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CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE
RAPE AS A WEAPON OF WAR: THE DEMYSTIFICATION OF THE GERMAN
WEHRMACHT DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

SUBMITTED TO
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AND
DEAN GREGORY HESS
BY
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Introduction

Angry guttural chants resound on a street crowded with people. Flags sway high above a sea of angry heads, boldly announcing the presence of the extreme right-wing National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD). Brief tussles break out between the marching protestors and those who line the streets to watch them. Police thrust themselves into the crowd to control the increasingly hostile environment, only to meet such violent resistance that they have to fight to get out of the crowd unharmed. Nationalistic songs blare in the background, reiterating the beliefs of the group that has gathered to protest. This demonstration is not meant to be a comment on any recent legislation passed by the government as one would naturally think, but rather it is a statement against the opening of an educational exhibit.

In 1995, the Hamburg Institute for Social Research (*Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung*) opened an exhibition entitled *War of Annihilation. Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941 to 1944 (Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944)*. The exhibit contained recently unearthed photographs from the private albums of German soldiers taken during WWII. They altered many German perceptions of the Wehrmacht.¹ Many believed that the Schutzstaffel (SS) was responsible for the genocide that occurred during the Second World War and that the German Armed Forces was entirely separate from these atrocities. The *Crimes of the Wehrmacht*, however, asserted that the German Army was indeed involved in carrying out a war of annihilation waged

¹ The Wehrmacht, also known as the German Armed Forces, consisted of the army land forces (*Heer*), navy (*Kriegsmarine*), and air force (*Luftwaffe*).

against Jewish and civilian populations and prisoners of war. The implication of this controversial exhibit caused an uproar among the German public, many questioning its legitimacy.

Some thought the historical display was an insult to the memory of the soldiers who fought so bravely for their country. “My father was not a criminal, he was a decent human being who taught me everything I know,” one woman states; “he was just carrying out orders and now he is slandered for murder.”² Others try to highlight the falsehood of the exhibit. An ex-infantry soldier insists that prisoners of war were never shot and that “the basic foot soldier had nothing to do with this crime in the least.”³ He stated that the information presented in the exhibit was fabricated to ruin the German Army’s name, claiming that the organizer of the exhibit was a former communist who was pursuing his own agenda. This thought was reiterated by the large presence of NPD members. Many refused to comment, but one man elucidated, “I don’t understand why these things are being rehashed fifty years later...there has to be an end somewhere.”⁴ This desired end, however, was nowhere in sight.

Despite the large number of people that decried the presentation, there were also many who defended it. Many were relieved that the record was being set straight. Rudolf Moussner, who served on the Eastern Front, stated emphatically, “it is all true. I was there from the first day to the last. I’m glad about this exhibit. The truth should not

² *The Unknown Soldier (Der Unbekannte Soldat)*. Dir. Michael Verhoeven. Perf. Hannes Heer, Dieter Pohl, Myriam Y Arani. (First Run Features and Kinowelt Filmverleih, 2007. DVD. *Netflix*. ARTE and Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR), 7 Sept. 2007. Web. 29 Jan. 2013.)

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

be forgotten.”⁵ Other former members of the Wehrmacht similarly echoed that “horrible things happened in the Wehrmacht and whoever denies that is unreasonable.”⁶ Many believed that knowing the truth of the Second World War, however uncomfortable it was to hear, was vital to mending the wounds caused by it.

As a result of the extreme reactions to the *Crimes of the Wehrmacht* exhibit, the head of the Hamburg Institute for Social Research closed it in 2000 for a committee of historians to review its content for accuracy. The group found that although the historical information had some inaccuracies and made sweeping generalized statements, the claims of forgery were not justified. The committee’s report stated that the “fundamental statements made in the exhibition about the Wehrmacht and the war in ‘the East’ are correct” and that the army played a supporting and also a leading role in the genocide against the Jewish population, the crimes against Soviet POWs, and the mistreatment of the civilian population.⁷ The committee recommended that the exhibit be reopened but with revisions that allowed the public to form its own perception about the information presented.

Although the Nuremberg trials essentially acquitted the Wehrmacht for being directly involved in crimes against humanity, only guilty of lesser war crimes, the reality of the past is much different. Omer Bartov, a leading historian of the Wehrmacht, found the German Army was not an apolitical organization. There were not merely a few “bad

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Michael Wildt, Ulrike Jureit, and Birgit Otte, "Crimes of the German Wehrmacht: Dimensions of a War of Annihilation 1941-1944" Trans. Paula Bradish (*Hamburger Institut Fur Sozialforschung Edition* (2004): *Hamburger Edition HIS Verlagsges.* Hamburger Edition, 2004. Web. 28 Jan. 2013).

apples” that committed lesser crimes on occasion as was once commonly thought.⁸ The photographs in the exhibit prove this; they serve as documentation that these deeds occurred. These pictures depict various atrocities, many with soldiers standing next to corpses, suffering people, and other horrific scenes. Many of these men smile proudly and pose for the camera as if they were being photographed under completely normal circumstances. The soldiers’ nonchalant attitude reveals that they were not forced to commit these crimes but acted on their own free will, otherwise they would not have been willing to document them. Many exhibit visitors were unprepared to face this reality. This highlights the importance of exploring the crimes committed by the formerly honorable “untarnished shield” that existed during Nazi Germany.

The Wehrmacht was Germany’s shining jewel during the Second World War. The public perceived it to be an entity separate from the other military forces (such as the SS) that were known to have executed unethical Nazi political directives. At the start of the war, the Wehrmacht was legendary for carrying out its immensely effective blitzkrieg tactics. The honor bestowed on this force made it the embodiment of German discipline and superiority. The perceived behavior of these men was one of the few aspects of the war that many Germans felt proud of, especially when facing the aftermath of genocide and crimes against humanity.

The *Crimes of the Wehrmacht* rudely disturbed the majority of the German people’s perception of their most esteemed army. As one of the last vestiges that restored faith in its people, the Wehrmacht lost its prestige in light of the exhibit. This demystification caused a strong reaction by the public, who insisted that its information

⁸ Omer Bartov, *Germany's War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), xiii.

was false and transformed honorable men into murderers. The newly discovered photographs proved that the majority of the Wehrmacht led an existence that was completely different than previously thought. The German Armed Forces participated in the “racial war” implemented by the Nazi Party in the East, which became increasingly brutalized as time passed.

Historian Dieter Pohl explains that German Armed Forces’ sovereignty allowed troops occupying a certain area to establish their own military administration, which gave immense power to individual soldiers to carry out directives.⁹ In order to make room for German colonists to set up their Nazi utopia, twenty to thirty million Soviet citizens had to disappear. At the same time, provisions were needed to maintain the army, so necessary supplies were seized from Soviet civilians. Thus, the starvation and elimination of millions was accepted as necessary. This concept was applied especially to Jewish people, prisoners of war, and civilians. Members of the Jewish faith were separated and often killed immediately with the introduction of troops into a given area.¹⁰ Mass shootings were the most common form of elimination. Prisoners of war who were not fit to perform physical labor were often killed, either through starvation or exposure to the elements.¹¹ Civilians were left to fend for themselves after the army had destroyed their homes and farms, leaving little to survive on. It was during this experience that the Wehrmacht raped and sexually abused women. This thesis seeks to expand upon this particular topic.

⁹ Verhoeven, *The Unknown Soldier*.

¹⁰ Bartov, *Germany’s War and the Holocaust*, xiv.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

The *Crimes of the Wehrmacht* exhibition poses relevant questions relating to German actions in the East, especially regarding sexual relations during this time period. With the true actions and purpose of the German Armed Forces recently unearthed, an unprecedented number of Germans grew disillusioned by this organization. It is therefore pertinent to examine what crimes this organization committed and how it came to carry them out. The Wehrmacht's treatment of women and how these interactions differed between various ethnicities is especially important. Delving further into this topic, one can see how the idea of *Rassenschande* (the illegal act of sexual relations between persons of "Aryan" and "non-Aryan" blood) in particular affected these relations with civilian women. Exploring the meaning of rape and sexual intercourse elucidates how it was utilized to meet both the personal needs of a soldier as well as its use as a tool for warfare. The difference between consensual and non-consensual sex during the Second World War for the Wehrmacht provides a comparison of the treatment between women who were deemed socially acceptable and those who were portrayed as unworthy and undesirable. One can apply this study of sexual relations to a larger global context across time.

Although I have tried my best to base this thesis off of a foundation of rich scholarship, this particular historical subject has proved difficult to research. The topic of sexual relations during WWII has only recently started to gain attention. It is still a young field and there is much to be uncovered. Due to various reasons, perhaps the combination of social taboos forbidding discussion of sexual intercourse and rape or the dismissal of rape as a side effect of war, locating documentation of specific women's experiences at the eastern warfront was difficult for me. With the help of the USC Shoah

Foundation, however, I was able to gain some insight on the topic while researching Jewish women's sexual experiences in a concentration camp setting. On a personal level, my unfamiliarity with the German language has limited my ability to explore texts that would have otherwise provided more insight into the topic. Despite these limitations, I believe that I have gathered extensive information with the materials available to me to compile a narrative of Nazi sexual relations in a wartime setting. I highlight the importance of this topic, offer my interpretation as to why certain events happened, and comment on the ramifications of Nazi brutality in a post-war setting.

My first chapter explores the Nazi Party's conflicting and evolutionary views on sexual intercourse. I compare the regime's conservative policies that existed before the start of the war with the drastic alteration of these policies with the commencement of battle. Nazi policies pre-1939 were aimed at preserving "pure blood" and effectively transformed women into objects useful only for procreation. These rules eventually changed to glorify soldiers at the front, who "deserved" to relieve their sexual urges after enduring the harsh realities of war. In addition to comparing the differences between relations on the Eastern and Western Theaters of war, I also discuss the military implementation of military and camp brothels to provide incentive to soldiers and workers.

The second chapter explores the workings of the German Wehrmacht and its breakdown of morality. This high-functioning and organized group was one of the most disciplined and effective armies at the start of the war. As the progenitor blitzkrieg warfare, the army inspired fear in the enemy merely at the sound of approaching German aircrafts. By the end of the war, however, this powerful fighting machine had broken

down. Among the factors that contributed to its fatal destruction were environment, ideology, and the organization of the Wehrmacht itself. As a result of this harsh existence, the soldiers came to blame the enemy for their misfortunes and became increasingly hostile towards civilians, which manifested itself through sexual violence.

The final chapter delves into the reverberations of entering into a “race war” where one fights not just for victory but also to secure racial domination. After seeing firsthand the destruction of its people, the Soviet Union began its occupation of Germany with a fiery vengeance. Between the years 1945 and 1947, the Red Army brutally raped the women of Germany. These actions were caused by a variety of factors such as propaganda messages from the home front, alcohol, and a deep-seated desire for revenge. Although the German people formulated ways to respond to the sexual violence that was plaguing their cities, they could not stop the will of Soviet soldiers entirely. The tool that had been used by the Wehrmacht to carry out destruction in the East was implemented in the same manner against them.

This thesis serves to comment on the evolution and use of sexual violence by the Nazis during the Second World War. It is meant to complement and supplement existing scholarship on the subject as well as to bring the topic of rape as a weapon of war to the attention of academia. War, genocide, and sexual violence share an unbreakable connection. In understanding the experience of perpetrators, victims, and the institutions that created these roles, we can learn how to heal the wounds caused by years of violence.

Chapter 1

Sex and the Nazis

Oscar Wilde cunningly remarked, “everything in the world is about sex except sex. Sex is about power.”¹ Nazi leaders were able to harness the power accorded to sexuality and use it to their advantage. The Nazi government offered conflicting views on the morality of sexual relations at various times in order to pursue its political goals. In the early stages of its rule, members of the NSDAP established laws that were meant to improve morality after the end of the wild Weimar period. This created an environment that glorified masculinity and suppressed femininity. Women were restricted to the domestic sphere and were portrayed as objects useful only for the purpose of procreation. In restricting female involvement in society, the Nazis fostered a culture of misogyny that continued at the fronts of war. The advent of battle brought changes in Nazi rules and values. Initially concerned with restricting relations between those of ‘pure’ heritage and ‘undesirable’ blood, the German government changed regulations to increase reproduction rates at home and encourage soldiers to seek solace in sexual intimacy abroad. Thus, by the advent of war, pre- and extra-marital heterosexuality was encouraged by the German government. The Nazi regime was rife with contradiction; its views on sexual relations were conflicting and evolutionary, and many of these changes took place with the start of the Second World War.

The Rules of the Early Reich

¹ Oscar Wilde, *Oscar Wilde: The Complete Works* (London: Collector's Library Editions, 2011), 54.

With the seizure of power in 1933, the Nazis were able to take action to rectify the decline in social virtue that had occurred during the Weimar Republic. A series of laws were introduced in an attempt to restore the nation to morality. In February 1933, the Prussian Ministry of the Interior closed short-time hotels and other places where prostitution was known to occur.² In March of the same year, a decree was issued for the limitation of nudism and obscene performances, writings, and illustrations.³ These directives were not implemented for the well-being of the country so much as they were for controlling society and furthering Nazi goals of limiting the procreation of “undesirables” and advocating the reproduction of “Aryans”. This is especially latent in the racial crime of *Rassenschande* in which a person of “Aryan” descent could not become sexually involved with a “non-Aryan,” and especially those of “Jewish, Negro, Mongol, or Eastern European blood.”⁴ This was later outlined in the 1935 Nuremberg Law for the Procreation of German Blood and German Honor. Continuing this trend was the law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring (March 1933) and the law for the Procreation for the Hereditary Health of the German People (October 1935).⁵ Under the guise of protecting the health of the nation, the Nazi Party took control of sexuality and molded it to fit its political agenda.

Marriage was another method of control exercised over the general population. Messages fabricated by the government were aimed to train young people the importance

² Hans Peter Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1973), 5.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, eds., *Rape: Weapon of War and Genocide* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2012), 15.

⁵ Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany*, 5.

of selective breeding. The NSDAP's Racial Policy Bureau published ten rules to follow when choosing a suitable partner to wed:

1. Remember that you are German!
2. Remain pure in mind and spirit!
3. Keep your body pure!
4. If hereditarily fit, do not remain single!
5. Marry only for love!
6. Being a German, only choose a spouse of similar or related blood!
7. When choosing your spouse, inquire into his or her forebears!
8. Health is essential to outward beauty as well!
9. Seek a companion in marriage, not a playmate!
10. Hope for as many children as possible!⁶

Through these directives, the goals of Nazi propaganda become clear. The ideal German would honor his or her body and heritage by marrying and producing numerous children with a spouse of the proper lineage. Of the ten messages, only two relate to the couple's compatibility while the rest focus on ethnicity and procreation. Through this we come to understand the immense emphasis placed on blood and pursuing a "proper" marriage in the early stages of the Third Reich. Adolf Hitler himself advised Germans to "take into account the ancestry of the individual to be married, not only of his or her physical attributes. On the whole, good breeding is the best guarantee of good offspring."⁷ The institution of marriage served as a means for the Nazi government to control sexuality.

Various additional policies further limited civilian control over their own bodies and sexual lives. In 1941, Heinrich Himmler banned all forms of birth control except for condoms, which were useful in "protecting men and soldiers" from sexual disease on the front.⁸ Contraception was portrayed as a "rape on nature" that "betrayed the soul" of

⁶ Ibid., 194.

⁷ Ibid., 24.

⁸ Matthew Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich* (London: Arnold, 2003), 156.

every woman.⁹ The sexism that accompanies these statements is important to understanding the role of women in Nazi society. In taking away the basic rights of women, Nazi leaders condemned them to a place of little importance. Women were a means to an end; they were an object that could serve one purpose (procreation) and little more. Female rights were further reduced with the ban of abortion and the threat of harsh punishment on the doctors who performed these procedures.¹⁰ The Reich's harsh directives in the early years of its rule may have been advertised as a method of "cleaning up society," but in reality they turned out to be early signs of an oppressive government that limited the rights of its women.

The Ideal Woman

The ideal German woman in Nazi society was allowed only a very specific niche to fill. She was expected to be a caring mother and a loyal comrade with a strong sense of moral obligation. Allowed only the domestic sphere, German women were denied entry into the workforce in favor of fulfilling the role that the Reich defined for them. Through women's restricted place in German society, we can begin to understand how they were dehumanized and objectified. The treatment of the "Aryan" woman in Nazi society serves to enlighten us as to the treatment of this sex during the Second World War. An "Aryan" woman respected for fulfilling her moral and procreative obligation to society was still restricted and portrayed as a tool used only to further her race.

The German mother was a valuable asset in the eyes of Nazi leaders. She was a commodity that held the promise of the next generation in her womb. One Nazi historian

⁹ Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany*, 25.

¹⁰ Martin Kitchen, *A History of Modern Germany, 1800-2000* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 288.

quipped, “the soil provides the food, the woman supplies the population, and the man makes the action.”¹¹ It becomes clear through this quote that women were seen as important, but only a tool to further the goals of those who had the real power: men. Motherhood ceased to become a private affair and was thought of as a public service that helped improve the “racial stock.”¹² Alfred Rosenberg, the Leader of the Foreign Policy Office, even went so far as to say that the childless woman was not a “fully paid-up” member of the nation.¹³ Thus, barren women were blamed and made to feel guilty for their decision not to have children. Since the only profitable contribution she could make to her country was to make a child, this type of woman was made to feel worthless in every other aspect. Those who did fulfill their duty, however, were made into national heroes. Mothers that produced a certain number of children were awarded medals: bronze for five, silver for six, and gold for seven.¹⁴ Members of the Hitler Youth were required to stop and salute these honored women.¹⁵ Mothers’ contributions were just as important as those soldiers fighting at the front.

These dutiful women were made to be loyal comrade-at-arms and fellow fighters holding down the home front. At a 1939 Party rally, Hitler stated:

“What a man sacrifices in his nation’s struggle, woman sacrifices in the struggle to preserve that nation on the individual plane...woman contributes ever-patient devotion, suffering, and endurance. Every child she brings into the world is a battle which she wages for the survival or extinction of her people.”¹⁶

¹¹ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 178.

¹² Kitchen, *A History of Modern Germany*, 288.

¹³ Alfred Rosenberg, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century: An Evaluation of the Spiritual-Intellectual Confrontations of Our Age* (London: Invictus Books, 2011), 158.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 170.

¹⁶ Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany*, 56.

The beginning of this quote puts women on an equal field to men, claiming that all the work they did at home was just as important as fighting actual battles. The last sentence, however, reveals that women were truly considered the second sex. The Führer went on to say that the German woman was the “helper of the man and thus his truest friend while the man was also at all times the protector of his spouse.”¹⁷ Even when trying to illustrate the importance that women play in society, Hitler gave the ultimate glory to his men. Wives were “helpers,” not unlike a faithful dog, ever trailing in the shadow of its master. In attempting to glorify the female role in Nazi society, leaders resorted to highlighting the importance of the opposite sex, placing women forever in another category below that of the vibrant man. This reveals the misogynistic climate that existed during the prewar years, which would continue (and worsen) upon the outbreak of war.

The controlling Nazi culture also took to policing women’s morality. Women were made out to be “high quality vehicles and guardians of moral conduct.”¹⁸ Thus, half of the German population was a tool that was charged with monitoring national behavior. They were meant to encourage the happiness of all while giving up personal private happiness for the benefit of the country.¹⁹ This tied in well with government-dictated “womanly” virtues and the idea of self-surrender, which was feminized and consequently stigmatized as a result. There was also much emphasis placed on women to remain chaste and not engage in sexual pursuits with anyone other than her husband. In his 1927 best-selling book, *Hygiene des Geschlechtslebens* (Sexual Hygiene), Professor Max von Gruber stated that “we must esteem and cherish feminine chastity as the supreme national

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 25.

¹⁹ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 179.

asset, for in the chastity of women lies our one sure guarantee that we shall truly be the fathers of our children, that we toil and labor for our own blood.”²⁰ Given the immense importance and infatuation with the preservation of pure blood in Germany, the honor of women was a leading desirable quality. As one can see, von Gruber was not as concerned about the chastity of men, even though this group had just as much of an opportunity to waste their own efforts on “undesirable” specimens. Chastity remained a feminine value that only applied to women, placing additional confines on this group in Nazi society. One National Socialist wrote that “man owes woman purity of soul; woman owes man purity of body.”²¹ Again we see the same restrictive values. Here it is clear that women were compelled to be chaste, but men were not held to the same standard. In fact, it is decidedly unclear as to what exactly the “purity of soul” entailed, leaving much up to interpretation unlike the clear-cut obligation of his mate.

As a result of these government-fabricated ideals, society adjusted to help encourage women to conform to the prescribed image of her ideal. A quota for female university students was placed on institutions, which would not allow the female population to compose more than 10% of the overall attending population.²² Women were also weeded out of the job market. Those who occupied government and senior positions were forced to leave.²³ In the general labor market, attempts were made to limit job opportunities for women, both on the principle that women should only occupy the domestic realm and to make jobs for men in response to the Great Depression.²⁴ To

²⁰ Max von Gruber, *Hygiene des Geschlechtslebens* (Stuttgart, 1927), 116.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

²² *Ibid.*, 68.

²³ Kitchen, *A History of Modern Germany*, 289.

²⁴ Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany*, 61.

make it even more clear as to the specific place women were expected to occupy during the pre-war years, regulations in the NSDAP as early as 1921 forbade women from becoming Party executives. This is particularly telling given that the majority of the voting population that helped put the party in power were women.²⁵ They were denied a voice in the government that would not have existed without them. Any political position that accorded its occupant any kind of serious power was reserved only for men. A woman possessing that kind of power in any form was a major threat to the system. To further encourage the German woman to conform, multiple government-issued incentives were implemented. Newly married couples received immense tax breaks and could apply for generous loans.²⁶ This encouraged young people to marry, thus increasing the probability of creating children, as well as providing these new families enough money so that both spouses did not have to work to support the household. Alleviating monetary burdens popularized motherhood. Mothers were given stipends after every child she bore.²⁷ These efforts illuminate the incredible amount of power the government exercised over every female life. Through restricting women's access to the job market and pushing them into the confines of the home, the Nazi regime effectively marginalized half of its population.

The Advent of War

Sexual policies implemented before the Second World War changed drastically after its start in 1939. This process began with the transformation of established laws in Germany, continued with soldiers's sexual endeavors on the Eastern and Western Fronts,

²⁵ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 145.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 185.

²⁷ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 163.

and culminated with the establishment of military and concentration camp brothels. Through understanding Nazi-condoned gender roles before the war, we see how misogynic treatment of many women encountered by the German Army came to be so brutal. The Nazis created an environment where even the most prized and respected women were restricted and objectified. Through this, it is easy to understand how interactions with “undesirable” women could get out of control.

The rules established by the Reich before the start of the war were altered or lost their potency in the face of change. Originally, Paragraph 4 of Party Ordinance of 1926 stipulated “all are disqualified from membership who a) commit dishonorable acts or of whom such acts become subsequent to admission...c) who by their moral conduct cause offence within the Party and thereby harm the same.”²⁸ This directive was changed, however, to read: “all acts and omissions of party members which violate the sense of honor and outlook of the NSDAP and thus jeopardize or injure the reputation of the party on application are subject to incitement by the relevant political director.”²⁹ Proceedings could no longer be enforced without the approval of the political director. This essentially put superior members of the Party in charge of carrying out punishments for immoral behavior. Thus, those in good standing with their superiors could evade punishment and senior members were almost completely immune from disciplinary proceedings themselves. This change allowed men to get away with what would have been originally defined as immoral behavior.

Continuing in this trend in altering rules that were once irrefutable directives, the genealogical background of couples that wished to be married became less important in

²⁸ Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany*, 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

the eyes of the government. There was great concern of the impact of war on the demographics of Germany, which led the regime to relax the requirements regarding proof of one's heritage when seeking a marriage loan.³⁰ Between 1939 and 1944, women who were classified as "average" and "asocial" (and thus undeserving the right to marry and have a family) were awarded Motherhood Crosses for bearing children.³¹ Hence, what was once one of the most sacred goals of the Nazi regime (to protect the well-being of the "Aryan" race) was demoted in favor of making more German citizens. Due to the huge toll that the war was taking on the German population, political leaders needed to be assured that there would be future soldiers to protect the realm. The need for more bodies outweighed the concern for their quality.

Even the concept of prostitution, once regarded as a cardinal sin, was reconfigured into an approved and even endorsed practice. Adolf Hitler had called for the elimination of prostitution in his 1925 political autobiography *Mein Kampf*, saying that it was "a disgrace to mankind."³² Hitler fulfilled his promise during the early years of the Reich; the Nazis fought street prostitution with aggressive measures by shutting down well-known houses and arresting prostitutes.³³ These proclamations and actions condemning prostitution in combination with the emphasis on the importance of the family unit led many to believe that extramarital affairs would not be tolerated under Nazi rule. This did not prove to be true. With the onset of WWII in 1939, the Nazi state had not abolished prostitution at all, but rather took control of it and presented it to the

³⁰ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 154.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (tr. By Ralph Manheim) (London: Hutchinson, 1969), 189.

³³ Dagmar Herzog, *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 180.

population as a sexual outlet. All prostitutes in Germany and occupied countries had to register and work in government monitored brothels supervised by the police and health authorities.³⁴ These women were subject to highly invasive bi-weekly health exams to ensure the prevention of sexually transmitted infections.³⁵ It is possible to see a trend with the advent of such changes in Nazi society. The alteration of rules occurred when it was convenient and would benefit the regime. With the start of war, it was almost impossible for the Nazis to maintain the ideal “Aryan” society while fighting the world to expand this German utopia, so they merely changed the rules.

Evolving Opinions Regarding Sex

There is much evidence to support that the Nazis were proponents of pre- and extra-marital sexual relations at the beginning of the Second World War. In 1940, the German political theorist Herbert Marcuse explored how Nazism encouraged extra-marital relations between the sexes. He pointed to the “herding of boys and girls in the training camps, to the license granted to the racial elite, to the facilitation of marriage and divorce, and to the sanctioning of illegitimate children” as proof that such behavior was accepted as normal.³⁶ Even as early as 1935, leaders in the *Bund Deutscher Maedel* (Federation of German Girls) received instruction to secretly encourage pre-marital love affairs between their young charges.³⁷ The *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (Social Democratic Party) issued similar reports of the promiscuity of Hitler Youth in

³⁴ Wendy Jo Gertjejjanssen, “Victims, Heroes, Survivors: Sexual Violence on the Eastern Front During World War II” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2004), 160.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, vol. 1, ed. Douglas Kellner (London: Routledge, 1998), 84.

³⁷ Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 28.

1937.³⁸ One could easily question the motives behind advocating such behavior in secrecy while presenting to the rest of the country the benefits of remaining pure for one's spouse. For one, advocating sexual relationships aligned with the regime's population policy. Removing the social taboo placed on pursuing sexual pleasure proved to be another method of binding citizens closer to the NSDAP. In making "private satisfaction a patriotic service," the government rewarded citizens for following their sexual urges.

Prominent Nazi members defended the importance of intimate relations. The physician Walter Gmelin commented on the high rate of pre-marital intercourse among the youth. He found that 95% of the men and women interviewed were not virgins and that many had begun to have intercourse approximately seven years before they married, beginning in their late teens and early twenties.³⁹ Instead of finding these results alarming, the doctor insisted that such actions were "a healthy reaction against the social inhibitions and against morality preachers."⁴⁰ This statement is particularly revealing given that the government composed a large part of these "preachers," as noted above. Jurist Rudolf Bechert adamantly defended extra-marital affairs and proposed a new law that would accord illegitimate children all of the rights and financial support as legitimate children. He believed "non-marital bonds are superior to marriages in many ways...all of human culture teaches that they can represent the highest moral and aesthetic value."⁴¹ With his five-point plan for advocating premarital sex, Alfred Zeplin announced that

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

“sexual activity is not sinful, it is sacred.”⁴² Even members of Hitler’s inner circle were notorious for their numerous extramarital affairs. Most prominent of these men included Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels (who had countless lovers; the most famous being Czech movie star Lida Baarova), Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler (who had a romance with his secretary), and Hitler’s private secretary Martin Bormann (who, happily married with nine children, also had affair with an actress).⁴³

These concepts of sexual emancipation were taken and applied liberally in the warzone. It was standard procedure for military leaders to encourage troops to engage in sexual activity. Condoms were distributed with the expectation that they would be used for non-marital sex; some groups of troops even received twelve a month.⁴⁴ There was immense pressure to engage in sexual intimacy with the belief that it would foster troop morale and well-being. An earnest Christian soldier recounted in disgust that he was told “every little Hans must have a little Sabine” and how “the Nazis constantly insisted that sex before marriage or outside of marriage was morally acceptable, even necessary.”⁴⁵ Through this it can be deduced that the Nazis were in favor of pre- and extra-marital affairs for reasons other than procreation. At the warfront, it became clear that sexual encounters would be encouraged as healthy and natural. Thus, by the time of war, the Wehrmacht and SS troops were not feeling restriction in regard to their sexual behavior.

Sexual Encounters in the East

At the start of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Nazi authorities were concerned about regulating sexual relations between soldiers and civilians. Intimate

⁴² Dagmar Herzog, *Sexuality and German Fascism* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 11.

⁴³ Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany*, 56-73.

⁴⁴ Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*, 60.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

interactions between German men and ethnically “undesirable” women posed a major threat to the preservation of German heritage. At a meeting of SS officers in 1943, several commanders expressed concern about SS and Wehrmacht soldiers disregarding laws for racial defilement. It was estimated that fifty percent of all men serving in the East had “undesirable sexual intercourse with ethnically alien women.”⁴⁶ This alarming figure caused much distress among army leaders; it meant that they did not have absolute control over their soldiers. It also presented a problem regarding the spread of sexually transmitted infections and the possibility of foreign female spies acquiring valuable information from their German lovers. Thus, Wehrmacht units tried to ban the occurrence of sexual intercourse, urging soldiers to “exercise restraint towards the other sex.”⁴⁷ German men did not pay much attention to this admonishment, however, which is partly due to the absence of consequences for engaging in such actions. Authorities documented rape and gang rape, sexual enslavement, and military and civil prostitution.⁴⁸ Compared to other crimes such as desertion and self-mutilation, engaging in sexual relations was not regarded as a “primary crime,” which explains the lack of punishment that existed for these crimes.⁴⁹ Military judges issued relatively light sentences in the case of a convicted rape. While soldiers who committed the same crime in the West were imprisoned for many years, those in the East escaped with only a few months to two years in prison (if their case was brought to trial at all).⁵⁰ This drastic difference existed mainly due to the implementation of racial warfare in the East. Many Germans believed

⁴⁶ Corey Ross, Pamela E. Swett, and Fabrice d Almeida, *Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 236.

⁴⁷ Roger Chickering and D.C. Washington, *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 317.

⁴⁸ Herzog, *Brutality and Desire*, 197.

⁴⁹ Herzog, *Brutality and Desire*, 202.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

eastern people needed to be conquered and completely vanquished. In the Nazi view, inferior races were occupying valuable land and resources that belonged to the more deserving “Aryan” race. As such, the type of warfare that existed in this area was outside of the boundaries of traditional warfare. Entire towns were brought to the ground and the unspeakable cruelty that befell civilians resulted in countless deaths.⁵¹ The Barbarossa Decree issued on May 13, 1941 indirectly encouraged this behavior. It stated that court-martials in the East could not punish German soldiers for committing criminal offenses.⁵² With this license to exercise extreme violence on eastern populations, the German Army began a war that redefined the meaning of brutality.

Sexual intercourse in the East was not solely for the purpose of satisfying a soldier’s sexual urges; it was also used as a weapon of warfare. Rape, gang rape, and sexual torture were part of the war that raged between Germany and the East. The “sexual surrender” of enemy women was considered a form of conquest over a nation.⁵³ Rape could end with murder or involve the abuse of a woman’s dead body. Often, men would cut off the breast of a woman and display her on a board, thus condemning her to a slow, painful death.⁵⁴ Through these actions, German soldiers took away a woman’s identity and femininity. Sexual torture was a method to affirm one’s power and communicate with the occupied population. The Germans conveyed to their enemies that they could no longer protect their own women.⁵⁵ Thus, sexual violence signified the complete and utter defeat of the male population.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Geoffrey Giles, *History of the Holocaust*, <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/ggiles/barbaros.html>.

⁵³ Herzog, *Brutality and Desire*, 199.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 200.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 201.

Despite the crime of *Rassenschande*, the Nazi Party condoned sexual behavior with some Eastern women. Women whose “racial hygiene” was considered “ethnically acceptable” were considered permissible partners for sexual relations.⁵⁶ There remained, however, much confusion as to exactly what made a woman “acceptable.” Laws involving this topic changed throughout the duration of the war, adding to the uncertainty. In the beginning, relations with every Eastern European woman was forbidden. These included especially Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, Gypsy, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish women.⁵⁷ In 1940, Paragraph 7 of a government regulation regarding Poles warned against sexual relations between soldiers and civilians and threatened the execution of the man or woman who had relations with the German.⁵⁸ In September of 1943, however, Heinrich Himmler issued an order to lift the ban preventing relations between Estonians and Latvians.⁵⁹ These directives remained difficult to enforce; exceptions were made and many commanders ignored the behavior of their soldiers. Many superiors sympathized with their men, believing they deserved to escape the pressures of warfare while others desired the suffering of their enemies, who were the cause of pain and suffering.⁶⁰ It was also easy for soldiers to evade punishment by claiming ignorance. It remained a difficult task to identify a woman’s ethnicity based on her looks, and many used this excuse if they were caught having illegal relations with a

⁵⁶ Ibid., 201.

⁵⁷ Gertjeanssen, “Victims, Heroes, and Survivors,” 52.

⁵⁸ Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy, 1933-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 232.

⁵⁹ Gertjeanssen, “Victims, Heroes, and Survivors,” 64.

⁶⁰ Ross, *Pleasure and Power*, 78.

woman of undesirable blood.⁶¹ Sexual relations in the East existed in abundance, despite the threatening and contradictory laws issued by the Nazi regime.

Sexual Encounters in the West

Compared to the brutal struggle to survive that took place on the Eastern Front against a people that threatened the existence of the “Aryan” race, the Western Theater consisted of consensual and government-approved sexual relationships. When occupation forces were not engaged in battle, there were more opportunities for leisure and fewer restrictions prohibited consorting with the local population.⁶² In almost all western nations, there were brothels for Wehrmacht soldiers, consensual relationships were allowed, and rape was not permitted.⁶³ Sex was openly encouraged as a reward for the hard-working soldier and in the hope that German genes would spread throughout the West.

Denmark provides a strong example of the nature of sexual relations in the West. The Germans occupied Denmark though what was termed a peace occupation in which the German government promised not to interfere with Danish sovereignty in return for the guarantee that German troops would be safe in the country.⁶⁴ During this time, relations between occupying forces and civilians were allowed and even encouraged by both governments.⁶⁵ Danish women took to German soldiers and found opportunities for fun and adventure. For them, the occupation brought about a form of sexual emancipation. Women said they preferred Germans to Danes because of their manners,

⁶¹ Gertjejanssen, “Victims, Heroes, and Survivors,” 57.

⁶² Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 60.

⁶³ Dagmar Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe: A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 89.

⁶⁴ Herzog, *Brutality and Desire*, 138.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

their superior skills as lovers, and their consideration for the “soul of a woman.”⁶⁶

Estimates suggest that one in ten Danish women under the age of thirty were at some point romantically involved with a German man.⁶⁷ About one in ten of these relationships resulted in babies.⁶⁸ This highlights the prevalence and acceptance of German-Danish relationships that occurred during the war.

France was another world that varied drastically from the East. The nightlife in Paris was said to be one of the “unspoken rewards” for soldiers who were stationed in the city.⁶⁹ Drunken debauchery and sexual exploits flourished nightly with the large number of brothels and cabarets that catered to German soldiers. By one count, there existed 102 nightclubs and 49 cabarets in Montmartre alone.⁷⁰ The two best-known brothels were “Le One Two Two” and “Sphinx,” though there was a plethora of businesses to choose from.⁷¹ Cabarets were filled with pretty women in revealing feathered costumes, singing and cavorting around dispensing champagne.⁷² The best clubs kept a flowing supply of alcohol and were open all night, thus allowing soldiers to ignore their curfew.⁷³ This environment is strongly reminiscent of the debauchery and sexual licentiousness accorded to the Weimar era, which was a subject of criticism in the early years of the Nazi regime. Life in France during WWII seemed to be the embodiment of everything the government was trying to prevent, and yet no action was taken to improve morality. This highlights the contradictory and hypocritical nature of the Third Reich.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 136.

⁶⁷ Herzog, *Sex After Fascism*, 61.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Alan Riding, *And The Show Went On: Cultural Life in Nazi-Occupied Paris* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 92.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 93.

⁷¹ Ibid., 92.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

Military Brothels

Due to the constantly evolving nature of sexual politics during the Second World War, brothels for soldiers emerged as government-condoned organizations. Although at the beginning of the Third Reich Nazi leaders vowed to banish prostitution, it became an approved activity with the start of the war. Brothels were only allowed to exist, however, under government control; women were not allowed to work for themselves.⁷⁴ The hypocritical nature of the evolution of prostitution in Nazi Germany is perplexing. It seems that government involvement was the sole factor that redeemed sexual encounters of their immorality. The fact that these places were established at all despite such early denouncements serves to emphasize the importance Nazis placed on sexual encounters. Sex was a means to escape the harsh realities of war, and because the Nazis went to such lengths to provide this outlet emphasizes the glory that men enjoyed as members of a “superior” race and sex.

Many of the Nazi elite advocated for the establishment of military bordellos. Heinrich Himmler believed that a man’s heterosexual lust during wartime was unavoidable and necessary for effective military performance.⁷⁵ A soldier’s virility and sexual drive was thus tied to his military prowess. Supreme Commander Walther von Brauchitsch, who was also of the same mindset, stated that brothels would prevent the spread of sexual disease, the act of rape, and the rise of homosexuality.⁷⁶ The commander worried that accumulated lust would lead to negative consequences: “due to the diversified natures of men, it is inescapable that there will be tensions and necessities

⁷⁴ Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 157.

⁷⁵ Herzog, *Brutality and Desire*, 199.

⁷⁶ Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany*, 225.

on the sexual field here and there, which we can and shall not close our eyes to.”⁷⁷ Von Brauchitsch dismissed a man’s sex drive as something to be accounted for in a military setting. He implies that it is the responsibility of the army to make sure that a soldier’s level of lust did not result in dangerous consequences.

Due to these concerns, the Reich Ministry of the Interior issued two directives in September 1939 and March 1940 to establish medically supervised brothels throughout Reich and conquered territory.⁷⁸ In some areas, the army took over already established bordellos, whereas in others they created their own.⁷⁹ The type of women employed as prostitutes varied from place to place. In the East, the Wehrmacht command force was said to have forced women from the warzone into service, thus many of these women would not have been what the Nazis would define as “Aryan.”⁸⁰ As the war continued, however, the negative stigma of having sex with ethnically inferior women seemed to lessen. In 1942, Heinrich Himmler himself condoned sexual relationships with “ethnically alien women” because it occurred outside the context of personal attachment and reproduction.⁸¹ Whereas originally it was forbidden to engage in any form of intimacy with an undesirable woman, this rule was remade to allow relations as long as they as long as they did not result in children or a serious committed relationship. Pursuing relations in the Western Zone, however, was a different matter. As we have seen, interactions between German soldiers and women in occupied western countries were not a concern of the army, and were even encouraged. Prostitutes in these areas

⁷⁷ Herzog, *Brutality and Desire*, 204.

⁷⁸ Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany*, 226.

⁷⁹ Herzog, *Brutality and Desire*, 206.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Herzog, *Brutality and Desire*, 206.

participated in the service more willingly, whether for material incentives and a means to support oneself or to engage in the excitement of interacting with foreigners.⁸² German military brothels formed a large part of the German soldier's experience during WWII.

Another incentive the implementation of the brothel system provided was the amount of control the government had over its maintenance. The Salon Kitty in Berlin serves as an example of the level of involvement the regime had in these establishments. Reinhard Heydrich created the Salon as a place to entertain important government guests from abroad and prominent Party members.⁸³ He planted microphones and trained the women to cleverly extract important information from the guests who frequented the brothel.⁸⁴ If these men talked about valuable secrets the government would use the information to its advantage. Although this endeavor was not largely successful, it shows how the Nazis manipulated sex to achieve their goals.

Concentration Camp Brothels

Nazi leaders emphasized the importance of sexual intercourse to such a degree that they implemented a system within German concentration camps that rewarded non-Jewish male prisoners with visits to the camp brothel. In the summer of 1941, Chief of SS Heinrich Himmler visited Mauthausen concentration camp and the quarries where prisoners worked to extract granite.⁸⁵ Following his visit, Himmler issued orders to establish two brothel barracks, which were subsequently opened in the summer of 1942.⁸⁶ Nazi leaders saw a need to establish brothels in Mauthausen and other camps in order to

⁸² Stibbe, *Women in the Third Reich*, 157.

⁸³ Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany*, 225.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Herzog, *Brutality and Desire*, 168.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

provide incentive for workers. Since the start of the war, forced labor had become increasingly important to the German economy, and with the plans for redesigning Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, Linz, and Weimar, granite was in high demand.⁸⁷ This incentive system, the Nazis reasoned, would increase production. Hence, between 1942 and 1945, ten concentration camps built bordellos including Flossenbürg, Buchenwald, Auschwitz-Monowitz, and Dachau.⁸⁸

It is important to note the emphasis Nazi leaders placed on providing incentive through sex. One would think that the promise of extra food rations, better treatment, or even early release would provide a stronger incentive for prisoners in light of the extreme conditions that they lived in. In the struggle to survive, a person's sexual desire is usually not at the forefront of one's thoughts. The fact that the Nazis went through all the effort to build and organize a brothel system suggests their fixation on sexuality. They truly believed that controlling sex would result in increased labor output.

The women who staffed camp brothels came from a variety of backgrounds. Some had been prostitutes before the war and were imprisoned for their immorality, while others were sent over from foreign occupation zones, and others still were Jewish women originally intended for extermination.⁸⁹ The existence of Jewish prostitutes may be surprising given all the effort the Nazis put in to preventing intimate contact with Jews, but it serves to further emphasize the hypocritical nature of their policies. Although Jewish people were portrayed as "undesirables" who needed to be separated and weeded out of the general population, when their existence could be used for a higher

⁸⁷ Ibid., 170.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 86.

⁸⁹ Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany*, 225.

purpose, sexual intermingling was allowed. Government officials did not have to worry as much about offspring resulting from these unions, which was one of the main driving factors behind the instigation of these policies in the first place. In the camps, there was slim possibility of women becoming pregnant, since many were sterilized before being admitted to the “whore block.”⁹⁰ Although there were certainly circumstances where pregnancy did occur, the controlled environment that existed within the camp setting did not give babies much chance of survival.

The day-to-day existence of a woman forced to work in a camp brothel was a far different experience from the average prisoner. Upon the arrival of a group of women, a selection took place. Usually those who were better-looking and new to the camp system were selected, since these women could be considered attractive since they showed no signs of malnourishment or physical abuse.⁹¹ Next, a woman would usually be sent to a lab within the camp to be sterilized. This process was extremely painful and at times fatal. Dr. Clauberg was put in charge of this process at Auschwitz, where he experimented on women to develop the most efficient way to administer mass sterilization. After testing various methods, he developed a caustic substance that was injected into a woman’s fallopian tubes and prevented her ovulation.⁹² After this traumatizing process, women were treated surprisingly well. Survivor Sientje Backer remembers that the girls were really “chic...they were well-dressed and even got shoes

⁹⁰ Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic, 1986), 270.

⁹¹ Ka-tzetnik, 135633. *House of Dolls* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), 169.

⁹² Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, 271.

and a bra. They were well-fed and beautiful.”⁹³ This experience is echoed in the novella *House of Dolls*, where Daniella, the main character, receives good food and clean clothes.⁹⁴ Although these girls evaded the rough treatment that normal prisoners faced, the camp brothel had its own unique set of terrors. In Daniella’s case, if a girl received three negative “reports” from her suitor, she would be sent away, and most likely killed.⁹⁵ The “sin of indifference” was taken seriously within the confines of bordellos; satisfied men would continue to work hard in hopes of returning again soon. Usually within these camp-run brothels, certain hours of the day were reserved for “enjoyment duty” where a man would be paired with a camp prostitute and allowed a 15-minute stay.⁹⁶ Some camps did not have such clear-cut rules. Erica Betts endured “sex from morning till night...two or three would come in and you had to lie down on the floor and that was it.”⁹⁷ Such was the existence of women who were selected to serve as a reward for male prisoners.

As noted earlier, the Nazi Party glorified the German man. We can see here even “unworthy” male prisoners were glorified for their ability to make a valuable contribution to the regime. The treatment of women in these brothels highlight the extreme misogynistic atmosphere that transformed women into objects used to tempt men into working harder. Concentration camp brothels also prove that sexual elements were an integral part of war and genocide. The Nazis separated sex from sentiment with the creation of their bordellos. This separation is also seen on the war front in a soldier’s

⁹³ Backer, Sientje. Interview 32515, *Visual History Archive*. USC Shoah Foundation Institute. Web. 30 March 2013.

⁹⁴ Ka-tzetnik, *House of Dolls*, 170.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁹⁷ Betts, Erica. Interview 20825, *Visual History Archive*. USC Shoah Foundation Institute. Web. 30 March 2013.

ability to consort with a foreign woman one night and then kill her the next day. German men were able to rape and kill because of how the Nazis dehumanized women.

Conclusion

The Nazi regime managed to portray itself as the guardian of morality as well as seduce its population by affirming the importance of sexual pleasure. The duality and ambiguity of this presentation served to fulfill the goals of the National Socialist Party. In catering to the conservative population through enforcing moral behavior, the Party firmly established itself as a strong leader. This guise changed with the advent of war, however. With the distraction of world conflict, sexual pursuits became socially acceptable and were even encouraged. Throughout these changes, women remained the inferior sex in the eyes of the Nazis and were used for the welfare of men. It is through this behavior that we can gain a better understanding of women's experience within the confines of the Nazi state.

Chapter 2

The Breakdown of Morality: Wehrmacht Control on the Eastern Front

The *Ostfront* remained a world of stark contrast compared to the Western Theater. Villages burned on the horizons as far as the eye could see and the hanging of Jews served as entertainment for soldiers to gather and watch as a spectacle.¹ Heinous acts of rape and merciless plunder could be expected under conditions of the German military occupation in the Soviet Union. The war that raged in the East was unlike any other the world had experienced before. Violence occurred under the auspices that there were no comrades in arms, and this affected the level of brutality that occurred both on and off of the battlegrounds. When comparing the Eastern and Western Theaters of war, one may ask why and how war could differ so dramatically based merely on location. The answer reflects a multitude of factors that need to be assessed. The harsh environment in the East was a shocking reality; men lived under brutal conditions. This affected their mentalities to a point that they would commit acts that would have normally been inexcusable. The workings of the Wehrmacht had a prominent impact over the control of German soldiers. The German Armed Forces implemented strict Prussian discipline in the training regimen of soldiers, which was paired with further brutalization by elite members of the Wehrmacht. Because soldiers adjusted to a life where they had to take anything and everything in order to survive, they were willing to exhibit harshness towards the enemy and were thus more susceptible to ideological indoctrination. Nazi

¹ Stephen G. Fritz, *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II* (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 50.

ideology pervaded the minds of most Wehrmacht soldiers, instilling a consciousness that was meant to further the party's racial and political agenda. Through these three primary influences, environment, Wehrmacht organization, and ideology, it is possible to grasp an understanding of how the Eastern Front was so much more hostile compared to the West.

Environmental Factors

The Second World War lasted six long years. In order to survive, soldiers had to adapt to their surroundings, which often involved paying any cost for the materials necessary to live. Life on the front was difficult to say the least; the average soldier faced problems with climate, landscape, filth, disease, and inadequate shelter. These elements, in addition to the extreme mental and physical exhaustion from war, made for a seemingly impossible combination of obstacles. Battles occurred surprisingly infrequently, and a soldier's thoughts were constantly focused on how to escape such rough living.²

The Soviet Union's legendary cold winters loomed almost as threateningly as the enemy itself. It inspired a deep fear in soldiers and this feeling was valid; winter could be deadly. Understanding the ramifications of such harsh weather, one soldier remarked "if it is bad weather for a few days, then that is a setback for many days, especially for the supplies."³ It was not a matter of buckling down and surviving a storm; it was the aftermath of that storm that could prove more deadly if the proper reinforcements did not arrive. As the winter months dragged on, the troops used supplies at a quickening rate. Fires burned day and night, blankets were bundled around bodies, and food was in short

² Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 104.

³ Alan Clark. *Barbarossa: The Russian-German Conflict, 1941-45* (New-York: W. Morrow, 1965),77.

supply.⁴ With temperatures dropping to negative forty degrees Celsius, even a soldier's basic duties became impossible to carry out. Lieutenant H. complained that "the ground was so slick that the horses had difficulty even standing up. Because of the cold our machine guns wouldn't work at all."⁵ Frigid temperatures could transform soldiers into creatures who were only capable of responding to the horrific cold. In order to bear the agony of the harsh climate, men withdrew into themselves. The body took over, conserving energy to be used to survive. Harald Henry noticed that he drifted into "a sort of trance...I mumbled senseless words and thought that I was experiencing everything only in my sleep as a dream."⁶ The alien Russian landscape quickly turned into a world that scarcely real to Wehrmacht soldiers. This concept serves as an important point when examining the breakdown of morality within the German Army. The war in the East had now acquired a flavor of desperation where survival was the only objective. The cold often had a drug-like effect that distorted reality and could alter one's views as to what was permissible. In light of survival, the morality of a soldier's actions held less meaning. There were no governing forces other than life and death, and this is indicative of how atrocities emerged.

The dropping temperatures of winter consequently led to a scarcity in food among the struggling soldiers. Some were lucky enough to get rations, while others had to rely on other methods of satisfying their intense hunger. One soldier recalls witnessing desperation among his fellow comrades:

⁴ Clark, *Barbarossa*, 369.

⁵ Wilhelm Prueller, *Dairy of a German Soldier* (1st ed. Coward McCann, 1963), 108.

⁶ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 112.

Men were no longer fighting for any spiritual motive, but were like wolves, terrified of starvation...who no longer distinguished between enemies and friends, were ready to commit murder for less than a quarter of a meal.... These martyrs to hunger massacred two villages to carry off their supplies of food.... Men died for the possibility of a day's food....Like hunted animals intent on self-preservation, each man thought only of himself.⁷

What was originally a war of ideology quickly turned into a fight against an invisible enemy when Germany could not sustain its troops during its harsh months in the Soviet Union. Hunger pushed men to commit acts that they would have never pictured in their wildest imaginings. Hans Woltersdorf recounted how he hoped to be able to salvage some of his own flesh for consumption after an amputation.⁸ Reduced to this bestial state of survival, Woltersdorf resorted to cannibalism to satiate his hunger. This deep-seated need to survive changed the mindset of even the strongest men. Honor and discipline was not a part of a soldier's consciousness when he could barely muster the energy to move. Through exploring the ramifications of hunger, it is possible to see how easily human behavior can spiral out of control when subjected to extreme circumstances.

What was a war without rations at times devolved into a war without weapons. There occurred a profound demodernization on the Eastern Front. The lack of technology and material resources from which to draw upon cost Germany the war and led to a change in tone within the army. German success during the first two years of the

⁷ Guy Sajer, *The Forgotten Soldier* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 384.

⁸ Hans Werner Woltersdorf, *Gods of War: A Memoir of a German Soldier* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1990), 125.

war was based on a creative and effective use of its limited resources.⁹ Hitler's delay in mobilizing Germany's economy had numerous negative reverberations and by the time war began in the East, the economy could not support a full on world war because it was behind in production and had few resources to draw upon. By 1944, supply and weapons output had increased, producing 27,345 tanks annually.¹⁰ This, however, was not enough to match the production rates of the Allies. The Soviet Union yielded about 30,000 tanks, Great Britain generated 36,720, and the United States put out 88,410 per year.¹¹ Thus, Germans could hardly compete, even after they had transformed their economy. The average soldier felt the reverberations of such unpreparedness in the extreme. About half of the Wehrmacht invasion came to rely on horse-drawn wagons and resorted to trench warfare due to the lack of trucks.¹² Even this level of warfare declined when vehicles could not be repaired and horses diminished in number due to cold and lack of food.¹³ The Eastern Front was larger than the Western by about 700 miles, and thus supply lines stretched thousands of miles behind advancing troops, causing huge delays.¹⁴ When German ground forces reached Leningrad, for example, they were unable to take over the city because reinforcements had not arrived. By the time it was possible to attack, the city had reinforced itself, which made it nearly impossible to conquer.¹⁵

Soldiers were forced to rely upon themselves under such primitive conditions.

Fighting an increasingly well-equipped army was especially demoralizing. Men could

⁹ Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 12.

¹⁰ Omer, *Hitler's Army*, 16.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, The Germans, and The Final Solution* (Jerusalem: International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem; 2008), 192.

not rest and recover from battle when they were exposed to the harsh elements without shelter and proper clothing, and many became sick.¹⁶ One doctor remarked that soldiers were becoming “*geistig immer stumpfer*” (increasingly apathetic) in the face of such hardship.¹⁷ Living conditions had a direct impact on a soldier’s state of mind. With soldiers forced to fend for themselves, the glorified perception of warfare was turned on its head. There was no dignity in scrounging around for anything that could aid in one’s survival. Because of this, soldiers lost touch with reality, which in turn enabled them to internalize the Nazi mentality and commit atrocious acts.

Wehrmacht soldiers not only faced climatic and technologic obstacles but also had to adjust to the violent nature of warfare. Each soldier’s first time in battle was known as his “baptism of fire,” a process in which boys became men and transformed into lethal combatants.¹⁸ This induction into warfare was challenging even for those with the strongest nerves. Many troops found it difficult to become accustomed to being constantly surrounded by death. Each soldier faced the reality of his own mortality. Men were overwhelmed by the enormity of war and plagued by a fear of being inconsequential.¹⁹ Many responded to this constant terror and helplessness of not being able to control one’s fate through displays of brutality.²⁰ Acts of cruelty seemed almost necessary to relieve oneself of living in constant fear, even if just for a few moments. By “playing God,” so to speak, a soldier could regain control over his own life and then turn around and exercise this newfound power over others. In the heat of battle, atrocities

¹⁶ Omer, *Hitler’s Army*, 23.

¹⁷ Kershaw, *Hitler, The Germans, and The Final Solution*, 106.

¹⁸ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁰ Sajer, *The Forgotten Soldier*, 69.

became natural acts; almost second nature. The collapse of one side goaded the other to be even more ruthless in its victory, and all the more so if that battle had cost many German lives.²¹ It is almost as if just sensing the fear and growing weakness of the enemy would encourage this onslaught of ill will. Contrasting the enormity of a war was the normalization of warfare. To some men, war became a job and they treated it like any other form of employment.²² Whom and how a soldier killed did not seem to make a difference to these men; it was advisable to pick the best weapon to complete the task at hand and carry it out. This method of accustoming oneself to warfare was used as a coping mechanism. If a combatant fulfilled his duty and killed the enemy, he was seen as a “good” soldier. It was no different than completing a day’s work at the factory; destruction was just one more item to check off of the day’s to-do list. In taking the emotion out of the traumatic experience of killing another human being, a soldier relieved himself of the guilt accompanying it. Each soldier adjusted differently to being surrounded by the horrors of war, but many found an outlet through violence.

Military Cooperation

Members of the regime knew that the doctrine they preached had to be accepted and implemented by the body of men who would be representing Germany in the great ideological war in the East. They relied upon a tradition of Prussian militarism to establish what was expected from the soldiers, which factored into the intensive training that men endured before being placed on active duty. Once at the front, Nazi leaders worked with Wehrmacht elite to further implement the ideas that the government represented. The consequent discipline and ideological restrictions the upper military

²¹ Ibid., 103.

²² Ibid., 118.

members placed on their soldiers resulted in some of the violent outbreaks that occurred on the Eastern front. Brutalization within the ranks of the army was the foundation that led to a path of violence that could not be stopped.

Prussian martial heritage set a precedent for harsh discipline and a love of warfare. Frederick the Great believed that the “common soldier must fear his officer more than the enemy” in order to perform well in the heat of battle.²³ It was when the fear of the enemy took over that breakdowns occurred during WWII. In the 1870s, Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke saw war as a chance to win honor, glory, and prestige.²⁴ Peace was not nearly so accommodating in leaving one’s mark on history. Moltke regarded pacifism as a mix of “stupidity, cowardice, and treason.”²⁵ Not as concerned with sparing lives and avoiding hardship, Moltke condemned men who sought peace, claiming that they were not loyal to their country. Men who fell into this category were in a dangerous place, ostracized and not trusted. During the First World War General Hans von Seeckt ran the army by the sayings “*selbst ist der mann*” (a man relies on himself), and “*Wehrlos – ehrlos*” (without defense, without honor).²⁶ Thus, most Germans adopted the mentality that a strong reserve army was vital to their well-being and that peace could not be trusted to last, which became thoroughly assimilated into Nazi doctrine. This concept was modernized and applied to the circumstances surrounding the start of the Second World War. Hitler believed that a lack of discipline and morale in the army had cost Germany WWI.²⁷ He aimed at creating a

²³ Nancy Mitford, *Frederick the Great* (London: Hamilton, 1970), 109.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

²⁵ Omer, *Hitler’s Army*, 89.

²⁶ Wette, *The Wehrmacht*, 142.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Volksgemeinschaft, both a civilian and military army, which would be able to achieve his goals without cracking under the hardships of battle.²⁸ What he created was one of the most disciplined and efficient armies in the world, capable of committing the deadly acts. The Nazi regime was able to draw upon a long history of rigid militarism to inspire soldiers and officers to follow new standards within the army.

The most obvious and integral part of the Wehrmacht organization was its body of common soldiers, who acted to carry out the objectives deemed necessary by its head. The process of transforming a civilian into a highly disciplined killing machine began on the first day of training camp. This was where army morals and expectations were first introduced to men, who came to understand what it really meant to be in Hitler's army.²⁹ These values transformed men into soldiers willing to commit atrocities. Basic training was a difficult step for many men. Private Karl Fuchs recounted his first experience upon arriving to camp with his unit:

“I have just put my bundle down on the wooden bed...when we are ordered to return to the courtyard...it is now past dinner and we have not had anything to eat since the rye bread, white cheese, and jam from the evening before....we are forced to do more gymnastics...and we have missed supper.... The sadist obliges us to put our guns back...and abruptly: go and see if there's anything left...!”³⁰

Enormous mental and physical strain made for many lonely and homesick soldiers. It was not an easy feat adjusting to a militaristic lifestyle where one's independence was severely limited. At the same time, however, this harsh preparation was only a taste of

²⁸ Sajer, *The Forgotten Soldier*, 166.

²⁹ Theodor Plivier, *Stalingrad* (New York: Time Inc., 1966), 2.

³⁰ Karl Fuchs and Horst Fuchs Richardson, *Your Loyal and Loving Son: The Letters of Tank Gunner Karl Fuchs, 1937-41* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2003), 42.

what real warfare would be like. Training was meant to acquaint men with weapon handling, battle tactics, group values, loyalty, and camaraderie. It conditioned reflexes, honed skills, and made a habit of obedience.³¹ All these skills were indispensable when performing in the heat of battle. A soldier could fall back on the training he had received and use it to survive. This partially explains the love-hate relationship men had with their training and officers.³² Soldiers may have been unhappy with all that they were forced to go through, but at the end of the day they were being taught how to persevere. Although Karl Fuchs complained that there was “no rest for anyone,” he later admitted that, “all of us are eager to make progress and no one complains.”³³ Life was hard, but these men knew what would result if they did not apply themselves. This preparation was the best defense that they had to survive the war, and in a way they were grateful that the army cared enough to prepare them in this way. They trusted that their superiors had their best interests at heart and would never steer them wrong, though it was only a matter of time before this seemingly good-willed preparation was turned into a tool of monstrosity.

When overwhelmed by the demands of combat training, German soldiers found solace in one another. Group pride bound men together within their units, which became an integral part of Wehrmacht forces. In his diary, Friedrich Grupe remarked, “because of our burdens borne in common, the feeling of comradely identity grows rapidly.”³⁴ This remarkable cohesion added to the immense military effectiveness on the front; commanders were able to combine fragmented units and use them on the battlefield, which proved indispensable. The values soldiers acquired during training camp turned

³¹ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 14.

³² *Ibid.*, 16.

³³ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

them into elite fighters, while also depriving them of a moral compass. Committing crimes in groups resulted in a diffusion of responsibility and a group mentality that could pressure individuals to commit atrocities. Although the military training Wehrmacht soldiers received allowed them to become one of the most effectively trained armies, men were molded to carry out orders unquestioningly. This open trust between the army and its soldiers inhibited their ability to think independently and judge what was acceptable on their own terms.

Wehrmacht officers' primary objectives were to create a soldier that would carry out his assignments. The army's demand was absolute, and unwavering obedience was required of every German combatant.³⁵ This contributed to a soldier's loss of individual responsibility and personal guilt regarding killing or harming others. War robbed men of their natural inhibitions and validated extreme violence. Cruelty was encouraged in the East with the portrayal of Soviet citizens. Dehumanizing images depicting the "Asiatic hordes" made it easier to break social and cultural taboos against killing.³⁶ Soldiers' sense of humanity and justice were deformed due to the environment they were surrounded by. There existed many messages affirming what would normally be socially unacceptable behavior. This blind acceptance in carrying out one's duty was enforced by the military philosophy that basic soldiers should only know as much about their mission as was necessary to carry it out.³⁷ Each man was trained not to ponder the meaning and possible reverberations of his orders but to accept that they were necessary to win the war. This blind trust proved to be a valuable tool. Not only was it effective for a soldier

³⁵ Wette, *The Wehrmacht*, 158.

³⁶ Omer Bartov. *The Eastern Front, 1941-45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 77.

³⁷ Wette, *The Wehrmacht*, 197.

to know as little as possible about his mission if he fell into enemy hands, but it also served as a means of control.³⁸ Soldiers were transformed into objects to be exploited to help carry out the Nazi agenda.

Nazi leaders knew that in order to acquire strong support throughout the ranks of the army, the Wehrmacht's elite commanders had to be completely committed to serving the regime. This would ensure that Nazi political goals would be carried out. Hitler knew that he could not wage this war without the help of Wehrmacht military leadership. Fortunately for him, the political ideologies of the army and the Nazi Party matched up fairly well: both believed that political questions could be solved by war.³⁹ Historically, the German Armed Forces, especially the Prussian Officer Corps, had aligned with groups on the extreme right side of the political spectrum. With the newly instated Nazi authoritarianism, high-ranking military personnel were generally amenable to Nazi goals.⁴⁰ Now that it was evident that the army was in support of the establishment of the party, it was up to the Nazis to make sure that their goals in entering the war aligned as well. The objectives given to the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front not only called for the defeat of the Red Army, but they also concerned the elimination of large groups of non-combatants based on racial and political criteria.⁴¹ This, in combination with similar anti-Semitic messages propagated at home, led to specific orders issued in the Spring and Summer of 1941. Field Marshall Wilhelm Keitel, the titular head of the German Armed Forces stressed to troops that "Jews and Bolsheviks" were their enemies and that the

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 139.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁴¹ Ibid., 137.

Wehrmacht should “move ruthlessly” against them.⁴² He went on to say that the army would absolve soldiers of their jurisdiction in military courts should they commit atrocities against Russian civilians.⁴³ This declaration gave soldiers a license to kill. There was no mistaking the intent of such a statement. The leaders of the Wehrmacht were now prepared to wage an unprecedented war based on racial ideology.

In order to pursue their goals and achieve the mission given to them by the Nazi Party, Wehrmacht leaders enforced a policy based on brutalization and strict draconian punishment. The practice of martial law in the Wehrmacht was meant to ensure that troops were steadfast in battle, but this idea was at times taken too far. Even while training soldiers, officers took the cause of discipline a little too close to heart. One soldier was forced to stand all day with an eighty-pound bag on his back just for walking across the mess hall with his hands in his pockets.⁴⁴ This soldier suffered extreme punishment just for behaving in what was deemed an “unsoldier-like manner.” Other punishments were doled out for no apparent reason at all. Officers would dump garbage in the middle of the dormitories and make soldiers clean it up, while other men had to clean the stables with their bare hands.⁴⁵ All this was done in the name of improving soldier conduct, but the line between discipline and outright cruelty was often blurred.

Traditional means of army control sufficed for the first two years of the war in the East while Germans were winning, but this quickly disintegrated once the tides took a turn for the worse.⁴⁶ The Wehrmacht’s top priority was combat performance, and once

⁴² Keitel’s Decree of 13 May 1941 in Hans-Adolf Jacobsen’s *Anatomie des SS-Staates*.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Sajer, *The Forgotten Soldier*, 79.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Bartov, *Hitler’s Army*, 61.

that started to disintegrate with the loss of battles, increased brutality was used as a means to turn the situation around.⁴⁷ Hitler felt that in the First World War there had not been enough effort made to ensure that soldiers fulfilled their duties and he made sure that this folly was not repeated.⁴⁸ As the war turned to favor the Soviet Union, brutality was utilized in its most raw form. Men who retained their individualism and disobeyed authority were taken to the *die hundehuette* (the doghouse) and chained with their hands behind their backs. After one soldier was taken to the doghouse six times, his commander shot him.⁴⁹ Soldiers were transformed into animals through this treatment. If a man proved to be of no use to the army, he therefore could not benefit the world by being in it and was put down like a lame horse. Other men were sentenced to death indirectly by being shipped to the farthest front, with their privileges revoked and an alarming scarcity of supplies.⁵⁰ Although this was meant as punishment, it reinforced the behavior that these men were paying for. Every man had to fend for himself and find a way to survive, thus continuing to work outside of military discipline. Many resorted to ravaging the land and people around them.⁵¹

The fear of army commanders and of losing the war led soldiers to turn against civilians and prisoners. This gradual process began when prejudice, fear, and brutality intertwined.⁵² Even men with the toughest mentalities disintegrated under draconian discipline. Exercising control and power over others was a coping mechanism and an outlet for frustration and helplessness. Soldiers who worked within the army's

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Plievier, *Stalingrad*, 3.

⁴⁹ Sajer, *The Forgotten Soldier*, 167.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 44.

⁵² Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 61.

disciplinary boundary became virtually paralyzed and suppressed all rational reflection, leading to an unchecked desire to alleviate these feelings at any cost.⁵³ This serves to emphasize the amount of influence Nazi ideology had over every aspect of the army. The Nazis' insatiable desire for a strong, disciplined force capable of withstanding the atrocities of warfare created a monster in itself. Soldiers faced one of two choices: "death by an enemy bullet or by the thugs of the SS," as one infantryman put it.⁵⁴ This "catch-22" left soldiers little control over their own destinies.⁵⁵ When the army decided to label its own men as enemies, it made its mission harder than it needed to be. The army essentially turned on itself, looking for "enemies of the *Volk*" while also fighting a losing battle with the East. To create an army of ideal soldiers, the Nazi party and Wehrmacht elite enforced a policy of strict discipline, which ended up being too much for soldiers.

While enduring drastic abuse for not following orders in combat situations, Wehrmacht troops were rarely punished for crimes against civilians, which set a dangerous precedent. Some officers felt sympathy towards their soldiers who were experiencing the hopelessness of war and allowed their anger and frustration to be unleashed on civilians and prisoners.⁵⁶ Given the negative perception of the Slavic population in the East, it was rare for a soldier to be punished for his actions. Private H.K. recalls a corporal who "raped a pregnant woman, a woman over fifty, and attempted to rape two others" within the span of an hour, but only received two years in prison as punishment. What is particularly surprising about this case is that the corporal had

⁵³ Wette, *The Wehrmacht*, 159.

⁵⁴ Fuchs, *Your Loyal and Loving Son*, 97.

⁵⁵ Joseph Heller, Christopher Buckley, and Jonathan R. Eller, *Catch-22* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

⁵⁶ John Alexander Armstrong, *Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 45.

performed the same acts in Poland but had received no punishment, and was in fact promoted because of these actions.⁵⁷ The rules of war were completely ignored when it came to political and racial categories. There existed a fine line between living off of the land and outright plunder in the East, with the former often instigating the latter.⁵⁸ Once officers and commanders let their troops cross the line into criminality, it was almost impossible to pull them back up the slippery slope. In this case, allowing soldiers to reap the benefits of looting reinforced the rewards of obedience, and that using the enemy as an outlet for emotion was more productive than acting out against one's superiors. This vicious cycle produced unprecedented destruction in the East and molded soldiers' perception of reality in a way that validated the crimes that were committed on the Slavic people. The disciplinary reins were let go, and they were impossible to recover.

Implementation of Nazi Ideology

German soldiers were trained in an environment that dramatically shaped their mentalities. The Nazi regime molded its troops in such a way as to have them reflect and carry out its political and racial agenda. Nationalists and imperialists saw the eastern countries as a large but weak expanse of land and the people who occupied these lands needed to be expelled.⁵⁹ In shaping public perception, Adolf Hitler fused this idea of Asian peril with anti-semitism, anti-bolshevism, and anti-slavic racism. Propaganda

⁵⁷ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 110.

⁵⁸ Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 61.

⁵⁹ Marlis G. Steinert, *Hitler's War and The Germans: Public Mood and Attitude During the Second World War* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977), 264.

instilled these racial views into the minds of soldiers who turned into emphatic supporters of Hitler.⁶⁰

The basis of the Nazi platform relied upon an inherent racism directed at the Jews and Slavs in the East. A famous appeal by several German professors painted the war as a struggle for survival with peaceful Germany caught in the middle.⁶¹ The Eastern Lands were said to be “soaked with the blood of women and children butchered by the Russian hordes...the Mongols and the Negroes are attacking the white race.”⁶² It was a soldier’s duty to rid the land of these parasites and establish a civilization in which people could flourish. Germans were portrayed as superior to Slavic people in terms of politics, economics, military might, and intellectual ability, and thus deserving the territory in the East.⁶³ This sense of entitlement morphed into Hitler’s famous concept of *Lebensraum*, a form of territorial expansionism that enforced the idea that people belonging to superior races were meant to displace people of inferior races.⁶⁴ Hitler was convinced that the Slavic countries were not capable of forming their own state and governing themselves, blaming this on the influence of Bolshevik Jews.⁶⁵ That these people were occupying a land that did not rightly belong to them according to the law of nature and Social Darwinism was a moral outrage. The barbarians needed to be thrown out quickly in order for the natural progression of the world to take place. These ideas began to be reflected within the ranks of the Wehrmacht. In a letter referencing Joseph Goebbels’s

⁶⁰ Martin Pöppel, *Heaven and Hell: The War Diary of a German Paratrooper* (Staplehurst, England: Spellmount, 1996), 176.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 13.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁴ Christina Morina, *Legacies of Stalingrad: Remembering the Eastern Front in Germany Since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 21.

⁶⁵ Omer, *Hitler’s Army*, 57.

speech on total war on February 18, 1943 the NCO W.F. wrote that “we must fight back...even more brutally because we know it is what God wants...we must abandon our lofty ideas about the value of human life...we attach more values to our lives, they are more valuable to human civilization than those of the Asiatic hordes...it is what nature demands.”⁶⁶ In referencing God, the military commander essentially blesses the Nazi mission to eliminate their neighbors. He absolves the German people of their sins, in a way playing the role of a deity himself when he places more value on the lives of one group of people over the other. He emphasizes the German people as a blessing to humanity; nothing else seems so important as this race of people occupying their “rightful” place in history. Influenced by their commander’s words, soldiers also adopted this outlook. A soldier recounts that during the war: “I had unquestioningly accepted the philosophy that might makes right.”⁶⁷ When fed a tantalizing vision of superiority, he was wont to believe it. This was especially true in an environment where everyone thought similarly, such as the case with group mentality in the army. The majority of the army followed suit in this way.

Racial messages reached the attention of many German citizens through the use of propaganda. The images one country creates about another can have a great political impact at home.⁶⁸ Propaganda was used to bridge the gap in people’s perceptions about the East in a negative way. Whether or not these images reflected reality was beside the point; the real power behind these messages depended on who believed them. The source of this information lent itself all the more to its believability: the government, who

⁶⁶ Wette, *The Wehrmacht*, 173.

⁶⁷ Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 225.

⁶⁸ Wette, *The Wehrmacht*, 3.

supposedly had the welfare of its citizens at heart. However, these messages were used less for the good of the people by protecting them from the “hordes of Mongols” and more for pursuing the goal of occupying and controlling the Eastern Lands. Constructs of enemies in the media during the time leading up to the war were meant to prepare the populous for military conflict and to convince them that such action was necessary.⁶⁹

The soon-to-be soldiers who saw these depictions became conditioned to think of the war in a positive light and instilled a desire to help carry out the Nazi program. This would help alleviate qualms about the subsequent mass extermination of the Eastern people and increase each German’s sense of his own superiority. This new manufactured mentality from the home front further added to the ruthless behavior that occurred abroad.

Conclusion

War serves as a backdrop against which human actions and emotions can be illuminated; the Second World War was no different. The circumstances under which Wehrmacht soldiers subsisted proved to be unimaginably horrific. From extreme weather to lack of supplies and weaponry, environmental conditions proved to be an exceptional challenge for German troops. The regime exercised its influence over the Wehrmacht army to ensure that its doctrine would become a reality. Through the use of Prussian tradition, strict training techniques, and draconian punishment, the Third Reich was able to mold its army into what would be known as one of the most effective killing machines in history. With Nazi propaganda shaping the consciousness of soldiers, men were convinced of the dire need to create *Lebensraum* for the Aryan race to occupy. This third component of racial ideology had the a huge impact over the way soldiers viewed the

⁶⁹ Ibid., 169.

struggle in the East, which consequently resulted in the release of unbridled brutality among Soviet civilians and prisoners of war.

Chapter 3

The Soviet Occupation

“*Komm, Frau, komm*” (come, Frau, come) was a phrase that came to symbolize the Soviet Occupation of Eastern Germany during the years immediately following the end of the Second World War.¹ It represents the mass rape of German women upon the defeat of the Nazi regime. The Soviets invaded Germany seeking vengeance, which manifested itself in an outbreak of brutality that plagued women for years. When analyzing such a catastrophic event, one may ask why such violence emerged and how this outbreak was received both in Germany and the Soviet Union. Rape was not instigated by sexual desire; it was a desire of a different sort. Many Soviets sought to punish each woman, the men who failed to protect her, and the country that ignited a war based on its assertion of racial superiority. Encouraged by Soviet propaganda and military commanders and fortified by large quantities of alcohol, soldiers had a lasting effect on post-war German life. Women who were intimately violated had little resources to turn to for justice, but organizations offered aid and women developed unique ways of evading the threatening gaze of troops. It was only after Soviet leaders finally realized the political damage the Red Army was doing that it changed its policies so that it could better control its soldiers, thus ending the long-lasting tribulation of German women. Rape was a tool that was used to thoroughly vanquish the German enemy; it was

¹ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City: A Diary*. Trans. Philip Boehm (New York: Metropolitan /Henry Holt, 2005), 24.

implemented to ensure that another war of such magnitude would never occur again, and to establish the Soviet Union as the true victor and leader of a superior race.

A Country in Chaos

After the end of WWII in September of 1945, Germany was in shambles. Its vital capital, Berlin, was reduced to the “greatest pile of rubble in the world.”² Survivors braced themselves for the invasion of the “Red Beast” from the East, trained from years of Nazi propaganda to believe that the Soviet Union was home to a population of subhuman Mongol barbarians.³ As it turned out, this German expectation was confirmed in many ways. Soviet soldiers, fueled by alcohol and embittered by the stubborn German refusal to admit defeat, were keen to reap the rewards of their hard-earned victory and to orchestrate their revenge on the German people. The struggles of German women, with the majority of the male population gone off to war, came to represent the situation of the entire nation. Charged with cleaning up the debris left from the war, women were urged by Soviet propaganda to also “get rid of the filth in our hearts and minds.”⁴ This reflected the worldwide perception of German morality. Germans were collectively blamed, each citizen equally deserving of punishment. Individual involvement made no difference; being German was all it took to be blamed. With the uncovering of the thousands of concentration and death camps, the German people were held responsible not only for the onset of World War II, but also a war meant to eliminate those deemed

² Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007), 17.

³ Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Metropolitan, 2006), 311.

⁴ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 20.

unfit to live. Although traditionally seen as victims of warfare, women were transformed into a means to affect the population as a whole.

Crime and violence was rampant in the immediate aftermath of the war. In July 1945, U.S. Ambassador Robert Murphy concluded that the “majority of the eligible female population” had been violated in some manner.⁵ Statistics of rapes committed during this period vary; it is impossible to know the exact number since many went unreported. As few as 20,000 or as many as one or even two million may have occurred.⁶ From January to May 1946, the region of Halle-Merseburg experienced “34 murders, 673 robberies, 123 stolen cows, 212 assaults and injuries, and 162 rapes” by Soviets.⁷ The frequency and multitude of these crimes indicate troops at this time cared little about reconstructing the country after a brutal war. This also demonstrates that soldiers were not held accountable for their actions by Soviet officers. In fact, commanders sympathized with their soldiers, who had endured six harsh years of war, and allowed them to vent their frustration and emotion.⁸ This eventually led to an outbreak of violence that was almost impossible to quell. Women were gang raped by soldiers who would form lines and wait their turn. The bodies of one woman and her daughter were split from the stomach to the anus as the result of such treatment. Others were killed immediately after being used for sexual pleasure.⁹ No woman in her right mind would venture out at night for fear of being violated by groups of men drunkenly wandering the streets. Railway crossroads in particular were treacherous. The Lehrter Bahnhof in

⁵ Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 1995), 80.

⁶ Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920-1950* (New York: Oxford UP, 1995), 192.

⁷ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 92.

⁸ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 79.

⁹ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 53.

Berlin, for example, was well known as a Russian “hangout” where men drank and looked for unsuspecting victims to pursue.¹⁰ Such violence reveals that the Red Army’s occupation of Germany was more than victors celebrating the end of war; it was the aftermath that resulted from completely vanquishing a former enemy.

Rapes in the Eastern Zone were indiscriminate and extraordinarily savage.

Women were treated as spoils of war; some Red Army men with specific tastes chose the prettiest ones that they could find to take to bed. The narrator of *A Woman in Berlin* elucidates that “fat means beautiful, the more a woman there is, the more her body differs from that of a man.”¹¹ Most of the time, however, it did not matter whether a girl matched up with a soldier’s perception of an ideal woman. In fact, some women were thought to be “too German-looking,” which added to their level of violence.¹² Upon first encountering these women, Soviet soldiers were appalled to see the luxury in which Germans lived. The women who had been partly responsible for the ruin of the Russian homeland wrapped themselves in silk and fur, wore makeup, and walked about in flashy high heels.¹³ Russian thirst for revenge was fueled by this jealousy of German extravagance. It invoked a rage in the occupiers that can be likened to a bull that chases objects that are red. Numerous women, whether they were German, Jewish, or Polish (and thus Soviet allies), and regardless of whether they were young or old were violated.¹⁴ This lack of preference reveals that such sexual violation did not arise from sexual desire. Rather, it was an unsystematic mass assault on a population that was

¹⁰ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 89.

¹¹ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*, 59.

¹² *Ibid.*, 64.

¹³ Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 318.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.

perceived to be all the same and equally deserving of punishment. Women were the physical embodiment of Germany, and were thus the targets of collective Soviet anger.

Fueling the Russian Rage

Many factors contributed to the outbreak of violence on the German population; one of which was the Soviet perception of Germans. Propagandistic messages provoked anger by invoking images of German brutality during the war. They encouraged soldiers not to forget the damage the Nazis had caused on the Eastern Front. One poster reminded each Red Army soldier that the “hour of revenge has struck!”¹⁵ These messages made soldiers believe the purpose of their occupation mission was to seek retribution for the wrongs the Germans had committed, and not to aid in reconstructing the country. Newspapers back in the Soviet Union claimed that soldiers were disciplined with high levels of military and political preparedness and were above the need for bestial revenge, yet the reality was a much different picture.¹⁶ Indeed, how could a message of peace and compassion be understood when soldiers were told that “every farmhouse on the way to Berlin is the den of a fascist beast.”¹⁷ Stalin himself is said to have informally encouraged his generals to drive his men to commit acts of revenge.¹⁸ Such directives were confusing: one component enabled soldiers to fulfill their desires of vengeance and the other depicted the noble, gentle soldier willing to sacrifice his own welfare in order to help the misguided enemy. In the end, the former won out. The Red Army felt as though they were dealing with a threatening people; a people that would never rest until they had destroyed the Russian homeland. The Germans appeared “unable or unwilling” to

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 101.

¹⁷ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 52.

¹⁸ Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 312.

believe what had happened during the war.¹⁹ This indicated to many Soviets that they were not remorseful for their actions and would not hesitate to commit them again if the desired circumstances arose. Many Germans saw themselves as victims of the Nazi regime and rejected the guilt forced upon them by the Allies. Through this mentality, it became clear that if the Soviets failed to “scare them now, there will be no way of avoiding another war in the future.”²⁰ In this the Red Army succeeded; not only did soldiers invoke a reign of terror, they sought to destroy any hope that had existed in German survivors to rebuild their country in peace.

The influence of alcohol in Soviet-occupied East Germany was also a component that affected violence towards women. The vast quantity and great potency of the alcohol in Germany contributed to make an environment that lacked moral discretion. Of all the Allies, the Soviets were known for their drinking binges and with that trait accompanied extreme destruction. At one point, the Socialist Unity Party (SED) women’s committee reported that drunken soldiers would climb on trains in the middle of the day, steal food and belongings, and violate women.²¹ Under the influence of alcohol, soldiers were difficult to control, especially when they were not in the presence of their commanding officers. As a result, violence reached a pinnacle of such intensity that there were even incidents of soldiers shooting each other.²² This brutality translated into interactions with German women. A majority of reported rape victims said that their assailants were drunk at the time of their encounter.²³ A soldier became another man

¹⁹ Grossman, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 31.

²⁰ Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 312.

²¹ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 89.

²² *Ibid.*, 112.

²³ Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 193.

when he was not sober; he lost perspective and his wild mood dictated a brutal and bloodthirsty behavior. When out drinking, Soviets traveled in groups; such numbers made it hard for any girl to escape once the men had struck upon the idea to harm her.²⁴ This group mentality alleviated individuals of any guilt that would accompany a crime under normal circumstances, which heightened the level of brutality considerably. Alcohol enabled the pent up anger of Red Army soldiers to manifest itself in such a catastrophic manner that German civilians stood little chance against its negative effects.

The final and most prominent element causing Soviet misbehavior was a desire for revenge. The first encounter of a group of soldiers with Germany, whether it be the arrival of the Russians in Berlin right before the end of the war or when new troops were shipped in to replace older ones in 1946 and 1947, always involved rape and plunder.²⁵ This pattern proves that Soviet brutality was not the result of one particular band of fighters, but rather the prominent aggressiveness and defensiveness associated with first time duty abroad. The Russian homeland had been invaded, raped, and looted by the Wehrmacht, and Soviets were wild for revenge. A journalist reported on the climate that he perceived to be emanating among occupation soldiers: “the taking of the enemy into and upon oneself...devouring the enemy through his fetish - carrying his weapons, wearing his scalp, taking his women. All this was a way of obliterating the enemy....”²⁶ Nazi motives for war were aimed at preserving “Aryan” racial superiority, merely defeating this group was not enough; Soviet troops felt like they had to destroy every vestige of this thought process to prove which race was truly exceptional. There was an

²⁴ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 113.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁶ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 62.

impersonal violence of battle. In a war setting, soldiers were expected to kill complete strangers, and through such disregard for others, sexual violence was transformed into an act of aggression.²⁷ The circumstances under which warfare was conducted by no means could be defined as normal. There existed a different set of rules outlining what was permissible, and in most cases such guidelines were overlooked. This was what changed murder into a noble deed of defending one's country and transformed rape into an acceptable act of male domination. Although such violations directly affected women, there was a double impact that also affected men. Many rapes occurred in public, especially in front of husbands, lovers, and fathers. While women were being dishonored, men were "symbolically castrated" in that they were unable to defend female purity.²⁸ This emphasized the message that German men were now powerless; reduced to creatures that were unable to intervene to prevent this intimate form of degradation. Women were used as an outlet for retaliation and revenge on the German people.

German Reaction

Many Germans were powerless to react to the horrors that were occurring throughout the country. Soviet forces permitted German police rudimentary weapons such as clubs to maintain order in towns, but were forbidden from using them against Allied soldiers. Law enforcement officers intervened during instances of sexual violence at their own risk; Soviet soldiers had few qualms about shooting a man who stood in his way of pursuing a woman.²⁹ Germans had their feet knocked out from underneath them, so to speak, with this power denied to their governing bodies. Victims were completely

²⁷ Carol Rittner, and John K. Roth, eds., *Rape: Weapon of War and Genocide* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2012), 45.

²⁸ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 114.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

on their own when it came to preventing rapes and bringing perpetrators to justice. If a woman was able to prove inappropriate contact had occurred, which was a difficult feat in itself, rapists were given back to Russian commanders who usually did little to punish them.³⁰ This led to a wide range of responses in the form of communal action, resistance, and defense mechanisms by the German people.

German organizations played an important role in providing assistance and information to the public. Venereal disease was a rampant “plague on the population” that affected nearly everyone. In 1946, more than sixty percent of the community in Saxony had some form of sexually transmitted infection.³¹ With penicillin not being available until late 1945, and impossible to get in mass quantities, other measures were taken to aid in maintaining women’s health. New clinics were devoted to stopping the spread of disease. Female workers in the food industry, hotels, and stores were required to get monthly exams to ensure that they stayed healthy.³² The German population accepted that it had little control over what was happening, but nonetheless tried to alleviate the dangers associated with Soviet attacks and make them less traumatic. Educational programs proved valuable in keeping the public informed of the dangers of unprotected sexual intercourse. Films, exhibitions, and lectures in combination with night clinics open twenty-four hours a day provided safe havens committed to the well-being of women.³³ In regard to unwanted pregnancies resulting from the violence of warfare, women had few options. The German legal code’s paragraph 218 continued to be enforced after the war, preventing abortions and forbidding the handling of the drugs

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 97.

³² Rittner, Roth, *Rape as a Weapon of War*, 89.

³³ Ibid.

necessary for performing such a procedure.³⁴ Many believed that killing the unborn children of women would lead to jeopardizing the already endangered German future. From a Soviet standpoint, impregnating German women also served to spoil the purity of the German race, which the Nazis had worked so hard to keep pure. Some doctors decided to place this paragraph aside in light of the circumstances in which women came to be pregnant.³⁵ Those who were not fortunate enough to encounter a doctor willing to perform an abortion relied on illegal and unsanitary means of ridding themselves of their offspring. In Berlin alone there were 6,000 deaths resulting from abortion.³⁶ Though the act of removing a fetus was highly dangerous to the mother's health, it remained a method of resistance to the Russian invasion and a way to cope with the conditions that existed in the German homeland.

Informal methods of resistance existed varying on the basis of the individual and the situation. Physical violence was the most common method of retaliation to Russian attacks, but it often ended badly with Soviet soldiers overpowering and killing women and any others who came to their aid.³⁷ Other approaches were more creative in dealing with sexual violence. The members of one community hid all of their women in basements and attics and announced to the Russians when they arrived that all of the women had run away.³⁸ Another village set up a system in which community members would bang kettles and pots together once troops were spotted.³⁹ This alarm not only notified all inhabitants that danger was approaching, but it also placed public attention on

³⁴ Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 192.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*, 67.

³⁸ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 116.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

the Soviets. The whole town was aware of their notorious reputation and they were watching out for them. Collective awareness helped decrease the frequency of rape. Large gatherings of crowds discouraged soldiers from committing acts of sexual violence.⁴⁰ On a more individual basis, women devised their own schemes of averting the gaze of soldiers. It was commonly known that Soviet troops had a soft spot for children; giving them sweets and treating them with kindness. Some women took advantage of this knowledge and always carried a child wherever they went. Erna Beck, a Berliner, even secretly pinched her baby in order to convince an interested soldier that her child was sick and needed her help.⁴¹ Other women used clothing to disguise their age, gender, and appeal. Some dressed in dirty, baggy garments while others donned prim and proper apparel.⁴² This either disgusted men when their conquest looked foul and undesirable, or intimidated them by the air of authority adopted by their victims. Such crafty methods enabled a number of women to evade unpleasant experiences.

There was a fine line between coerced and consensual sexual encounters in the occupation zone. The range of these relations reflected a variety of motives. Many women deliberately sought out soldiers, preferring to live with men in positions of power to ensure their own protection. This was the case of the narrator in *A Woman in Berlin* who became the lover of a major in the Red Army. Not only did he have his own personal guards watch over her house, but he would also bring food and other supplies to help make ends meet.⁴³ In this way, women would barter for safe shelter and negotiate protection for their children and themselves through the use of their bodies. Other

⁴⁰ Ibid., 118.

⁴¹ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 61.

⁴² Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 117.

⁴³ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*, 54.

women offered themselves in the place of those they loved such as daughters, friends, and sisters.⁴⁴ These actions arose purely out of need to protect others from harm and to ensure their safe survival. Such women had to choose between two difficult situations: enduring sexual violation and living to benefit materially, or resisting and risking harm to oneself and others. These “choiceless choices” were a daily reality of life in the Eastern Zone, and Germans had no other option but to cope the best way they could.⁴⁵ This proved to be especially confusing when moments of genuine affection and desire were shared between victim and perpetrator. One woman in Berlin who was forced to have sex in a room with a Red Army soldier was surprised to develop feelings of “pity and warmth” for the lonely young man.⁴⁶ What started as a forced relationship changed over the course of time into something that was more difficult to define. Upon becoming more familiar with her captor, she was able to recognize him not as the bestial occupier, but as a fellow human who sought the same sources of comfort as she. Women endured a variety of relations with their Soviet occupiers and adapted the best they could.

Soviet Assertion of Authority

Soviet leaders finally recognized that the behavior of their soldiers was beyond the bounds of moral propriety, and that German perception of the Soviet Union was suffering as a result. Upon trying to catalyze change, Soviet politicians found that it was more difficult than expected to control the wild actions of their soldiers. Allowing extreme violence from the beginning of the occupation made it all the more difficult to reign in. Local commanders sympathized with their soldiers and allowed them to express

⁴⁴ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 53.

⁴⁵ Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: Ruins of Memory* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 12.

⁴⁶ Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 55.

their deep-seated need for revenge. They remained apathetic towards regaining control of their soldiers in order to ensure the safety of a people that that they had been conditioned to believe were not worthy of any mercy.⁴⁷ General Kolesnichenko was not happy for having to punish his men just because of their “healthy sex drives” due to the “temptation and seduction” of German women.⁴⁸ Commanding officers in the Red Army were not ready to take responsibility for their troops’ actions or admit that their behavior had been out of line. Soldiers saw themselves as merely venting the frustration that had resulted from what the government had been telling them all along: obliterate the enemy. Communist authorities knew that they were suffering politically in Germany as a result of these soldiers. The bourgeois party used the troops’ violent behavior to its advantage, pointing to the chaotic social environment caused by Soviet brutality. These politicians asserted that these were the consequences of communism, and asked whether this form of government was capable of running Germany given all the destruction it had brought already.⁴⁹ The Red Army’s actions gave other German political parties leverage, and this directly inhibited the Soviet plan to mold its conquest into a country that reflected the same values. Hence, in June of 1945, the Soviet government replaced military commanders with government officials.⁵⁰ Although this motion was largely ineffective (government workers were not directly in charge of troops), it represented the beginning of change in Germany. The army had gone too far in the eyes of its government in exercising its revenge and had to be reined in.

⁴⁷ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 79.

⁴⁸ Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 316.

⁴⁹ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 95.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

In the summer of 1947, the Soviet Union made another effort to restrain its soldiers. Top secret order number 009 issued on May 23 banned fraternization between Russians and Germans.⁵¹ Now any form of contact was defined as immoral behavior and not to be tolerated. Segregation was deemed the only solution to changing inappropriate sexual behavior. Soldiers did not embrace this sudden change in lifestyle. The government was changing its policies; originally encouraging integration in the form of violence, it was now condemning men for following such enabling advice. Although separation was a difficult feat to accomplish, it was made possible through law enforcement. In Magdeburg, men needed written permission to visit German apartments or else they would be “severely punished.”⁵² The Cadres Department of Soviet Central Committee would send soldiers home if they disobeyed this order. Such was the case in *A Woman in Berlin* when one of the narrator’s lovers is “reassigned” to work back in the Soviet Union.⁵³ With these enforcements, the Soviet Union was able to regain some measure of control and was successful in affecting the brutality that existed in the Occupied Zone.

The motivation behind Soviet government involvement in Germany arose from a desire to further its own interests rather than to protect the well-being of its former enemy. Lack of discipline among the ranks of soldiers was a prominent problem in the eyes of Russian authorities. Officials claimed that soldiers “forgot that they were raised in the highest intellectual culture on earth” of Marxism, Leninism, and Stalinism.⁵⁴ Men were expected to demonstrate the superiority of Soviet life through respectable conduct

⁵¹ Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 317.

⁵² Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 93.

⁵³ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin*, 135.

⁵⁴ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 95.

and were blamed for their drunkenness, rape, and assaults on German citizens. The government, regardless of its self-interest, was finally making an effort to change the conditions of its occupation. The threat of the Cold War also made Soviet-German contact more suspicious. Officials worried that soldiers would turn into traitors to their country; yielding to bourgeois ideology because of their interactions with the German population.⁵⁵ Since it was clear that the Communist Party in Eastern Germany was not gaining popularity, separation was necessary in order to prevent Soviets from losing faith in their own governing body. March of 1949 brought with it more laws from the Soviet government. A directive was issued to increase punishment for the rape of German women. The penalty was considered draconian: between ten and twenty years of hard labor.⁵⁶ This was the clearest message issued by the Soviet Union directed towards their soldiers. Rape was no longer acceptable. Although such actions may have been made with the Soviet Union's own well-being in mind, they caused a change in occupied Germany that allowed women to finally be free from the threat of sexual abuse.

Rape was a weapon of war used to demolish the German people not just physically but also mentally. It aimed to wipe out all resistance and hope of ever regaining the former prestige attributed to the Nazi regime. Sexual brutality during this specific time in history had a meaning that was much deeper than a victor's entitlement to the spoils of war. It was a violent response and an act of revenge on a country that had instigated a war that brought about unprecedented hardship and sadness. Enabled by propaganda from the homeland, alcohol, and a desire to exercise revenge, Soviet soldiers undoubtedly violated the majority of German women who survived the war. Those who

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 98.

could escape relied on their own wit and the help of organizations around them. It was not until 1948 that German women were virtually free from the threat of rape when Soviet troops were mandated stay within strictly guarded areas. Although this horrible period in German history did eventually come to a close, the fact that this Soviet rape and pillage ever occurred is proof that sexual violence plays a large part in warfare and during peacetime.

Conclusion

The conclusion of warfare in 1945 did not signify the immediate conclusion of violence within the countries that participated in the Second World War. The reconstruction of Europe was a daunting task, and the first order to be addressed was the administration of justice. The implementation of justice in countries that had been occupied by Axis powers posed an especially difficult problem. A deep division existed between those who had cooperated and collaborated with Germans and those who had worked against them. Now that the Allies had won the war, the former had opportunity to seek revenge. This was especially evident in France. Those who had assisted the Nazis in arresting, killing, and torturing their kinsmen were made to pay for their actions. Thus, the liberation of France also brought the liberation of years of built-up anger. Frontier justice, underground courts of the resistance, and ad hoc courts sought to provide an outlet for these feelings. For many, liberation was traumatic, and the scars left from this period never healed. Sex and sadism were often seen in accounts of post-war administration of justice. Women were especially susceptible to this type of treatment and received the brunt of public anger.

A special type of justice was reserved for women who had given their bodies to German soldiers. Those guilty of committing “horizontal collaboration,” received almost medieval punishment.¹ In his book, *The Purge*, Herbert Lottman points to an event that embodies the experience of many women accused of consorting with the enemy in this

¹ Herbert Lottman, *The Purge* (New York: Morrow, 1986), 16.

manner. A BBC reporter at Nogent-le-Rotrou described the scene on August 20, 1945. He found three thousand people gathered in the center of town eagerly watching the head-shearing of sixteen women, aged between twenty and sixty years of age. As each emerged from the barber's chair the crowd laughed and booed. Every woman was bathed in a tub before being paraded through the streets and subjected to more public humiliation. "There were good reasons for that," claimed the reporter.² Many believed women deserved this public shaming for becoming so intimate with men who were carrying out the systematic and mass destruction of so many people and places. A good portion of these women could have very well sided with the Nazi cause and informed them of partisan movements, but many women were also trying to find a way to survive in the variable wartime climate. As noted earlier, France was home to vibrant nighttime entertainment, which included brothels where prostitutes were trying to make a living. Outside of these establishments, women also independently sought out soldiers and gave their bodies in exchange for material goods in order to survive.

Many did not stop to consider the motives a woman would have for giving her body away, and even fewer tried to intervene to save these women from this extreme punishment. Herbert Lottman asserts that women guilty of "horizontal collaboration" served another function: to absorb the anger that would have otherwise resulted in bloodshed between partisans and collaborators. Even after the conclusion of war, we see women used as objects to serve a higher purpose in a man's world.

It is important to preserve the distinction that "horizontal collaboration" included a significant measure of voluntary behavior whereas the mass rape and abuse of women

² Lottman, *The Purge*, 68.

that took place during WWII occurred against the will of the victim. Women in both of these circumstances, however, were forced to endure the shame placed on them by society. The disgrace associated with fallen women presents an obstacle in understanding this history completely. I originally intended this thesis to follow testimonies and experiences of Eastern European women and their interactions with Wehrmacht soldiers. I discovered, however, that this documentation does not exist, or at least is not available to the general public. The fact that women did not come forward with accounts of their own sexual violation is indicative of the kind of culture that existed during and right after the war. Post-WWII Stalinist Soviet Union was xenophobic and misogynistic toward women, making it less likely for women to reveal their shameful past. After the conclusion of the war, Soviet soldiers who had been German prisoners of war were sent to gulags (forced labor camps) and treated as traitors for submitting to the Germans.³ This serves to emphasize the culture of fear and paranoia that existed in the Soviet Union. Interactions with the enemy were simply not tolerated, which contributed to women's silence when it came to discussing their past.

Even where history has revealed that forced sexual violence undoubtedly occurred, such as within Nazi concentration camp brothels, the survivor's shame (despite being a victim) prevents her from revealing the full story of her past. Before describing her experience, Halina Ragazzoni questioned her interviewer, saying that she "didn't know if I should be saying this on video."⁴ After receiving affirmation, she proceeded to describe a scene in Mauthausen where women forced into prostitution by the Nazis sat

³ Arnold Beichman, "Sorting Pieces of the Russian Past | Hoover Institution" (Hoover Institution: Stanford University. <http://www.hoover.org/publications/hoover-digest/article/7571>), accessed April 20, 2013.

⁴ Ragazzoni, Halina. Interview 27707. *Visual History Archive*. USC Shoah Foundation Institute. Web. 30 March 2013.

weeping and wondering how they could explain to their husbands that they had been untrue.⁵ Irene Berkowitz constantly repeated, “God forgive me” throughout her tale of assault by camp guards.⁶ After they had finished their dealings with Irene, the guards threatened to kill her if she told anyone about what had happened, so she kept silent for years.⁷ Elsa Breuer was “horrified” when she found out that it was “taboo” to talk about rape with other prisoners.⁸ These women’s experiences embody the culture that forbids open discussion about sexual violence.

Silence is a common theme when pursuing the topic of rape. Even over fifty years after the end of the war, these Jewish survivors have trouble relating their experience. In my experience viewing recordings of survivors at the USC Shoah Foundation, many women said that they either could not remember the exact circumstances under which they had been sexually violated (something that I find hard to believe due to the violent nature of these encounters) or related a story rich in detail about the life of a concentration camp prostitute and were reluctant to reveal exactly how they came to know so much about it. Thus even today, when relating their stories for the benefit of posterity, women who survived WWII find it difficult to overcome the guilt and social taboo against discussing sexual brutality.

War transforms human nature; it eliminates sensitivity to suffering and intensifies men’s sense of entitlement and superiority. In war, there is no victory for women, regardless of which side wins. This is especially true for the Nazi regime, where

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Berkowitz, Irene. Interview 15450. *Visual History Archive*. USC Shoah Foundation Institute. Web. 30 March 2013.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Breuer, Elsa. Interview 44511. *Visual History Archive*. USC Shoah Foundation Institute. Web. 30 March 2013.

masculine superiority was paired with the oppression of women. Although rape and sexual violence was not specifically encouraged in Nazi policy, it played an important role during the Second World War.

Nazi Germany produced conflicting and alternating messages regarding appropriate sexual conduct among Germans. In the early stages of the Third Reich, relations between “Aryans” and “non-Aryans” were closely monitored out of fear that mixing blood would ruin the purity of the “superior” race. Laws and regulations ensured that people of different ethnicities were separated and those of the desirable race were paired together and procreating for the good of the nation. During this process, Nazi society endorsed a specific prototype that every German woman was expected to embody. The ideal woman was a married mother of numerous children who maintained morality on the home front. With this, women were restricted to the domestic sphere. They were objectified as a tool useful only for carrying the promise of the next generation in their wombs, forever in the shadow of the glorified German soldier, who sacrificed his life for his country. With the advent of WWII, however, Nazi directives regarding sexual relations began to change, though they still offered little freedom for women. The modification of rules served to benefit the German soldier so that he was allowed and even encouraged to engage in pre- and extra-marital affairs as a means of releasing his sexual tension. Military brothels were set up for this exact purpose. Prostitution provided a means to control the spread of sexually transmitted disease, prevent the development of intimate relationships with the local female population, and maintain discipline within the ranks of the Wehrmacht. The German Armed Forces’ endeavor to foster these sexual relations often went directly against the crime of

Rassenschande, and resulted in the intermingling of “Aryans” and “non-Aryans.”

Despite their racial views, Nazi leaders applied their theory of the need to satisfy a man’s sexual drive to imprisoned workers. They established concentration camp brothels as a means to provide incentive to non-Jewish workers to work harder. Jewish and Eastern women were forced to serve as prostitutes and were thus also used for an additional purpose by the Nazis.

German commanders and soldiers in the Wehrmacht were unprepared for the experiences that they would encounter on the Eastern Theater of WWII. Environmental, organizational, and ideological factors played a part in the breakdown in morality in the East. Primitive physical conditions forced soldiers to change their priorities from battling the Bolshevik enemy to fighting to survive. Germany’s limited material resources and delay in mobilizing to a wartime economy resulted in a regression into less modern circumstances at the front. Wehrmacht soldiers were forced to revert to tactics used during the Great War. The organization and philosophy that governed the ranks of the Wehrmacht fighting force contributed to the harsh reality that existed on the Eastern Front. A tradition of harsh Prussian discipline was drilled into soldiers in an effort to instill obedience and transform ordinary men into highly skilled killing machines. Training regimens for soldiers were harsh and unyielding; many men complained of the excruciating circumstances they were forced to endure, but this training made German soldiers the most well-trained of any nation that fought in WWII. On the front, soldiers were expected to live up to the strict levels of obedience established in training and suffered harsh, draconian-like punishment if they failed to do so. The power of the military did not extend to soldier-civilian interactions, however. Many men exerted

power over non-combatants as a way of venting frustration and dealing with the harsh realities of the Eastern Front. The final and most powerful component affecting the level of brutality among German soldiers was Nazi ideology. Leaders of the regime molded troops to reflect and carry out their political agendas. Propaganda was made to infuse soldiers with a determination to eliminate the Bolshevik enemy, who did not deserve to inhabit German *Lebensraum* (living space). This ideology infused a hatred in soldiers that set the tone of the war in the East.

The hatred that was bred into Germans and manifested itself in the East was turned against them after the conclusion of the Second World War. The Soviet Union occupied Germany without mercy. The many emotions after seeing their country ripped apart surfaced in the form of sexual violence towards German women. The Red Army was the most brutal in late 1944 and early 1945, when troops were especially intent upon revenge and were encouraged to act on their anger from policies from above. This anger became slightly more restrained after VE-Day (May 1945), although this capitulation by no means brought an end to Red Army soldier's sexual violence. Government-issued propaganda encouraged soldiers to seek revenge upon encountering the defeated enemy and recalled images of suffering civilians to invoke anger. Alcohol also exacerbated the feelings of Soviet troops, causing the release of inner inhibitions. Germans were on the whole helpless to protect themselves from the widespread rape that plagued the nation. Despite the absence of formal governmental system in place for protection, Germans developed informal ways of protecting themselves. Clinics were set up to educate the population about sexual health and many young women disguised themselves to look older and undesirable to avoid the gaze of soldiers. Finally realizing how little control

Soviet commanders had over their troops and that their unchecked actions were damaging the image of communism, Soviet leaders issued directives in an effort to curb the outbreak of violence. Slowly order was restored to Eastern Germany, though not before Germans had experienced the full force of anger for instigating a war of epic proportions.

This thesis originally set out to disprove the myth that the German Wehrmacht was innocent of committing mass rape while being guilty of virtually every other crime imaginable.⁹ Due to the long-standing assumption that Nazi racial ideology prevented the intermingling of the “superior” German race with the “lesser” Eastern European races, this myth was rarely questioned. Given the dearth of unquestionable evidence proving that many Eastern European women were raped by the invading Wehrmacht troops, a firm conclusion in this case is out of the question. However, with a concrete understanding of the Nazi attitude towards sexual relations, the breakdown of morality in the East, and the reaction of the Soviet Union in light of this brutality, one can surmise the type of violence women were forced to endure. Through my research, it is my belief that mass rape did indeed occur between Wehrmacht soldiers and Soviet civilian women. Perhaps one day in the near future, this can be proved without a doubt.

A woman recounts her experience with sexual violence during a time of war:

They (the military) did whatever they wanted. They did terrible things and then they would kill you. If you were lucky, you were thrown into a mass grave. I spent one week in a communal grave, left for dead. Then a soldier noticed I was still alive and pulled me out. He said that they would kill me tomorrow. I told him to kill me now. I begged him to stab me in the stomach so I would die. But he let me go and even gave me some water..... They (the soldiers) even raped the corpses. They were like wild animals. I was raped by a soldier.... I was hiding in the bush when he found me. It was broad daylight. He took me while others were running away – I could not even scream. He said, "you are cockroaches with long

⁹ Omer Bartov, Atina Grossmann, and Mary Nolan, *Crimes of War: Guilt and Denial in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New Press, 2002), 12.

tails. We must kill women, we must rip them apart." I also saw terrible things. I saw one woman ripped apart and hung. One leg was in one place, the other leg in another.¹⁰

This could be an account given by a Jewish woman being tortured by Nazi soldiers after enduring a miserable existence at a concentration camp. This could also plausibly be a chronicle of an “ethnically alien” and “undesirable” woman living in the Eastern War Zone after her native village was invaded and destroyed by Wehrmacht soldiers. It even provides a semblance of what life could have been like for a German woman after the fall of the Third Reich with the Soviet Occupation. This narrative, however, is none of these things.

Chantalle was twenty-eight years old and two months pregnant when the Rwandan genocide erupted in 1994. The assassination of President Juvénal Habyarimana triggered attacks against the Tutsi minority by the Hutu majority.¹¹ The 100-day period between April 6 and July 16, 1994 resulted in the death of an estimated 800,000 to 1,000,000 people.¹² Between 250,000 and 500,000 Tutsi women and girls were raped.¹³ Military and civilian authorities endorsed and implemented the use of rape as a tool to eliminate the Tutsi race.¹⁴ Chantalle was one of the victims of this genocide; this quote symbolizes only part of what she experienced during this time.

This narrative calls our attention to the occurrence of sexual violence across time. Rape and warfare share an inherent connection that has existed as long as there have been

¹⁰ Dorothy Thomas, Director of the Women's Rights Project, and Janet, “Rwanda.” Human Rights Watch: Defending Human Rights Worldwide, http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1996/Rwanda.htm#P494_126020 (accessed April 20, 2013).

¹¹ Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, eds., *Rape: Weapon of War and Genocide* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2012), ix.

¹² “BBC News - Rwanda: How the Genocide Happened.” BBC – Homepage, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13431486> (accessed April 20, 2013).

¹³ Rittner, Roth, *Rape as a Weapon of War*, x.

¹⁴ Thomas, “Rwanda.”

disputes between opposing groups. Just as it is plausible to apply this situation to various types of women during WWII, it is also conceivable to place this event at various points in history. Sexual violence is not limited to the “race war” that took place between 1939 and 1945. It is also not an outdated concept that happened in the past. As proved by the Rwandan Genocide, the Bosnian Genocide, and countless other recent atrocities, rape is a reality women continue to face.

Even though sexual violence has long accompanied racial cleansing and warfare, it was not defined as a tool of destruction until recently. The 1996-1998 case brought by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) against Hutu mayor Jean-Paul Akayesu found that rape and sexual brutality “constitute genocide in the same way as any other act as long as they are committed with the specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a particular group.”¹⁵ The tribunal sought to address the purpose of sexual assault, and found it was often used for “intimidation, degradation, humiliation, discrimination, punishment, control or destruction of a person...rape is a violation of personal dignity, and rape in fact constitutes torture.”¹⁶ Rape has been so common in a war setting precisely because it is so effective in producing these effects.

Rape has so recently come to the attention of scholarship because it has often been overlooked. Due to its connection to war, sexual violence is often dismissed as a side-effect; something to be accepted and anticipated with the onset of battle. Cultural norms have minimized the damage it causes, leaving victims invisible. Thus, survivors of genocidal rape are re-victimized as they are left without support and understanding for their recovery. It is time to put aside the social taboos that shame women into silence. It

¹⁵ Rittner, Roth, *Rape as a Weapon of War*, xiv.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, xv.

is time to move beyond misogynistic cultures that target and use women as objects. It is time to create a world where women can live freely without the threat of rape.

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