nutritious diets, including meats, honey, jams, breads and various vegetables. If caught sneaking food meant for the animals, prisoners would be severely punished.<sup>424</sup> In addition to the construction of the zoo was the construction of a riding arena the size of a football

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>422</sup> Flint Whitlock, *The Beasts of Buchenwald: Karl & Ilse Koch, Human-Skin Lampshades, and the War-Crimes Trial of the Century*, (Brule, WI: Cable Publishing, 2011),75

<sup>423</sup> Whitlock, *Beasts of Buchenwald*, 78.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid, 80.

field. Built especially for Koch's beloved wife, who was an avid horseback rider, the arena was erected in a hurry, resulting in the death, from accidents or exhaustion, of about thirty prisoners.<sup>425</sup>

The Kochs used Buchenwald as a site to indulge in their perverse enjoyment of brutally treating and murdering prisoners, and as a place to extort money from the Reich and obtain various luxury items. Kommandant Koch, despite Nazi law against such actions, obtained great wealth while in Buchenwald. He often stole from the Nazis by smuggling prisoner goods, embezzling money meant for camp use, as well as auctioning off various "state collected" items for personal profit. Ilse, who profited handsomely through her pseudo-directed actions of her husband, as a result, spent thousands on clothing, furs and jewels. When Ilse was not spending her days entertaining in their elaborately decorated home, horseback riding, shopping, or having tea with high society women, she was busy reconstructing the "wifely" role.<sup>426</sup> Ilse was known for taking great pride in assisting Koch with running Buchenwald.

Villa Koch, situated less than 1000 yards from the camp where thousands of prisoners were systematically used for scientific experiments, starved, beaten and murdered, allowed Ilse Koch to become infamous in her participation in the selection and torture of prisoners. Known as a sexual sadist, Ilse took a great deal of pleasure from not only of watching her husband and other SS men bludgeon prisoners, often to death, but from beating prisoners herself. Ilse rose to infamy through tales of her using her riding crop to whip prisoners as she rode her horse alongside them. When prisoners looked at Ilse, she would approach the inmate, and beat them with her crop. On one of many documented occasions, Walter Retterpath was forced to work on a road detail. When Ilse approached and Retterpath glanced at her, Ilse screamed, "What do you

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<sup>425</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>426</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 145.

think you're doing, looking at my legs?" and proceeded to beat him.<sup>427</sup> In fact, there are many testimonies which relay similar encounters. In another instance, prisoner Ernst Reichert watched as a feeble prisoner, who had been sent to a roadwork detail, saluted Ilse in accordance with camp regulation. As a result, she approached him and hit him repeatedly in the face. When the berated prisoner fell to the ground, unmoving, she continued the beating with blows to his abdomen."<sup>428</sup>

Clearly, Ilse had no reservations about physically abusing prisoners on her own accord. But many times Ilse also used her power and influence to dictate the actions of male SS prison guards, as well as her husband's confidants. In fact, Ilse's influence on her husband and fellow camp higher ups, such as deputy camp-commander Hermann Florstedt, the adjutant Heinrich Hackmann, and camp physician Dr. Hoven, amongst many other, was so strong, that Ilse became one of the most feared persons in the camp because of her own violence, and also because of the violence she commanded from others. Unlike the wife of the second camp commander Pister, and wife of the camp leader Rödl who were never seen ordering SS men or prisoners around the camp compound, Ilse is remembered by survivors for her excessive cruelty and power over the camp men.<sup>429</sup>

In July 1938, prisoner Fritz Unger, while working in the troops' garages to install a heating system, recognized Ilse passing by with a baby carriage. A fellow prisoner watching the scene and knowing what was about to befall Unger, told him to disappear as fast as he could. As Unger began to run away, Ilse from far off, called for him to halt, to which he did not heed. In his attempt to run, an SS man suddenly blocked his way and began to continually punch him in the head and face, asking why he had not saluted Frau Koch. When Unger responded that he had

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<sup>427</sup> Whitlock, *Beasts of Buchenwald*, 69.

<sup>428</sup> Phillips, *Indictment against Koch, Ilse*, 87.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

not seen her, the *SS* man shoved the prisoner into a ditch filled with water. When Ilse finally approached, she ordered the guard to take down Unger's number and make him stand in the water until the evening, to which the *SS* guard complied.<sup>430</sup>

In the spring of 1939, while assigned to work on the Autoban, connecting Weimar to Buchenwald, prisoner Christian Muselman was tasked with fixing the seams between the different cement runs, which required the prisoner to kneel down in order to complete his work. Upon returning from Weimar, Karl and Ilse Koch began walking their bicycles across the unfinished road, as riding on it proved to be an impossible challenge. The couple approached the command, and Ilse could be heard asking her husband, "How long do these loafers need to get finished? Look at this pig he is sleeping at his work," regarding the working position Muselman had taken.<sup>431</sup> As a result, Kommandant Koch called for the head of this work command. When director *SS Oberscharführer* Schäfer arrived, wanting to impress the Kochs with his "robust discipline," he ordered the other *SS* guards to beat the prisoners. Schäfer joined in as he picked up a piece of root and beat Muselman for approximately one hour, hitting him about 100 times, while the Kochs stayed and took pleasure in watching the beatings.<sup>432</sup>

In accordance with the statement of various witnesses, because of her violent behavior Ilse was given a variety of nicknames, such as the "Devil of Buchenwald," "Enemy No. 1," "the Red Witch," and "Commandeuse." Yet, the most revolting of Ilse's sadistic tendencies, which would brand her with the infamous nickname, "the Bitch of Buchenwald,"<sup>433</sup> was her well-documented collection of lampshades, and other household items and decorations, made from the tattooed skin of inmates, whom she would personally select for death.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>434</sup> Yenne, *Hitler's Dark Arts*, 232.



In the testimony of Dr. Kurt Sitte against Ilse Koch in the Dachau Trial, the physicist explained the history behind the existence of the lampshades made of human skin. Imprisoned in Buchenwald from September 1939 until liberation in April 1945, Sitte attributed the initial fascination with tattooed human skins to the thesis work of Dr. Erich Wagner. In Germany, it was customary that after medical school, in order to obtain a certified medical degree, physicians had to complete a thesis. With the huge number of human subjects at their disposal, the SS doctors, many of whom had not yet earned their degrees upon their arrival in concentration camps, would conduct scientific experiments on their human guinea pigs, and then have prisoners, who were appointed to sick ward duty, complete their thesis work for them. Assigned to the pathology department for almost three full years, this is what Sitte claimed he did for Dr. Hoven.

Dr. Wagner's thesis, which claimed the value of the collection of tattooed skins as important to the "sociology record," actually consisted of nothing more than a selection of dates of tattooing, and the description of possible methods for having the tattoos removed. In order to obtain these human "hides" for "study" prisoners would be killed and then skinned. Sitte confirmed this connection between the "scientific work" being done for the thesis, and the murder of prisoners for their tattoos, when working in the pathology department, he came across a series of photographs documenting the tattoo found on one prisoner's arm taken, which had been taken while the prisoner was still alive. At a later time, Sitte remembers seeing the same tattoo from the photograph, but this time, it was no longer in the photo. Instead Sitte claimed that the actual tattooed piece of skin was being kept in a solution, rather than tanned like many of the other skins. In fact, at Buchenwald, all prisoners with tattooed skin were called to the hospital, and all were to be photographed, for possible future use.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> United States Congress, State, *Conduct of Ilse Koch War Crimes Trial: Hearings before*

Though it was Wagner who introduced this custom of killing prisoners for their tattooed skin, the “Bitch of Buchenald” soon caught word. Ilse, having come across the photos of the tattoos in the photography department, became interested in the pictures. Despite the explanation of camp physician Dr. Werner Kirchert, that the photos were actually human skins, Ilse, nonetheless was fascinated, and developed an obsession with selecting prisoners for their exotic tattooed skin, in order to create various household items, particularly lampshades and framed photographs.<sup>436</sup>

In order to confirm that these people had actually been murdered, in Sitte’s cross-examination, prosecution lawyer Senator Ferguson asked, if while working in the pathology department, if, of the bodies that had been brought to Sitte, any had died of as the result of gun shot wounds. Sitte replied, quite frankly, “Yes; there were such cases.”<sup>437</sup> Other times, such as in the example of prisoners Karl Peix and Walter Krämer, who, while working in the pathology department had received the skins and were tasked with tanning them, but were unable to find “any normal cause of death.”<sup>438</sup> These people, Sitte concluded, were sent to death by Ilse Koch’s command, solely for their “picturesque tattooings.”<sup>439</sup>

As Ilse’s sadistic obsession with the tattooed prisoners became better known amongst the prisoners with special treatment, these inmates began to warn all tattooed prisoners not to be seen by her.<sup>440</sup> Prisoner Kurt Glass, who was assigned to garden work at Villa Koch, recalled a time during roll call when all prisoners were ordered to remove their shirts. Prisoners with interesting

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*the Investigations Subcommittee of the Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments, Interim report of the Investigations Subcommittee of the Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments pursuant to S. Res. 189, 80<sup>th</sup> Congress, a Resolution Authorizing the Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments to Carry Out Certain Duties, United States Senate, Eightieth Congress, second session, Sept. 28-Dec. 9, 1948, Dec. 27, 1948, Submitted under authority of the order of the Senate, June 19, 1948, by Mr. Ferguson, (United States Government Printing Office: Washington, 1949),1040*

<sup>436</sup> Phillips, *Indictment against Koch, Ilse*, 132.

<sup>437</sup> *Conduct of Ilse Koch War Crimes Trial*, 1038.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid*, 1041.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid*, 1040.

<sup>440</sup> Phillips, *Indictment against Koch, Ilse*, 133.

tattoos were then brought to Ilse, who had given the order, and selected the ones with tattoos she found most appealing. As a result, these inmates were murdered and skinned. Their tattoos were tanned and turned into lampshades and other “pieces of art.”<sup>441</sup>

On another occasion, one of many, two prisoners, Herbert Thiele and Arno Best, witnessed Ilse accompanying her husband on his rounds through the camp. When they came across a prisoner who was working with his shirt off, Ilse noticed a tattoo on his chest. Upon closer examination of the tattoo, which was a depiction of a large Indian head, Ilse quickly took down his number. Shortly after, the prisoner was called to report immediately to the main square. He was subsequently brought into the sick ward, where Dr. Waldemar Hoven gave him a lethal injection.<sup>442</sup> According to the testimony of Karl Gartig, Dr. Hoven confessed to the killings of these tattooed prisoners upon Ilse’s request, although he claimed he was not the only one to do so.<sup>443</sup> Other doctors respected her orders as well. Witnessed by prisoner Richard Cryc, Dr. Martin Sommer in the spring of 1940 gave a lethal injection to one German Jew, and certainly others, who’s colorful sailboat tattoo on his chest and depiction of a light tower with a setting sun tattooed on his back, had caught Ilse’s eye.<sup>444</sup> According to Sitte, as Ilse’s collection grew, often times SS guards would enter the pathology department in search of tattoos they could use for as a book covers, knife sheaths, purses, or other types of “souvenirs.” The men would enter claiming “Koch has them and other fuehrers have them. We want the same.”<sup>445</sup>

In January 1942, Karl Koch was transferred to Majdanek, where he was to also serve as camp commandant. Just prior to his departure, wanting to cover up his infidelity and medical history, Kommandant Koch ordered the death of medical inmate orderlies, Karl Peix and Walter

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<sup>441</sup> Whitlock, *Beasts of Buchenwald*, 84.

<sup>442</sup> Phillips, *Indictment against Koch, Ilse*, 134.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid*, 136.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid*, 134.

<sup>445</sup> *Conduct of Ilse Koch War Crimes Trial*, 1041.

Krämer, who had treated him for syphilis.<sup>446</sup> Though the SS had been suspicious of the Kochs and their excessive wealth for quite sometime, the murder of Peix and Krämer finally gave the SS a reason to place Koch under intense scrutiny. Koch's superior, Prince Josias Waldeck, called upon George Konrad Morgen to look into the Koch's financial affairs. Looking for evidence of embezzlement and theft, Morgen and his team turned Villa Koch inside out. During the investigation, Morgen became increasingly aware of the extra-martial relationships carried out by both Ilse and Koch. Whereas Koch had become involved with a dancer in Weimar, Ilse had been carrying on affairs with Dr. Hoven and deputy camp commander Hermann Florstedt simultaneously.<sup>447</sup>

Ilse, recognizing that her power was slipping away, decided, along with the support of her lovers Hoven and Florstedt, to contact Weimar Chief of Police Paul Hennicke, and hand over the evidence on all of Karl's illegal financial endeavors.<sup>448</sup> Morgen had gathered enough evidence to bring charges of unauthorized killings, massive fraud, and embezzlement of funds that should have gone to the SS, against both Ilse and Karl Koch. With such incriminating evidence compiled against the Koch's, even Karl's close friend Heinrich Himmler had to allow Morgen to move ahead with the charges. After having spent a day in jail, Koch was released by order of Himmler in order to move forward with his transfer to Majdanek, yet the charges would not be dropped, and Morgen would continue to build a case against him. Ilse, as required by the SS, would no longer be able to accompany Koch, but would stay behind at Buchenwald, and would do so with great pleasure, for the time being.<sup>449</sup>

Morgen's final SS report on the investigation of Karl and Ilse Koch included a long list of acts committed by these members of the SS elite, which did not portray them in a favorable light.

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<sup>446</sup> Whitlock, *Beasts of Buchenwald*, 123.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid, 129.

The investigation revealed that the Kochs had embezzled about 65,000 RM, an amount that would have been virtually impossible to attain based on Karl's salary alone. The Kochs had also profited greatly after *Kristallnacht* in 1938, when large numbers of Jews arriving in Buchenwald were ordered to deposit their valuables, which was directly confiscated by the Kochs. Further, from the mouths of those who had died at Buchenwald, the Kochs had extracted approximately 5,597 grams of gold; of that amount, only 857 grams were turned over to the SS.<sup>450</sup>

When the investigation ceased, and the evidence presented to Himmler and Prince Waldeck proved that the Kochs had been profiting greatly, at the expense of the SS, Ilse and Karl Koch were taken into custody on 23 August 1943.<sup>451</sup> The conclusion of the Koch trial by the SS in 1943 resulted in a guilty sentence of the most severe extent for Koch, who was executed by an SS firing squad on 3 April 1945.<sup>452</sup> Ilse, on the other hand, argued that, as a devoted mother and housewife, she was unaware of her husband's finances. As a result, she was set free on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence to prove her involvement in the corruption case. With that, Frau Koch and her two young children left Buchenwald in February 1944, and moved into a small apartment in the Stuttgart suburb of Ludwigsburg, where they lived a remarkably quiet life in hopes that the Koch name was common enough that she, along with her crimes, would blend into obscurity.<sup>453</sup> While living in this area occupied by American troops, Koch often came into contact with many Americans. Becoming comfortable in her new life, Koch was further deluded by the perception that because of her sexual appeal, and the positive attention she often received by American forces, that she could not be held culpable for her time in Buchenwald.<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>454</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 151.

When American forces liberated Buchenwald on 11 April 1945, the conditions in which they found the surviving inmates were atrocious. Two separate memoirs written by American soldiers, Richard Daughtry and Jack La Pietra, relate their visits to the camp, just days after its liberation. Both of these memoirs were imperative, not only in revealing the Nazi atrocities to the outside world, but in accumulating evidence against Koch.

Upon Richard Daughtry's entrance into the camp, two Jewish men approached him and a few of his fellow soldiers. These two educated members of the camp, who spoke perfect English, offered to guide Daughtry and friends through the camp, so as to "make certain the atrocities that had occurred... were viewed and recorded for history."<sup>455</sup> At one point along the tour, the Jews led the Americans to the crematorium, where on one side of the hall was a wooden table covered with about five or ten lamps in a row, the lampshades made of tattooed skin. The guides explained that they had been the work and prized possessions of the "Beast of Buchenwald," Ilse Koch. In accordance with victim's testimonies, Daughtry also related through his memoir, the process by which the skins were fashioned into household items. One of the guides explained that Ilse would have men with elaborate tattoos murdered, their tattooed skin removed and subsequently dried, and finally stretched into lampshades. Daughtry claimed that, despite the inability of the prosecution to produce any of these lampshades during Ilse Koch's trial, he witnessed these lampshades with his own two eyes, and one guide even pointed out a human nipple on one of the shades.<sup>456</sup>

Pietra offered a similar narrative in his memoir. Like Daughtry, Pietra touring Buchenwald with the members of his squadron, were approached by a newly liberated political internee, Reinhold Schienhelm, who speaking in perfect English, offered to guide the men

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<sup>455</sup> Richard Daughtry, *Afternoon in Buchenwald*, transcribed by Henry F. Tonn (Wilmington, NC: 2009), 3, accession No. 2011.317.1.

<sup>456</sup> Daughtry, *Afternoon in Buchenwald*, 5.

through the camp. After a while, Schienhelm led the men towards the laboratory, where various scientific experiments took place. Upon seeing the chemically shrunken heads, and dried skins, their guide related the story of the wife of the camp Kommandant Koch, who he described to be “a creature even more brutal than he was.”<sup>457</sup> Consistent with other accounts, the guide goes on to describe Koch’s sadistic hobby of collecting tattoos. Koch was also said to attend physical examinations of the new arrivals of prisoners. She would take note of the numbers of those with exceptional tattoos, and then hand her list to the SS guard in charge. These men, at the request of Koch, were then given “murder priority.” Within a few short days, the tattoos had been turned into lampshades put on display in the Villa Koch. If ever the tattoo supply became too large, “choice specimens were preserved in jars and put on display in the laboratory,” until they were needed.<sup>458</sup>

Buchenwald received so much worldwide publicity, especially by American reporters, that the American legal system acted quickly to bring perpetrators of Nazi violence to justice. Having spent the past year of her life living in a modest apartment and out of the public eye, Koch had no idea that the American Intelligence agency had issued a confidential report on her crimes. When a former Buchenwald inmate recognized her, and reported her whereabouts to American Intelligence, the Americans began to further scrutinize her. Upon further investigation, an American soldier came to Koch to conduct a series of questionings. When asked if she had been at Buchenwald, she denied that she ever had.<sup>459</sup> Next, the American questioned her eldest son, and further investigation into Koch’s conduct, including a June 1945 raid of her home, led to the discovery of family photo albums which contained evidence of her

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<sup>457</sup> Lt. Col. Jack La Pietra, *I Saw Buchenwald* (Weimar, Germany: April 19, 1945), 8, RG-09.009, accession No. 1991.064.

<sup>458</sup> La pietra, *I Saw Buchenwald*, 8.

<sup>459</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 151.

time spent in Villa Koch at the camp, along with her Nazi party membership card.<sup>460</sup> The occupying American Army showed up at Koch's door and arrested her in "Violation of the Laws and Usages of War," amongst others charges, against prisoners of Buchenwald. The charges included counts of abuse, torture, murder, and having personal items made from the tattooed skin of murdered inmates.<sup>461</sup> The Buchenwald Trial, *United States v. Josias Waldeck-Pyrmont, et al.*, held at Dachau, began on 11 April 1947, exactly two years after Buchenwald's liberation. The only woman amongst the thirty-one defendants, Koch pled "not guilty" to all charges.<sup>462</sup>

Prior to the start of the trial, Koch had spent the previous two years incarcerated at an all women's camp at Fromann Kaserne, a former army barrack located in Ludwigsburg known as *Lager 77*.<sup>463</sup> During her time here, Ilse had become pregnant by former lover Fritz Schaeffer, who was imprisoned in Flossenberg. It was believed that Koch had come into contact with Schaeffer in the summer of 1946 in the prison kitchen, where she was said to have slipped him information on where she was staying. Whether true that Koch and Schaeffer engaged in sexual intercourse by means of Schaeffer digging a tunnel to reach her, Koch indicated in a letter to him, that the child was his.<sup>464</sup> No matter the father, the announcement that she was six months pregnant at the time of her trial would prove imperative to Koch's defense in cultivating the image that she was nothing more than a saintly mother who could not have participated in the crimes committed at Buchenwald, in any such capacity. Her pregnancy would certainly prove to influence the decision of the court, despite mounting evidence against her that made her more culpable than other defendants who received the death sentence. As a result, after four long

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>461</sup> Phillips, *Indictment against Koch, Ilse*, 55.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>463</sup> Whitlock, *Beasts of Buchenwald*, 189.

<sup>464</sup> *Conduct of Ilse Koch War Crimes Trial*, 1027.



months spent on trial, the Court Tribunal found Koch guilty of crimes against humanity and sentenced her to life imprisonment.

Following Koch's conviction, defense attorney Emanuel Lewis, convinced that the court had unfairly convicted Koch, petitioned for Clemency. Aside from finding what he believed were many irregularities surrounding the case, the most damning factor in Koch's case, according to Lewis, were the stories printed prior to the trial, that cultivated the image of Koch as a beast. He believed that these "sensationalist" stories greatly influenced the Court's decision. After Buchenwald was liberated, word of the atrocities spread to newspapers worldwide, many of which included mentions of Koch, the woman with lampshades made of skin.

In an article "MAKES GERMANS VIEW HORROR OF DEATH FACTORY," written by Sigrid Schultz, printed on 18 April, 1945 in the Chicago Daily Tribune, the author describes a decision made by American Lieutenant General Patton, in which citizens of Weimar were ordered to go to Buchenwald to witness the atrocities their people had committed against innocent men, women, and children. While walking through the decrepit camp, Major L.C. Schmuhl stopped the German civilians to show them pieces of "what seemed to be parchment," one that was decorated with a nude woman, and another that pictured Napoleon.<sup>465</sup> Yet, the article read, these were no ordinary pieces of parchment, but were actually human skins, a repulsive act which was carried out by camp commander Karl Koch's wife.<sup>466</sup> When a tattooed prisoner arrived at the camp, Koch (whom they do not mention by name) was asked if the design on the skin appealed to her, if it did the prisoner would be killed. The skin would then be tanned and "presented to Frau Koch, who made pocketbooks and lamp-shades of it."<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> Col AC F.M.S. Miller, "Buchenwald Concentration Camp: a Letter Home," In the *Lorenz C. Schmuhl Collection, 1937-1985*, (April 23, 1945), RG-10.137, accession No. 1995.A.1119

<sup>466</sup> See Image 1.

<sup>467</sup> Miller, "Buchenwald Concentration Camp."

In another article “Nazi Death Factory Shocks Germans on a Forced Tour” published in the *New York Times* on 18 April 1945, author Gene Currivan relates a similar report to Schultz. Currivan writes that the first things German visitors were forced to see were the displays of “parchment,” consisting of two, elaborately tattooed, large pieces of human skin. Here Currivan mentions the use of these skins by a German doctor writing a “treatise on tatooes,” and also the “28-year-old wife of the Standartenfuehrer.” This woman, (whom they also do not mention by name) described by surviving prisoners as an “energetic sportswoman” also had a “mania for unusual tatooes.” Whenever a prisoner with an interesting tattoo arrived at the camp she would excitedly claim that the “trophy would make a valuable addition to her collection.”<sup>468</sup> While Schultz recognizes the two “parchments” in his article, Currivan also makes mention of two large lamps, its shades made of human skin.<sup>469</sup>

These two initial articles drew a great deal of publicity to the lampshades made of human skin that were found at Buchenwald. As a result of increased interest and investigation, it became known that Koch was the woman supposedly responsible for these crimes. This, the defense attorney argued, coupled with the upcoming trial, cultivated an image of immediate culpability in the minds of those presiding over the court, which would only be exacerbated as the trial continued. In this appeal, Koch included her own plea for a sentence reduction in which she asked for “immediate release... because (1) my children are in most urgent need of me (2) there is no proof of whatsoever that I committed a punishable crime.”<sup>470</sup> Having leaned heavily on the roles of gender, Koch’s sentence was reduced to just four years on 16 September 1948 by

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<sup>468</sup> Gene Currivan, “Nazi Death Factory Shocks Germans on a Forced Tour,” *The New York Times*, 18 April 1945, pg. 8.

<sup>469</sup> Gene Currivan, “Nazi Death Factory Shocks Germans on a Forced Tour,” *The New York Times*, 18 April 1945, pg. 8.

<sup>470</sup> Whitlock, *Beasts of Buchenwald*, 247.

General Lucius Clay, on the grounds that there was “no convincing evidence that she selected inmates for extermination in order to secure tattooed skin.”<sup>471</sup>

This decision, met with mass outrage, called for further hearings by the United States Senate, known as the Ferguson Commission which in 1948 launched an investigation called the Conduct of Ilse Koch War Crimes Trial, following Koch’s reduction of her life sentence to just four years. Whereas many believed the laxity of her sentence was considered a crime against humanity, the purpose of these hearings were to re-examine the trial evidence in order to determine the validity of the accusations. Like many women who received lenient sentences, or none at all, it seemed that Koch, despite mounting evidence against her, was treated exceptionally based on her pregnancy during trial, and her claim that she was nothing more than a commandant’s wife and mother of three children, who was unaware of the events taking place inside of Buchenwald.

In the cross-examination of Koch’s prosecutor, William D. Denson, Mr. Rogers calls into question a letter Denson had written, in which he claims that “to cut Ilse Koch’s sentence to 4 years is to make mockery of the administration of justice.”<sup>472</sup> When asked if he could think of any reason at all, why her sentence would have been reduced, Denson explains that Koch, pregnant at the time, had testified at her own trial and used the opportunity to paint herself as a sainted mother. When further questioned by Ferguson about the nature of Koch’s initial sentencing and whether there was resentment amongst civilians because of her life imprisonment sentence, instead of the death penalty, Denson replied, “the people that I talked to expressed the feeling that she was probably sentenced to life instead of death because she was pregnant and a woman in addition.”<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> Ibid, 248.

<sup>472</sup> *Conduct of Ilse Koch War Crimes Trial*, 1026.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid, 1031.

Brigadier General Emil Charles Kiel, of the United States Air Force, served as a the Presiding Officer as the head of the court, and voted on the sentencing of the defendants in this case.<sup>474</sup> While being cross-examined for The Conduct of Ilse Koch War Crimes Trial, Senator Ferguson asks whether General Kiel remembered the Buchenwald case, in which the woman was tried as a defendant, to which he admits he recalled. When asked by Ferguson about whether there was a dispute within the court as to the female defendant's guilt, Kiel responded that he did not recall her particular case, as there were thirty-one defendants being tried simultaneously. Somewhat perplexed by this response, seeing that there was only one woman out of the thirty-one defendants, Ferguson pushes further posing the question "And does that not stand out, as to whether or not there was any conflict in the case?", to which Kiel simply replied "No, sir."<sup>475</sup>

Mr. Rogers continued with the questioning of Koch's case in particular. After uncovering that only a two-thirds vote was needed to give the death penalty, Mr. Rogers asks Kiel what the vote count of the court was concerning Koch. Kiel responded that he could not recall, and further, could not recall any dissent, or discussion in the decision to give Koch life imprisonment. When asked about the influence of her pregnancy in the verdict, as she was six months pregnant at her sentencing, Kiel claims that it was known she was pregnant, and it was discussed in the chamber. This, coupled with Koch's opportunity to walk across the court room in order take the stand—when according to Kiel, she was visibly pregnant and "appeared as a very sweet young mother,"—where she was given the opportunity to deny every indictment against her, was believed to have altered the view of some of the members of the court. This picture she painted of herself, despite the mounting evidence against her, and having been brought up on the same charges for mass murder alongside her male counterparts, according to General Kiel, "may have" influenced the courts decision to award the only female defendant,

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<sup>474</sup> Ibid, 1079.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid, 1080.

along with four others, a life sentence, while twenty-two others, with less evidence against them, received the death penalty, simply because she was a mother.<sup>476</sup>

In the end, the Commission found the reduction of Koch's sentencing was unjustified. While at Buchenwald the Commission, once again, received sufficient evidence that Koch "did wrongfully and unlawfully encourage, aid, abet, and participate in the operation of Concentration Camp Buchenwald."<sup>477</sup> Here, she participated in killing, beating, torturing and selecting, non-German nationals.<sup>478</sup>

Nevertheless the reduction of Koch's sentencing was granted and Koch was released from Landsberg prison on 17 October 1949. However, upon her release by Americans, Chancellor of West Germany, Konrad Adenauer was ready to re-arrest her. In avoiding the possibility of double jeopardy, Koch was to be tried for the alleged offenses not part of her conviction in the war crime trials at Dachau. This time, she would be tried for crimes committed against German nationals, specifically on three counts of assisted murder, one count of attempted murder, sixteen counts of inciting murder, and three counts of attempted murder.<sup>479</sup> Koch would spend thirteen months in prison before her trial in Augsburg began on 27 November 1950 under President of the Court Georg Maginot.<sup>480</sup>

After a little less than a month of proceedings, and witnesses taking the stand, accusing Koch of similar atrocities as in her previous trial, she cracked. While in Aichach prison, Koch began screaming, "I am guilty! I am a sinner!" amongst other babblings about heaven and hell, as she destroyed the contents of her cell. Yet this hysterical episode did not delay the course of the trial, and on 15 January 1951, Koch would receive the verdict. Although Maginot found no

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<sup>476</sup> Ibid, 1088-1090.

<sup>477</sup> Whitlock, *Beasts of Buchenwald*, 249.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid, 249.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid, 258.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid, 256.

direct evidence linking Koch to the deaths of tattooed inmates for the use of their skin in making lampshades and other household items, nevertheless, Koch was still found guilty. Despite her denials, Koch had successfully wielded “unusual influence over her husband” at Buchenwald, and was consequently charged, “Guilty of one count of incitement to murder, one count of incitement to attempted murder, five counts of incitement to severe physical mistreatment of prisoners, and two of physical mistreatments.”<sup>481</sup> Her punishment: life imprisonment subjected to hard labor in Aichach women’s prison.

On 2 September 1967, three weeks shy of her of sixty-first birthday, Ilse Koch would take her own life. To Uwe Köhler, the son she had given birth to just after the Dachau trial she left behind a short note, “I cannot do otherwise. Death is for me a liberation.” With that, Koch fashioned her bed sheet into a noose, and hung herself from her cell door latch.<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> Ibid, 258.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid, 260.

**Image 1:**

**This image from the Lorenz C. Schmuhl Papers, 1937-1985, RG-10.137, located at the USHMM is a photograph taken at Buchenwald. This image displays the human skins which were framed and used as artwork. Although many of the lampshades and framed skins were lost post-war, this image serves as evidence that these types of things did exist. The caption reads, "Samples of human organs used in research by German doctors. In addition to this assortment, I saw a number of samples of tanned skin which had elaborate tattooing. Some were made into lamp shades, woman's bags, and other trophies, or possibly souvenirs. Then there was the head of the Pole prisoner who had tried to escape. He had been caught, killed and his head cured in the same fashion used by the head hunters of the South Seas."**



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### Conclusion: Fleeing the East, The Final Retreat

“My [*sic*] wife, sir, wouldn’t hurt a fly.”<sup>483</sup>

The famous trials, which featured Oberheuser, Grese, and Koch, are what made spectacles of these “sadistic” female murders, solidifying the belief that most women were not involved in the Nazi terror regime, and that these few were the exception to the rule. Although they were brought to justice, there were actually many more just like them who got away. Hermine Braunsteiner-Ryan serves as an example as one of these women for which justice had to wait. In fact, though not tried for almost thirty years post-war, Braunsteiner-Ryan was actually one of the most notorious female camp guards to serve at Majdanek concentration camp.

Braunsteiner was born 16 July 1919 in Vienna, Austria, the youngest of seven to a Roman Catholic, working-class family. Braunsteiner’s father was a butcher who also worked as a coach driver in Vienna. Her mother was a laundress. She was educated in a *Volksschule*<sup>484</sup> until the age of fourteen, when she was forced to leave school in order to help support her family after her father succumbed to cancer.<sup>485</sup> The essence of an Aryan, the beautiful blond-haired, blue-eyed girl, while working in a munitions factory in Vienna, was encouraged to apply for the position of camp guard at Ravensbrück, which would offer her many great benefits not usually achieved by women of the time, one of which was a substantial increase in pay. Having been accepted for the job, Braunsteiner entered into the selective training program at Ravensbrück in 1939 at the age of 20.<sup>486</sup> From Ravensbrück, Braunsteiner was sent to Majdanek in October 1942, under the command of Ilse Koch’s husband, Karl Koch. Here she served for fifteen

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<sup>483</sup> Russell Ryan, husband of Hermine Braunsteiner-Ryan in NYT article, Joseph Lelyveld, “Former Nazi Camp Guard is Now a Housewife in Queens,” *New York Times*, (July 14, 1964), 10.

<sup>484</sup> A compulsory education all people of the *Volk* are required to obtain.

<sup>485</sup> Lynn Wolff, “*The Mare of Majdanek*” *Female Concentration Camp Guards in History and Fiction* (Senior Honors Thesis: Dept. of Germany, University of Wisconsin, 2001), 31-32.

<sup>486</sup> Wolff, “*The Mare of Majdanek*,” 33.



months as a *Rapportführerin*<sup>487</sup> before returning to Ravensbrück where she was promoted to *Oberaufseherin*,<sup>488</sup> and was given the “opportunity” to help supervise up to eleven thousand women.<sup>489</sup>

At Majdanek, Braunsteiner aided in selections, as well as was known for whipping women who did not sew the numbers correctly into prisoners’ uniforms. She was also known to shoot prisoners, murder infants and children, and often used her boots to stomp prisoners to death, “earning” her the nickname *Kobyla*, or “the Stomping Mare.”<sup>490</sup> During her time at Majdanek, Braunsteiner received the *Kriegsverdienstkreuz II Klassen*, or the War Merit Cross, in 1943 for her “service” and “dedication” to the Reich.<sup>491</sup> The specifics of her cruelties would not be known until much later.

The Allied bombers and the Soviets on the Eastern Front began closing in in late 1943, and mass extermination began to pick up speed. With the Anglo-American Invasion on 6 June 1944,<sup>492</sup> and the Russian summer offenses beginning 10 June 1944, the war came home to Germany.<sup>493</sup> In December 1944, Hitler launched his last desperate gamble on the Western front. Having suffered around 120,000 casualties, 600 tanks and assault guns, 1,600 planes and 6,000 motor cars, the Germans had failed in their last major offensive in the West, dooming their chances for the German armies in the East.<sup>494</sup> By Christmas Eve, the Russians surrounded Budapest. By 27 January 1945, the “Russian tidal wave” their greatest offensive of the war, had sent Germany spiraling into complete disaster.<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> Female “Report Leaders” who were in charge of conducting *Appelle* or roll-call of prisoners.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>489</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 92.

<sup>490</sup> Wolff, “*The Mare of Majdanek*,” 34.

<sup>491</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 92.

<sup>492</sup> William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 1036.

<sup>493</sup> Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, 1085.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid*, 1095.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid*, 1097.

The complete breakthrough of the Russian Army on the Eastern Front on the 27 January 1945, caused the *SS* to fear for their lives at the hands of the Red Army, and they sought to destroy all evidence of mass death that has taken place. By order of Himmler, they began blowing up the gas chambers and crematoria, and started executing as many prisoners as possible.<sup>496</sup> Braunsteiner, having been sent back to Ravensbrück in the spring of 1944, remained there until the Soviet advance, when she, alongside her male counterparts, fled the concentration camps, leaving prisoners to die. She fled to Vienna and was captured towards the end of 1945 by Allied forces.

The days and weeks immediately following the end of the war were crucial for Nazi senior officials, and perpetrators of the genocide, including Braunsteiner-Ryan. While some, such as Hitler, Himmler, and Goebbels, cheated justice through suicide, many more had received from the RSHA (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, or the Reich Main Security Office) false personal documents disguising themselves under new aliases.<sup>497</sup> While being held in British war camps, many *SS* members who had acquired false papers prior to their imprisonment, were able to present themselves as ordinary soldiers.<sup>498</sup> Many also fled through various European avenues in order to run from the crimes they committed. Women were also able to hide in plain sight. Not only could women easily change their last names through marriage, or revert to their maiden name, but most importantly, the viciousness associated with the Soviet Army, and the lack of German men left to defend them, cultivated German myths of female innocence. Women were vulnerable during their retreat from the East and borderlands, with lack of supplies and

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<sup>496</sup> Donald McKale, *Nazis after Hitler: How Perpetrators of the Holocaust Cheated Justice and Truth*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.), 34.

<sup>497</sup> Gerald Steinacher, *Nazis on the Run: How Hitler's Henchmen Fled Justice*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xv.

<sup>498</sup> Steinacher, *Nazis on the Run*, 9.

accompanied by small children, were especially susceptible to violence and rape by the Red Army.<sup>499</sup>

Although initially Braunsteiner was able to escape, she was eventually discovered in late 1945 in Austria and was subsequently interned by the British as a prisoner of war until 1949. She was subsequently released to Austrian authorities and tried by the Austrian courts solely for her crimes at Ravensbrück, which were said to have included infanticide.<sup>500</sup> Although she received a sentence of three years in prison, she was released in 1950 and was assured by the Austrian government that she would not be tried for war crimes (in Austria) for the remainder of her life.<sup>501</sup> Upon her release, Braunsteiner met American Russell Ryan. They fell in love, moved to Canada and married in October 1958, where she officially became Mrs. Hermine Ryan. Less than a year later, the couple, using falsified displaced persons documents for Braunsteiner, moved to New York and she applied for American citizenship in 1962. During the application process, however, Braunsteiner-Ryan falsely swore that she had never been convicted of a crime, and as a result, was granted American citizenship in January 1963. It seemed that Braunsteiner-Ryan had gotten away with murder.<sup>502</sup>

Simon Wiesenthal,<sup>503</sup> regarded as the infamous “Nazi Hunter,” was enjoying lunch in Israel one afternoon when he was approached by survivors of Majdanek. When queried about the fate of the “Stomping Mare,” Wiesenthal decided to look into Braunsteiner’s case. Wiesenthal discovered that Hermine Braunsteiner, now Hermine Ryan, was living as a loving

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<sup>499</sup> Lower, *Hitler’s Furies*, 148

<sup>500</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 93.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>503</sup> Holocaust survivor, played a key role in tracking down Adolf Eichmann in South America, who was subsequently tried in the Eichmann Trials in the early 1960s.

housewife in Queens, New York. He sent this information to the *New York Times*, and on 14 July 1964, Joseph Lelyveld uncovered the whereabouts of the infamous woman.<sup>504</sup>

Having been assured by the Austrian authorities that she would never be charged again, when interviewed by Lelyveld she openly admitted that she had worked at Majdanek, which claimed the lives of approximately 235,000.<sup>505</sup> However, Braunsteiner-Ryan said, she “had never been more than a guard and had no authority whatever,”<sup>506</sup> and that the extent of her work could be equated to what American prison guards were tasked with doing in the 1960s. Further, she minimized her involvement by stating that during her “year at Majdanek, eight months of it [were spent] in the camp infirmary with a serious illness.”<sup>507</sup> While talking with her husband, Lelyveld reported that Mr. Ryan had not known about his wife’s prison sentence, nor her position as a camp guard, and went further to claim, “She was not in charge of anything. Absolutely not... My[sic] wife, sir, wouldn’t hurt a fly.”<sup>508</sup> At the conclusion of the interview, Lelyveld described Mrs. Ryan as being in somewhat of a state of terror as she broke into tears and cried “This is the end... this is the end of everything for me.”<sup>509</sup>

Despite validation of her husband’s statement about her innocence from neighbors who were in disbelief of the claims being made against their friend Braunsteiner-Ryan, due to large public outrage over her crimes, in 1971 the American Government began proceeding with the process to revoke her citizenship, and on 1 May 1973, she became the first American to be

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<sup>504</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>505</sup> “Majdanek: Inside Majdanek,” *The Jewish Virtual Library* (2015), <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Majdanek1.html>

<sup>506</sup> Joseph Lelyveld, “Former Nazi Camp Guard is Now a Housewife in Queens,” *New York Times*, (July 14, 1964), 10.

<sup>507</sup> Lelyveld, “Former Nazi Now Housewife,” 10.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid, 10.

extradited from the United States to West Germany for crimes committed while working in Nazi concentration camps.<sup>510</sup>

The Majdanek War Crimes Trials in Düsseldorf, West Germany, began in November 1975, where she was tried alongside sixteen other defendants, including eight other *Aufseherinnen*.<sup>511</sup> In her trial, various witnesses, including the testimony of Rachel Nurman, claimed that Braunsteiner-Ryan not only wore boots with iron tips and used to kick prisoners, often stomping them to death, but also that she was in fact, essential in aiding with the selection process,

I remind myself that minute what she did with these children, how she's screaming to them "Hup, Hup, schneller!" she yelling to them. "Hup, hup, schneller!" like it was a joke to her. So many lives she destroyed, and here she yells to them, "Hup, hup, schneller! Schneller!" She wanted faster to go with them to the gas chambers.<sup>512</sup>

While testifying at the trial, Nurman went further to describe that she approached the bench where Braunsteiner-Ryan was seated, and demanded she answer how she could sleep at night, having killed so many innocent children, to which Braunsteiner-Ryan did not say a word.<sup>513</sup>

After five years on trial, Braunsteiner-Ryan was convicted of "collaborative murder in 1,181 cases and being an accessory to murder in 705 cases,"<sup>514</sup> and in 1981 was sentenced to life imprisonment. However, Braunsteiner, once again caught a "lucky-break" when, due to illness attributed to her diabetes, she was given a compassionate release in 1996. Once again freed from

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<sup>510</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 94.

<sup>511</sup> Simon Wiesenthal Archives, "Some Significant Cases: Hermine Braunsteiner." [http://www.simon-wiesenthal-archiv.at/02\\_dokuzentrum/02\\_faelle/e05\\_braunsteiner.html](http://www.simon-wiesenthal-archiv.at/02_dokuzentrum/02_faelle/e05_braunsteiner.html). (1 August 2010)

<sup>512</sup> Nurman, Rachel (Interviewee) and Ellis, Carolyn (Interviewer), "Rachel Nurman oral history interview by Carolyn Ellis, July 5, 2010" (2010)., *Digital Collection - Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center Oral Histories*, [http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud\\_oh/175](http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/hgstud_oh/175).

<sup>513</sup> Nurman, "Rachel Nurman oral history."

<sup>514</sup> Simon Wiesenthal Archives, "Some Significant Cases."

jail, Braunsteiner-Ryan was able to escape her past and died a free woman in 1999, at the age of eighty.<sup>515</sup> Hermine Braunsteiner-Ryan was “the one that got away.”

Oberheuser, Grese, Koch and Braunsteiner are the outliers, although there were thousands more women who would disappear without justice, despite the study published by Ruth Kempner in July 1944. We know about these women, and consequently about the possible existence of thousands more just like them, because they were captured and tried in some of the most infamous court cases. While many survivors might not have recalled the names of all of their punishers, these were women who were given nicknames that made them stand out in the minds of the innocent. But these four women are only unique in the fact that they were captured by the victors in the war, not for the atrocities they committed. These were truly “ordinary women” of the Nazi regime.

Of the opinion that the war would not be won by the Germans, and with most post-war policies directed towards eliminating top Nazi officials, Kempner felt it imperative to make known the women who would also pose a threat to German peace. According to her estimates, of the thirty-six million German women, nineteen million of which were believed to be Nazis or had been indoctrinated with Nazi ideology.<sup>516</sup> While abolishing male Nazi organizations, Kempner also called for the closure of the Labor Service for Girls, which in its present National Socialist organization as a highly militarized institution, was detrimental to any form of peaceful development.<sup>517</sup> She further called for all female labor camps and training schools to be abolished as well, which, as breeding grounds for the cultivation of National Socialism would be dangerous to the public security of post-War Germany.<sup>518</sup> Finally, and most importantly, Kempner called for the female Officers “many of whom [were] high ranking members of the NS

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<sup>515</sup> Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 96.

<sup>516</sup> Kempner, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 62.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid*, 78.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid*, 78.

Party, [to] be dismissed at once and interned for reasons of public safety.”<sup>519</sup> However, her warnings went largely unheeded.

Approximately twenty thousand women were arrested in East Germany and transferred to Russia for internment; however, most were granted pardons in 1950 and returned to Germany. Because many women were not in “official” positions of leadership, simply because they were female, most never sat in the docks alongside their male counterparts, and a great deal of available resources were dedicated to tracking down top Nazi officials.<sup>520</sup> Despite Kempner’s detailed work, illusions about the behavior of women in Nazi Germany persisted, and lack of clear motive deterred courts from pursuing justice for their victims.

Of those who were tracked down and questioned, women intentionally deceived their interrogators, claiming, as Oberheuser, Grese, and Koch tried to do, that they “could not recall,” and painted themselves in such a way that made them likeable and be seen also as victims of the patriarchy, rather than perpetrators of the genocide. They emphasized their youthful and feeble minds, “forced” to fulfill their duties, either to the Reich, or to their husbands and or lovers.<sup>521</sup> Further, women were aware of the advantage they had over their male counterparts as the male prosecutors initially judged them based on their emotional responses. If women displayed emotions that showed remorse, sensitivity, empathy, humanity, or other qualities consistent with the “nature” of feminine instincts, most were given only minimal sentences, making women a small minority of female defendants in many of the post-war trials.<sup>522</sup> Whereas men, based on their gender, were unable to escape prosecution for the crimes they committed, despite various testimonies that claimed women were worse than men in the concentration camp setting, gender bias, and the physical appearance of women, easily succeeded in entering the minds of the judges

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<sup>519</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>520</sup> Lower, *Hitler’s Furies*, 150.

<sup>521</sup> Bayzler, *Forgotten Trials*, 155.

<sup>522</sup> Lower, *Hitler’s Furies*, 169.

and juries throughout the entire judicial process, allowing the thousands of women responsible in the genocide of millions “unworthy of life,” to escape justice.<sup>523</sup>

Historical scholarship has only recently begun to examine the dimensions of the complex ways in which women were involved in the Third Reich. Needless to say, more work needs to be done to further the scope of historical research. In order to further explain the roles of women, trial testimonies need to be revisited, and oral testimonies need to be carefully studied in order to extract even the slightest mentions of survivors claiming women’s culpability. With those pieces of information, more research must be conducted to connect more Nazi women to the roles they played in the Nazi Final Solution.

It is also important to examine the roles of women who were not complicit in the regime, and rather helped to bring down the Nazis. Whereas in the past, men have published many of the leading memoirs on the Nazi regime, female survivors also need to be recognized in order to tell their side of the story. The recent addition of Sarti’s and Lower’s work in Holocaust studies are also imperative to the history of gender studies. In order to fully understand the Third Reich and Nazi atrocities, the other half of society needs to be acknowledged and recognized for their participation. If not for the past, then in order to stop future genocides from occurring, historians and governments alike, need to become aware of the variety of roles women are capable of playing, not only as the mothers who indoctrinate children with dangerous ideology, but as their positions in powerful and destructive roles as well. While Oberheuser, Grese, Koch and Braunsteiner stand out in post-war memory, these “ordinary women” were not alone in their indoctrination or participation in Hitler’s Germany.

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<sup>523</sup> Ibid, 174.



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