

Maren Röger / Ruth Leiserowitz (eds)

# Woman and Men at War



A Gender Perspective on World War II and  
its Aftermath in Central and Eastern Europe

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# WOMEN AND MEN AT WAR

EINZELVERÖFFENTLICHUNGEN DES  
DEUTSCHEN HISTORISCHEN INSTITUTS WARSCHAU

28

Edited by  
EDUARD MÜHLE

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A Gender Perspective  
on World War II and its Aftermath  
in Central and Eastern Europe

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Maren Röger and Ruth Leiserowitz

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*Cover picture:*

*Young insurgents in a captured vehicle in front of the hospital  
in the Goszczyński-Street in Warsaw-Mokotów, August 1944  
(photographer: Sabina Żdżarska „Anna“)*

*Museum of Warsaw Uprising, Warsaw, MPW – IK/1711*

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## FOREWORD OF THE EDITORS

Modern wars do no limit themselves to the battlefields. Violence and shortages of resources also affect the interior, the home-front. This was true to an exceptional extent for the Second World War in Central and Eastern Europe, an area scarred by having been overpowered and seized multiple times and by the brutal occupations of German and Soviet aggressors. And then there were the inner-societal tensions and conflicts that followed, discharging themselves along ideological and ethnics lines. The war affected all generations, men, women, and children in especially drastic ways. Direct violence, being ruled by occupiers, and deportations affected men and women in and not in uniform; soldiers and civilians suffered from material and psychological hardship. Whole life-worlds were destroyed by the daily presence of war and the occupation regimes – often with long-lasting consequences.

At the front and on the home-front stood women and men whose experiences were gender-specific. Research about the occupations in Central and Eastern Europe have blotted out such everyday and gender historical questions for a long time, whereas fortunately in more recent times numerous research works have appeared and it has been our intention to gather them together. For this reason, a conference was held from the 31th March - 2th April 2011 in the German Historical Institute in Warsaw with the topic of “Dynamization of Gender Roles in Wartime: World War II and its Aftermath in Eastern Europe”. At this gathering, female and male historians (but also representatives of other disciplines) from different countries presented their reflections on this aspect of a social history of the Second World War. We would like here to thank once again all the participants in the conference. Our thanks include the organizational support we received prior to the conference from the administrative office of the GHI, namely from Grażyna Ślepowrońska, Edyta Turek und Dorota Zielińska, and the interns before and during the conference, Oskar Świdorski und Mike Plitt. In a special way we would like to thank the chairs of the panels and the speakers. Also we would thank especially Professor Jane Caplan, from Oxford, who contributed through her stimulating concluding comments to the sharpening of our deliberations.



This volume is a collection of the contributions to the conference. We would like to thank Professor Eduard Mühle for accepting this volume in the series of the German Historical Institute – a series that has a long tradition especially with regard to gender historical issues. For the willingness of the authors to be open to a re-working of their texts and following along with our time plan, we would like to thank all of them most cordially. Isabella Osenberg was as an intern helping in the final formatting. A special thank-you is due for Dr. Philip Jacobs who edited the texts as a native speaker with regard to grammar and style (while still allowing the voice of the authors to be heard), and he translated certain contributions.

MAREN RÖGER / RUTH LEISEROWITZ

## INTRODUCTION

### GENDER AND WORLD WAR II IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Did the war and post-war twisting lead to a deformed double helix?

In what has become a classic attempt to explore the interdependencies between war and gender roles, Margaret Randolph Higonnet and Patrice Higonnet introduced the image of a *double helix*. In geometry, a double helix is a winding spiral of two strands, but Higonnet and Higonnet used this metaphor to explain how the changing roles of women and men in the two World Wars of the last century did not automatically cause trouble for established gender relations. Although women were forced to fulfill functions that previously had been in the male domain, the distance to the male roles (which were also changing) remained. The World Wars, then, in a very specific and paradoxical way, led at one and the same time to both progress and stability in gender roles.<sup>1</sup>

The model Higonnet and Higonnet have offered is often referred to for explaining in general terms the dynamics of gender roles in the two World Wars. As a model, it is schematic. But does the metaphor still work despite the lack of any differentiation with regard to differing regions and time periods? Because of specific war and post-war experiences and policies, one could conceivably hypothesize that the metaphor of the double helix does not fit for Central and Eastern Europe during World War II and its aftermath.

Our thesis is rather: Even during the course of the war in Central and Eastern Europe, experiences, self-awareness, and roles were changed by the extreme situations, such that the helix was temporarily and uniquely

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<sup>1</sup> See Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L.-R. Higonnet, 'The Double Helix', in Margaret R. Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel, and Margaret Collins Weitz, eds., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 31-47, here 34-35.

deformed. In the time period following the establishment of the new Soviet and People's Republics (as a result of the war), the specific gender policies led to a continuation of these deformations.

From our perspective, Central and Eastern Europe is not simply a geographical category, but rather has substantive content in the sense that as far as gendered experiences and gender roles are concerned, there were clear differences with the West both during and after the war.<sup>2</sup> The Second World War distinguished itself through its great brutality. The aggressive policies of Germany forced almost all European countries into a war that soon extended itself worldwide, leading to an unbelievable loss of human life. Among the fallen were more than twenty million male and female soldiers, and yet thirty million civilians died as well.<sup>3</sup> Millions of people were forced to work as slave laborers, losing control over their bodies as well as family members and their homes through both the war and the post-war deportations. This war completely blurred the division between the frontline and the interior, although this development started in World War I.

The Central and East European theaters in World War II were notable in one sense for their brutality. This region, in fact, was in many ways quite distinct from the other theatres of war in Europe. Most Central and East European countries experienced not one, but in fact two occupying forces during the war, being either occupied by NS-Germany and the Soviet Union, or being occupied by Germany and then 'liberated' by the Soviet Union with the effect of becoming part of the socialist bloc in the Cold War. Furthermore, Central and Eastern Europe was the staging ground for the mass extermination of European Jews, and was the place where non-Jewish civilians were exposed to mass atrocities and deporta-

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<sup>2</sup> Claudia Kraft pointed out in 2008 that there were more intense efforts made in the 2000s to recount European history without going along an East-West dichotomy. See Claudia Kraft, 'Geschlecht als Kategorie zur Erforschung der Geschichte des Staatssozialismus in Mittel- und Osteuropa. Zur Einführung', in Claudia Kraft, ed., *Geschlechterbeziehungen in Ostmitteleuropa nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg: Soziale Praxis und Konstruktionen von Geschlechterbildern* [Gender as a Category for Researching the History of State Socialism in Middle and Eastern Europe. An Introduction, in *Gender Relations in Eastern Middle Europe After the Second World War: Social Practice and Construction of Gender Images*] (München: Oldenbourg, 2008), 1–21, here 3. Thereafter Kraft, 'Geschlecht'. Among the empirically based studies (in which however the category of gender plays a subordinate role), are: Tony Judt, *Postwar: A history of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006). Thereafter Judt, *Postwar*. Concerning the conceptual considerations, see Ulrich Herbert, 'Europe in High Modernity. Reflections on a Theory of the 20th Century', *Journal of Modern European History*, 5, 1 (2007), 5–20.

<sup>3</sup> The discussion about numbers is still not finished. For this reason, we decided to give only approximate numbers.

tions. The policies of the occupiers to a large extent ignored the sex of the civilians. This was especially true in the extermination of European Jewry. In this case, the Germans aimed at a group defined by racist categories, regardless of their age, sex, or class affiliation. Yet the instruments of terror used against gentiles (mass killings, deportations, etc.) also affected both sexes. Among the deported slave laborers from the Soviet Union in 1944, 51% were women.<sup>4</sup> The percentage of Slovakian and Polish women was also comparatively high (44% and 34% respectively).<sup>5</sup> While so many men and women fell victim to the occupiers' policies, there were also men *and* women who participated in the struggle against the invasion. The number of women engaged in the armies and partisan movements reflects the high level of internal mobilization. During the war, women in Central and Eastern Europe also came much more clearly into focus than those in the West because of their resistance to the occupiers' repressive measures.

The gender historical dimension of the Second World War in Central and Eastern Europe up to now has often come up short in research. As Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur have stated in their important volume (one of the first transnational attempts at a gendered war history in Eastern Europe):

“Given the enormous English-language literature on the two world wars, it is perhaps surprising how small the share of studies on Eastern Europe is. Moreover, the literature of the world wars in Eastern Europe has heretofore focused almost exclusively on traditional military-diplomatic questions. Only recently have historians of the region turned their attention to cultural and social aspects of war, and gender analysis has remained marginal in this new trend.”<sup>6</sup>

While numerous studies have explored the occupation policies and also the effects of the occupying regimes on the respective societies,<sup>7</sup> the impact of

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<sup>4</sup> See Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany Under the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). The quotation here is from the original German edition: Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter: Politik und Praxis des "Ausländer-Einsatzes" in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches*, 2nd edn (Berlin: Dietz, 1986), 271. Thereafter Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter*.

<sup>5</sup> See Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter*, 272.

<sup>6</sup> Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur, 'Introduction: Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe', in Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur, eds., *Gender and War in twentieth-century Eastern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1-20, here 2. Thereafter Wingfield and Bucur, 'Introduction Gender'.

<sup>7</sup> See for Poland e. g. Jan T. Gross, *Polish Society Under German Occupation: The General Gouvernement, 1939-1944* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Waclaw Długoborski, 'Die deutsche Besatzungspolitik und die Veränderungen der sozialen Struktur Polens 1939-1945', in Waclaw Długoborski, ed., *Zweiter Weltkrieg und sozialer Wandel: Achsenmächte und besetzte Länder [German Occupation Policies and the Changes to the*

World War II on gender relations and gender roles in Central and Eastern Europe has generally been treated as a rather marginal issue.

These studies are unsatisfactory because they tend to overlook how the *homo socius* (Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann) acted in many of his/her social roles as they were profoundly affected by the war.<sup>8</sup> The reality of war, with its deaths, separation from partners and families, and deportations clearly influenced relationships, one's performance as a father or mother of a family, or as a partner, etc.<sup>9</sup> Social groupings in the village or in the city neighborhoods fell apart as well. The extreme situation of the war also influenced the values and norms, which are themselves always gendered and which were in many cases deeply shaken during the war.

The neglect in previous efforts is unacceptable for a second reason: the Second World War, with regard to gender roles, put in motion in Central and Eastern Europe a development which found a continuation after 1945. We argue that in the post-war history of this region, this deformed helix did not untwist and return to form, but stayed deformed for a while. First of all, the consequences of the racial and political persecution that was carried out in Eastern Europe with unbelievable brutality were much more dramatic. What comes to mind first are the demographic consequences, for which there is no comparison in the West. There were 20 million more women than men in the Soviet Union after the war – an imbalance that would take longer than a generation to correct.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, due to ideological, economic, and political necessities, women in the Soviet sphere of influence were not sent back into a role of secondary importance, but rather integrated.

It is here that one can see a further significant difference to Western Europe, where the lack of a work force was offset through the recruitment of migrants. In the East the individual states did not capitalize on the female population only after the war, but instead they drew on the vast mobilization of the female population that had taken place during the war. Altered gender roles during the war were not dispensed with in order to be changed yet again by the Soviet system, but instead they were carried over into the post-war society. In general awareness, the role of politicized and fighting women was present as never before, which is why in general there

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*Social Structure of Poland 1939-1945*] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 303-63.

<sup>8</sup> See Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, reprint (New York: Anchor Books, 1990). Thereafter Berger and Luckmann, *Construction*.

<sup>9</sup> See Berger and Luckmann, *Construction*.

<sup>10</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, 3.

was little social resistance to the new role for women. The number of men following traditional role behavior was few for demographic reasons, but such behavior was nevertheless still partially valid as a preferred model. A direct demographic consequence of the war is captured in the term “youthification” (Tony Judt) and this reality had a significant relevance for the gender roles after 1945.

It is an established fact that a targeted promotion of women was introduced and women were deemed as equal, however not treated as equal political subjects, because differences and forms of discrimination remained. In the Soviet and People’s Republics these had different gradations.<sup>11</sup> Through integration in many areas, women were indeed much more actively present in the society; there were, therefore, fewer spheres that were divided by gender. Having said that, later on new gender domains did develop. For example, the groups in typically female professions remained far below the pay level of the traditional male jobs. What increasingly came to be was a greater discrepancy, since women formally fulfilled many duties, but nevertheless were not equal. Below the declared tier, a high measure of social discrimination was taking place. The position of men could only be protected by massive governmental backing.

Among these contradictory policies one finds a disregard of certain female and male accomplishments during the war. Only a behavior during the war that conformed to a Soviet norm was built up into a role model. In the case of other behavior, for example, participation in the ‘false’ underground movement, layers of taboos were imposed upon it. Up until the breakdown of the Eastern bloc, the men and women who had been important agents in wartime, e.g., in partisan movements or para-governmental armies, these people were politically instrumentalized after 1945 or excluded from public commemoration, depending on the political aspirations of the communist leaders.<sup>12</sup> Further, the memories of those who fought in wartime became highly standardized and attempts were made to keep politically unwanted aspects out of public discourse. This was also true for many civilians’ experiences in Central and Eastern Europe. A history from below never really developed in the countries behind the Iron Curtain. It was only in the 1980s that some tendencies toward social liberalization were observed.

Thirdly, values – within which there are always gender specific components immanently present – were permanently shaken during the war.

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<sup>11</sup> See Kraft, ‘Geschlecht’, and the chapters in the respective volume for bibliographical remarks.

<sup>12</sup> For differences in commemoration politics see Wingfield and Bucur, ‘Introduction Gender’, 4.

Occupation meant a confrontation with differing values and a confusion of existing values. The obvious decriminalization of murder, plundering, harassment, etc. for the occupiers influenced the suppressed societies. Wartime profiteers who adapted to the new codes emerged in all of the occupied countries. Unfortunately, we do not have many written or oral memories from them. Also for this reason, there has been little discussion about the specific dimensions of moral brutalization during the wartime beyond a general statement that one can recognize it. The émigré Polish author Czesław Miłosz emphasized this quite early on in his influential work “Captive Mind” published in 1953.<sup>13</sup>

Post-war twisting II: Why have questions about  
the gender history dimension of the Second World War  
in Central and Eastern Europe largely failed to appear?

The study of occupation policies and the occupying regimes themselves have been numerous, yet what has remained on the margins is the impact of the Second World War on gender relations and gender roles in Central and Eastern Europe. Gender as one crucial category of a social history has seldom been applied to this subject. Not only has the gender history regarding Eastern Europe not given attention to this period, the general historiography of World War II has not attended to questions of gender in research about the Eastern European theatre of World War II. Many volumes with a gender history approach stop at 1939 and restart in 1945.

This has been to a degree true for the diverse publications and conferences of the German Historical Institute Warsaw which have examined the gender history of Central and Eastern Europe,<sup>14</sup> a tradition in which our volume generally stands, based as it is on a conference held at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw in 2011. This is also true for Eastern Euro-

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<sup>13</sup> Czesław Miłosz, *Captive mind* (New York: Knopf, 1953).

<sup>14</sup> See Johanna Gehmacher, Elizabeth Harvey, and Sophie Kemlein, eds., *Zwischen Kriegen: Nationen, Nationalismen und Geschlechterverhältnisse in Mittel- und Osteuropa 1918-1939* [*Between the Wars: Nations, Nationalism, and Gender Relations in Middle and Eastern Europe 1918-1939*] (Osnabrück: fibre, 2004). Thereafter Gehmacher, Harvey, and Kemlein, *Zwischen Kriegen*. The anthology by Claudia Kraft, also a former research fellow of GHI Warsaw, focused on “Gender relations in Eastern Europe after the Second World War”. It was based on a conference not held at the GHI, but Kraft herself puts it in any case in a line with the GHI-Gender history. See Kraft, ‘Geschlecht’, 6.

pean conferences about gender history – as in Riga 2008<sup>15</sup> or Moscow 2009<sup>16</sup>. They did not discuss gender and World War II.

There are multiple reasons why World War II in Central and Eastern Europe is still seldom discussed with regard to gender relations and gender roles. Without trying to have a homogenized view of this region, comprised as it is of countries with different historical, cultural, and religious backgrounds, we see different common factors for this slowness. Firstly, we identify the need in many of the different societies, after 1990, to tell their stories of World War II in a specific way. After decades of revisionist or sometimes faked public history with its restraints on remembering specific events (for example, the national underground movements), the master narratives of the wartime have had to be re-written. In many of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the new narratives written since 1989 have been aimed at telling a patriotic story, a story of a unified nation.<sup>17</sup> These stories have strong links and ties with the images and narratives of the pre-war history. Historiographical approaches, like cultural history or gender history, which focus on specific aspects of wartime, have been rarely applied, especially in the smaller countries. Connected with this is the still slow reception of the approaches of gender history in Central and Eastern Europe, especially in the field of war history, though one can see progress in recent years.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Irina Novikova, ed., *Gender matters in the Baltics* (Rīga: Latvijas Universitāte Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Natalia Pushkareva, Muravyeva, Marianna, and Novikova, Natalia, eds., *Zhenskaja i gendernaja istorija Otechestva: novye problemy i perspektivy* [Women and Gender History in the Fatherland: New Problems and Perspectives] (Moskva: IAE RAN, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> See for an overview about historiography after 1989 Sorin Antohi, Peter Apor, and Balazs Trencsenyi, eds., *Narratives Unbound: Historical Studies in Post-communist Eastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> See for the state-of-the-art in 2004 Andrea Pető, 'Writing Women's History in Eastern Europe: Toward a "Terra Cognita"?', *Journal of Women's History*, 16, 4 (2004), 173-181. Thereafter Pető, "Terra". From 2003, but in German language, see Carmen Scheide and Natali Stegmann, 'Themen und Methoden der Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte' ['Topics and Approaches of Gender and Women History'], in *Digitales Handbuch zur Geschichte und Kultur Russlands und Osteuropas* [Digital Handbook for the History and Culture of Russia and Eastern Europe], 2003, available at <http://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/578/1/scheidestegmann-frauengeschichte.pdf> (last visited 22 February 2011). There one also finds additional references to literature about the determination of the position. See also Dietlind Hüchtler, 'Zweierlei Rückständigkeit? Geschlechtergeschichte und Geschichte Osteuropas' ['Two-folded backwardness? Gender History and the History of Eastern Europe'], *Osteuropa*, 58, 3 (2008), 141-44. Concerning individual countries, see Andrea Pető and Judith Szapor, 'The State of Women's and Gender History in Eastern Europe. The Case of Hungary', *Journal of Women's History*, 19, 1 (2007), 160-66. Mal-



Secondly, this delayed application of gender history approaches to Central and Eastern Europe has been accompanied by a reluctance to recognize memoirs, oral-history, and other forms of individual sources that are often the basis for the analysis of gender roles, mentalities, gendered values, etc. In many Central and Eastern European countries, the communist governments organized contests for individual memoirs about the wartime or the aftermath of the war, but the outcomes were always instrumentalized to serve the state's need according to the official historical policies. As a result, individual sources had been suspect for a long time. Only recently have changes started, and in some of the countries the history of everyday life under communism is booming.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the creation of more sources from women through oral-history interviews has just started in the last decade.

Lying crosswise to these findings are the research results about the extermination of European Jewry, since it was Poland that the Germans chose as its primary venue. After the groundbreaking works of Joan Ringelheim, Lenore Weitzmann and Dalia Ofer, the category of gender has been addressed in more and more English-language investigations about the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, even though some scholars have refused to introduce the category of gender in order to avoid splitting up the victims who had been persecuted for specifically racial reasons.<sup>20</sup> As it is, during the last twenty years information has become available on the importance of the category of gender in understanding the mechanisms of discrimination inside and outside the ghettos and camps as well as in the processes of remembrance.

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gorzata Fidelis, 'Diverse Voices: Women and Gender in Recent Polish History and Historiography', *Aspasia*, 3 (2009), 233-44.

<sup>19</sup> Compare regarding informal economy e. g. Włodzimierz Borodziej, Jerzy Kochanowski, Joachim von Puttkamer, eds., 'Special Issue: Hidden Paths Within Socialism', *Journal of Modern European History*, 8, 2 (2010). For Poland see e. g. Barbara Klich-Kluczevska, *Przez dziurkę od klucza: Życie prywatne w Krakowie (1945-1989)* [*Through the Keyhole. Private Life in Kraków (1945-1989)*] (Warszawa: Trio, 2005). The book was published in a series of books dealing with every-day-history.

<sup>20</sup> A summary of these arguments can be found in Dagmar Herzog, 'Introduction', in Dagmar Herzog, ed., *Lessons and Legacies VII: The Holocaust in International Perspective* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006). See also Joan Ringelheim, *Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research*, in Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman, eds., *Women in the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 373-418.

## (Dis-)Continuities: World War I – Inter-war Period – Post-war Period

Gender history research regarding Central and Eastern Europe has in most cases held to the traditional political stopping and starting points of 1939 and 1945. This happened for the memory-cultural reasons mentioned above, as well as on account of the research logic of specialization and the pragmatic decisions within a research field. What is commonly in short supply are studies of the continuities and discontinuities of societal developments that consider the extreme situation of war in a larger context. There have been studies about the Third Reich and its aftermath by researchers like Elizabeth Heineman or Dagmar Herzog, who have shown us the wide acceptance of premarital sex in the course of NS-Germany,<sup>21</sup> yet we know little about these questions in the Central and Eastern European countries. Among others, Heineman and Herzog argue that in regard to a history of morality and sexuality, a parallelism of political and moral breaks should be doubted – an important argument we think. Far too little research has been done regarding changing moral values in relation to sexuality. Furthermore, if we ask about specific female experiences (like the acceptance of abortion in the pre-war period, in wartime, and the continuities or discontinuities in the aftermath of the war), we have answers on hand for only a few Eastern European countries.

Research has focused rather on the two World Wars. Diverse studies have conclusively shown that World War I confused dominant gender roles: Having to replace the men who were fighting, more women than ever became the bread-winners for their families by working outside the home, e.g., in factories.<sup>22</sup> In addition, women worked behind the fronts as nurses or auxiliaries, some of them becoming the stuff of legend.<sup>23</sup> At a more general level, World War I blurred the distinction between the front and the interior so completely that since then the latter has often been

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<sup>21</sup> See Elizabeth D. Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> See e.g. for Great Britain Penny Summerfield, 'Gender and War in the Twentieth Century', *The International History Review*, 19, 1 (1997), 2-15; Gail Braybon, and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in two World Wars* (London: Pandora, 1987).

<sup>23</sup> See Karen Hagemann, 'Heimat - Front: Militär, Gewalt und Geschlechterverhältnisse im Zeitalter der Weltkriege', in Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, eds., *Heimat-Front: Militär und Geschlechterverhältnisse im Zeitalter der Weltkriege* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2002), 12-52, here 22. The book was also published in English: Karen Hagemann, and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, eds., *Home/front: The Military, War, and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2002).

referred to as the ‘home front’, meaning that the war with its hardships affected not only the male fighters. As a result, World War I is extremely important when discussing changes in the gender roles in World War II. For this reason, many contributions in the field of war-studies from a gender point of view have chosen to take an integrated perspective on both World Wars.<sup>24</sup> In one of the few English language publications on this topic in Eastern Europe, Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur chose to use an integrated approach.<sup>25</sup> When speaking about a gendered history in Central and Eastern Europe, the state of research regarding gender and World War I differs from country to country. For some of the countries concerned, we have to remember and recognize the importance of the national movements in the processes of the foundations of the national states, something which overshadowed the women’s rights movements. For example, the essays in the books of Sophia Kemlein et al. clearly show this.<sup>26</sup>

### Aims and Limitations of this Volume

One of the aims of our volume is to provide insights into the field of gender and war studies with regard to different Central European countries. These have been provided by researchers at research institutions in the various countries, by researchers with an academic or cultural background in the region of their research who have emigrated from that area, and by researchers from the international community. Unfortunately, the researchers’ knowledge of the literature is normally limited by his/her knowledge of languages, so the intention of this volume is to provide an insight into academic research and discussions on World War II from a gender perspective in the respective countries.

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<sup>24</sup> Especially regarding German history this became quite popular. See beyond the mentioned e. g. Birthe Kundrus, *Kriegerfrauen: Familienpolitik und Geschlechterverhältnisse im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg* [Wives of Soldiers: Family Policies and Gender Relations in the First and Second World War] (Hamburg: Christians, 1995); Ute Daniel, ‘Zweierlei Heimatfronten: Weibliche Kriegserfahrungen 1914 bis 1918 und 1939 bis 1945 im Kontrast’ [Two Different Home Fronts: Women’s War Experiences 1914 to 1918 in Contrast to 1939 to 1945], in Bruno Thoß and Hans-Erich Volkmann, eds., *Erster Weltkrieg – Zweiter Weltkrieg: Ein Vergleich. Krieg, Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung in Deutschland* [First World War – Second World War: A Comparison. War, War Experience in Germany], 2nd edn (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005), 391-409.

<sup>25</sup> See Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur, eds., *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). Thereafter Wingfield and Bucur, *Gender War*.

<sup>26</sup> See Gehmacher, Harvey, and Kemlein, *Zwischen Kriegen*.

When trying to give an overview of the extensive topic of gender and World War II in Eastern Europe, one could arrange this according to different categories, for example, the state of research in the different countries or languages. But a severe imbalance is observable amongst the academic communities in the different countries. Although we are unfortunately not able to trace all native-language debates in Central and Eastern Europe, it seems that the most vivid discussions about gender and World War II in this region are published in English- or German-language anthologies. Other historiographies, among them the Polish, have until recently only marginally integrated questions of everyday life and gender relations with regard to World War II.<sup>27</sup> With regard to Russia in the last decade, primarily regional research has been done on women and their role in the 'Great Patriotic War', focusing mainly on peripheral regions.<sup>28</sup> Prior to that, most of the Russian writing merely contributed to a heroic narrative of the Soviet people in the war where the representation of men and women was rather stereotyped.

Whereas many of the articles collected here are research results being published for the first time, most of them are being published in English for the first time. Although all chapters deal with the question of gender

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<sup>27</sup> Pioneering: Katherine R. Jolluck, *Exile and Identity: Polish Women in the Soviet Union During World War II* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Yelena Aleksandrovna Bembeeva, 'Deyatel'nost' zhenshchin Kalmykii v gody Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny 1941-1945 gg' ['The Activities of Kalmykian Women in the Years of the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945'], Ph.D. thesis, Astrakhan State University, 2008, available at [http://disszakaz.com/catalog/deyatelnost\\_zhenshchin\\_kalmykii\\_v\\_godi\\_velikoy\\_otchestvennoy\\_voyni\\_1941\\_1945\\_gg.html](http://disszakaz.com/catalog/deyatelnost_zhenshchin_kalmykii_v_godi_velikoy_otchestvennoy_voyni_1941_1945_gg.html) (last visited 1 August 2012); Aleksandra Aleksandrovna Vdovina, 'Patriotizm i obshchestvennopoliticheskaya deyatel'nost' zhenshchin Urala v gody Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny' ['Patriotism and Socio-political Activities of the Women in the Ural during the Years of the Great Patriotic War'], Ph.D. thesis, Moscow University, 2005, available at <http://www.dslib.net/istoria-otchestva/vdovina.html> (last visited 1 August 2012); Natal'ya Nikolaevna Pozhidaeva, 'Zhenshchiny Kurskoy oblasti v Vooruzhennykh Silakh Sovetskogo Soyuza i v dobrovol'cheskikh voenizirovannykh formirovaniyakh v gody Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny 1941-1945gg' ['The Women of Kursk Oblast' in the Soviet Armed Forces and in the Voluntary Paramilitary Units during the Years of the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945'], Ph.D. thesis, Kursk State University, 2007, available at [http://disszakaz.com/catalog/zhenshchiny\\_kurskoy\\_oblasti\\_v\\_vooruzhennykh\\_silakh\\_sovetskogo\\_soyuza\\_i\\_v\\_dobrovolcheskikh\\_voenizirovannykh\\_formirovaniyakh\\_v\\_gody\\_velikoy\\_otchestvennoy\\_voyny\\_1941-1945gg.html](http://disszakaz.com/catalog/zhenshchiny_kurskoy_oblasti_v_vooruzhennykh_silakh_sovetskogo_soyuza_i_v_dobrovolcheskikh_voenizirovannykh_formirovaniyakh_v_gody_velikoy_otchestvennoy_voyny_1941-1945gg.html) (last visited 1 August 2012); Chetav Saida Yerestemovna, 'Zhenshchiny Adygei transformatsiya sotsial'noy roli v gody radikal'nykh peremen i v ekstremal'nykh usloviyakh Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny 20-40- e gg XX v' ['The Transformation of the Social Role of the Adygian Women in the Years of Radical Changes and under Extreme Difficulties'], Ph.D. thesis, Maykop State Technical University, 2005, available at [http://disszakaz.com/catalog/zhenshchiny\\_adygei\\_transformatsiya\\_sotsialnoy roli\\_v\\_godi\\_radikalnih\\_peremen\\_i\\_v\\_ekstremalnih\\_uslovi.html](http://disszakaz.com/catalog/zhenshchiny_adygei_transformatsiya_sotsialnoy roli_v_godi_radikalnih_peremen_i_v_ekstremalnih_uslovi.html) (last visited 1 August 2012).

and World War II and its aftermath, the pursuits are very different. They reflect not only individual understandings of gender history, but also academic cultures. In some cases, the texts reflect that some historiography is still working in ‘national contexts’, even to the point of having only limited access to international research literature. In some cases, authors limit themselves to women’s history – often representing the beginnings of what today is gender history in the U.S. or Germany.<sup>29</sup>

Bucur and Wingfield identified in their book that such a focus on female participation in historical events is an important first step in making female experiences visible.<sup>30</sup> This is also true for our volume. But our authors have gone further, following an apt statement of Andrea Pető in her 2004 essay: Please, let us talk about gender, and not only speak about women.<sup>31</sup> In sum, this volume historicizes concepts of masculinity and femininity, analyzing the gendered role models of men *and* women in armies and partisan groups. It also turns away from a gender history that *exoticizes* women and sets men as the norm. Since gender history often brings into view the norms, values, and self-understandings of the actors, ego-documents given in the first person play a special role. As a result, many contributors work with autobiographical literature or oral history interviews. Yet traditional administrative records also have a part to play.

Of course, this volume will not be able to untwist the *deformed double helix* in all its dimensions. In the following, we will present – against the background of the current state of research – four thematic blocks for this anthology: 1.) Gender Rules: The power of ideologically and autobiographically gendered interpretive models, 2.) Gender Roles and Gendered Identities in Armies, 3.) Gender Roles and Gendered Identities in Partisan Movements, 4.) Post-War: (Dis-) Continuities and Memories. At this point we will present short discussions of our four themes, then the remaining part of the introduction will emphasize the two different concepts of gender history that are found in the chapters.

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<sup>29</sup> See for a resume of American and German developments Karen Hagemann and Jean H. Quataert, ‘Comparing Historiographies and Academic Cultures in Germany and the United States through the Lens of Gender’, in Karen Hagemann and Jean H. Quataert, eds., *Gendering Modern German History: Rewriting Historiography* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 1-38.

<sup>30</sup> Wingfield, and Bucur, ‘Introduction Gender’, 4.

<sup>31</sup> See Pető, ‘“Terra“’, 175.

## Gender Rules: The Power of Ideologically and Autobiographically Gendered Interpretive Models

Until now, a book summarizing the gender history of World War II in Central and Eastern Europe has been almost an utopian hope. Up to this point, we have only had available some important pieces of a puzzle, each focusing on different regions and different aspects of men and women's roles, power structures, gendered identities, bodily concepts, representations and remembrance – just to name a few of the key concepts of gender history.<sup>32</sup> In the first section, the authors show (using various examples) the kinds of interpretive power that gendered explanatory approaches can generate. *Elizabeth Harvey* studies the resettlement process of the German minorities from Eastern and Southeastern Europe. With such relocations, the NS-leadership wanted to create ethnically pure territories. The goals and the process have heretofore been frequently described,<sup>33</sup> but now Harvey turns the attention to the gendered self-awareness of the actors and the ideologically driven accounts of the NS-media which was likewise founded on gender roles. The members of the resettlement commandos saw and staged themselves like a bunch of “wild freebooters and frontiersmen”. Harvey notes their heroizing tales and colonial-style descriptions of meetings with the aliens. Here one finds points of contact with her groundbreaking 2003 study about German women sent to work in the occupied Polish territories and who enjoyed the empowerment given them by the racial categories.<sup>34</sup> For the re-settlers of both sexes, the National Socialist concept of comradeship played a crucial role. Franka Maubach comes to a similar conclusion in her chapter about female auxiliaries in the German army.

While Harvey can show how truly present gendered narratives can be found in how the settlers saw themselves and how this worked together reciprocally with the NS-propaganda, in another contribution *Mara Lazda* considers the female and male role models of the occupiers as ideological bait in Latvia. She investigates the publications of both the German and Soviet occupiers, which offered in newspapers their image of a social and gender order (reaching back into Latvian traditions). This was done not

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<sup>32</sup> Classic: Joan W. Scott, ‘Gender. A Useful Category in Historical Analysis’, *American Historical Review*, 91, 5 (1986), 1053-75. For the different concepts, see one of the more recent introductions, for example, by Sonya O. Rose, *What is Gender History?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> See the chapters in Wingfield and Bucur, *Gender War*.

<sup>34</sup> See Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

least of all to gain the cooperation of the Latvians. She further shows how the gendered public discourse influenced individual narratives about the war. Using oral-history interviews she traces the impact of the occupiers' gendered speech and concludes that Latvians "repeatedly use gendered frameworks to recall their wartime experiences." How new role models were established *during* the war and which kinds of visual material and narratives were instrumentalized to spread the ideas, are crucial questions, but we have so far only a few answers for far too few countries. Here we would like to mention Elena Baraban's work on the re-activation of the symbol of "Mother Russia" in Soviet cinema during World War II as well as Susan Corbesero's research on the symbolic configuration and reconfiguration of femininity and the female image in the Soviet poster propaganda.<sup>35</sup>

*Andrea Pető* identifies as well the influence of gendered interpretative patterns. While Harvey and Lazda's papers in this volume focus on autobiographical or public media narratives, Pető traces the severe consequences of gendered assumptions in post-war Hungarian collaboration trials.<sup>36</sup> Female perpetrators, members of the pro-fascist Arrow-Cross Party, were rarely found guilty. Especially when claiming that they had been under the influence of a male person, judges gave them more lenient sentences. The aim was a reconstruction of the pre-war gender order, but it was also based on political needs: Communist leaders did not want to admit that there had been another political party that had mobilized women on a mass scale. Pető further discusses the "conspiracy of silence" regarding Hungarian women raped by Soviet soldiers. She concludes that remembrance frameworks in both cases, for the perpetrators and the victims, are highly gendered and serve among others things the construction of "emotional communities".

### Gender Roles and Gendered Identities in Armies

One of the large thematic blocks is gender conceptions and gender roles in the armies that either attacked Eastern European countries or defended

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<sup>35</sup> See Elena Baraban, 'The Return of Mother Russia: Representations of Women in Soviet Wartime Cinema', *Aspasia*, 4, 1 (2010), 121-38; Susan Corbesero, 'Femininity (Con)scripted: Female Images in Soviet Wartime Poster Propaganda, 1941-1945', *Aspasia*, 4, 1 (2010), 103-20, here 118.

<sup>36</sup> See for a gender-sensitive history of postwar collaboration in Czechoslovakia Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution Against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).



them. The historiography of the military, when it has integrated gender at all, has concentrated throughout the decades on women in the armies. German Historians Klaus Latzel, Franka Maubach and Silke Satjukow have argued in their reflection on female soldiers in a *longue durée* (from the Middle Ages to the present day) that the cross-dressing and arming of female fighters has always fascinated societies.<sup>37</sup> This is clearly reflected in an extensive historical literature about women in the some armies of World War II. Regarding the Red Army, there are academic studies describing the role of women in it.<sup>38</sup> But popular accounts also exist.<sup>39</sup> The fact that women served in the Red Army is widely known in many countries. In Germany, books of remembrance written by German soldiers often include stories of women in the Red Army, with their being mentioned merely as a tool for intermingling misogynistic and racist perspectives.<sup>40</sup>

Yet in fact, “German women auxiliary forces did not become the stuff of legend” as Elizabeth Heineman once put it.<sup>41</sup> Since the 2009 work by Franka Maubach, we finally have detailed information about the several hundred thousand female auxiliary forces in the German army.<sup>42</sup> In our

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<sup>37</sup> Klaus Latzel, Franka Maubach, and Silke Satjukow, ‘Einleitung’, in Klaus Latzel, Franka Maubach, and Silke Satjukow, eds., *Soldatinnen: Gewalt und Geschlecht im Krieg vom Mittelalter bis heute* [Female Soldiers: Violence and Gender during Wartime from the Middleages until nowadays] (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2010), 11-49.

<sup>38</sup> See the diverse articles quoted in Bucur and Wingfield, ‘Introduction Gender’, 19; Beate Fieseler, ‘Women as Comrades-in-Arms: A Blind Spot in the History of the War’, in Robert Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch, eds., *The People’s War. The Soviet Union During World War II* (Urbana-Chicago: University of Illinois, 2000), 211-34; and most recently Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>39</sup> One of the most influential is the interview book with Soviet women, among them former female fighters by Svetlana Aleksievich, first published in 1985 in Russian, and which has, up to now, been repeatedly reprinted and translated into other languages, among others in German, English, Finnish, Hungarian, and Polish. See Svetlana Alekseevich, *War’s Unwomanly Face* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988).

<sup>40</sup> See Regina Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen: Sexuelle Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutscher Soldaten in der Sowjetunion, 1941-1945* [Conquests: Sexual Acts of Violence and Intimate Relations of German Soldiers in the Soviet Union 1941-1945] (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2010), 115-16. Thereafter Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*.

<sup>41</sup> See Elizabeth D. Heineman, *What difference does a husband make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 45.

<sup>42</sup> See Franka Maubach, *Die Stellung halten: Kriegserfahrungen und Lebensgeschichten von Wehrmachthelferinnen* [Hold the Line: War Experiences and Life Stories of Female Auxiliaries of the German Army] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009). Gudrun Schwarz investigated in 1997 the role of the wives of SS-men and showed thereby the collaboration of both sexes in the war crimes (in the sense of psychosocial support on site). Compare Gudrun Schwarz, *Eine Frau an seiner Seite: Ehefrauen in der “SS-Sippen-*



volume *Maubach*, based on her monograph, discusses the specific dimension of women's service in the Eastern European theatre of war. Following Elizabeth Harvey's thesis about German kindergarten teachers and other women teachers in Warthegau, she argues that a number of the women enjoyed their superiority over the local men which the racist system provided them. Yet she also describes instances of discomfort with the return of traditional gender orders. Over and above that, Maubach discusses in general the possibilities and desiderata for a gender integrated research of the NS-occupation.

If the role of women in the Red Army has been at the center of interest, the gender roles of the men have been less scrutinized. Up to this point, there have been almost no attempts to examine the role and concept of men (as a gender category) in the Red Army during World War II. Karen Petrone, however, has shown in her interesting essay about "Masculinity and Heroism in Imperial and Soviet Military-Patriotic Cultures" that comradeship became a crucial concept in the bolshevist military propaganda in the period until 1939.<sup>43</sup> But a study similar to the one presented by Thomas Kühne in 2006 about the concept of comradeship in the German *Wehrmacht* in wartime is still lacking with regard to the Red Army.<sup>44</sup> It is this gap in the research to which *Kerstin Bischl's* paper turns. Bischl underlines the paradox that women in the Red Army have been analyzed, but the gendered identity of men has not been studied although they clearly outnumbered the women and thereby dominated the social space in the army for any woman who also served. She traces the male soldiers' behavior towards their families, but also their female comrades using ego-documents. Parts of her paper are in an interesting way mirrored by *Irina Rebrova's* paper that deals with the memories of Russian women regarding the war, among them women who had served in the Red Army.

The contributions from *Łukasz Kielban* und *Maren Röger* also address the issue of the male members of the army. Kielban deals with the (gendered) values in the Polish officer corps. Honor played a key role. Many Polish officers spent the war mainly in German captivity where they

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*gemeinschaft*" [*A Woman At His Side: Wives in the SS-Corps*] (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1997).

<sup>43</sup> See Karen Petrone, 'Masculinity and Heroism in Imperial and Soviet Military-Patriotic Cultures', in Barbara E. Clements, Rebecca Friedman and Dan Healey, *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 172-93.

<sup>44</sup> Compare Thomas Kühne, *Kameradschaft: Die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert* [*Comradeship: The Soldiers of the National Socialist War and the 20th Century*] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006). His ideas can be found in his English language work: Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler's Community, 1918-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

could not fight the enemy, but struggled with the psychological burden of living *in-waiting*. While they defended their (gendered) values in the camps, the outside world was being turned upside down by the war. After 1945, the older men were lost in a Polish society among young men and women who had witnessed the brutality and moral disorder of wartime and who had fought alongside one another, something which led as well to a new understanding of gender roles. In her essay, Röger takes into view the sexual contacts of German occupiers with local women. In the German sphere of power created by the occupation, sexual contacts between occupier and occupied were not private. Neither the occupiers nor the patriotically active occupied considered it a personal matter if a German occupier met up with a local woman. Polish underground groups and private persons watched, denounced, and punished women who got involved with Germans. The occupiers forbade the contact on racial grounds, but diverged greatly in their policies on punishment. The reactions ranged from imprisonment to the suggestion of marriage.

*Georgeta Nazarska* and *Sevo Yavashchev* present an integrated view of the Bulgarian army and the communist resistance movement. From the perspective of military history and women's history, they first of all document the number of women in the respective formations and, secondly, present their motivations.

### Gender Roles and Gendered Identities in Partisan Movements

Another large thematic block addresses the gender roles and gendered identities in the different partisan movements in Eastern Europe. The state of research concerning gender roles in the diverse partisan movements differs from case to case. Several studies deal explicitly with Jewish partisan movements and in the historiography of these movements aspects of everyday life have (since the 1990s) been consistently integrated, for example, the gendered power relations within the fighting units.<sup>45</sup> Conversely, some of the national partisan movements have never been analyzed from this perspective, even though their history was quite present in the new patriotic or nationalistic narratives after 1990 – that was after decades in which their history had no place at all in the former communist master

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<sup>45</sup> See among others the diverse publications of Tec Nechama, *Jewish Resistance: Facts, Omissions, and Distortions* (Washington D.C.: Miles Lerman Center for Study of Jewish R, 1997); Tec Nechama, 'Women among the Forest Partisans', in Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman, eds., *Women in the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 223-33.

narratives.<sup>46</sup> For the gender roles in partisan movements, memory and history are even more intermingled than with regard to the armies. The majority of the partisan movements have no written documents or transmitted conceptions of, for example, how women should be employed. As historians we strongly rely on memories, in writing and orally transmitted, as well as on visual material.

Ruth Leiserowitz, Barbara Wiesinger and Olena Petrenko demonstrate how to write a history of the partisans (using such sources) which integrates the category of gender. Ruth Leiserowitz's paper, a comparison between women in the ethnic and Jewish resistance movements in Lithuania, shows that the stability of gender differences, which existed in the pre-war period, was clearly broken up by the war, by the armed resistance, and by the underground insurgency of the post-war period. Although the experiences during the war were largely tabooed in the Soviet era, they remained in the collective memory. Since the end of the 1980s, the female veterans of the different partisan movements have played important roles in the memorialization and cultural-political functionalization of their respective histories.

Barbara Wiesinger, who presented in 2008 a monograph about the female partisans, discusses in this volume the revolutionary aspirations and the everyday life experiences of female fighters in Yugoslavian partisan units. The units were comprised of up to 15 percent by women, even though women living among men were suspected of having dubious sexual morals by those living in rural areas of Yugoslavia.

In Ukraine, however, the politization of the OUN-history made it impossible to develop a more or less objective account of the individual motives of the fighters. Petrenko argues that the suppression of such biographies in communist time found its weird continuity after 1989. Female fighters were heroized. Part of making them heroines was an exclusion of unpleasant elements found in their biographies. In the case of Ukraine, this might have been cooperation with Soviet security forces or participation in executions of civilians during the war. Already in the inter-war period, Petrenko argues, the OUN had many female fighters whose deeds were depicted as heroic efforts. Alongside radically minded young men, women were already media stars to help legitimate the fight.

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<sup>46</sup> This is true for the Polish case, where only some initial attempts have been made to integrate the female fighters' story and ask them about their experience. See Weronika Grzebańska, *Płeć i naród w Powstaniu Warszawskim. Kobięce doświadczenie w narracjach członkiń AK* [Gender and Nation in the Warsaw Uprising. Women's Experiences in the Narratives of Female AK-Members], Master Thesis, University of Warsaw, Institute of Sociology, 2010 (to be published in 2012). We thank the author for sharing her unpublished manuscript with us.

## Post-War: (Dis-)Continuities and Memories

Determining even a date for the end of war is not an easy task. Ruth Leiterowitz emphasizes that this is true for Lithuania and Vita Zelče says the same for Latvia. Andrea Pető points out for Hungary that in some parts of the country fighting was still ongoing, while in other parts collaborators were already being brought to trial. In general, in all Central and Eastern European countries, the German capitulation brought relief, but that was not the end of chaos, poverty, displacement, and political and moral confusion.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, values, which are always gendered in and of themselves, were deeply shocked during the war, something which had long-lasting effects after 1945.

A very concrete effect of war was the loss of so many citizens. *Barbara Klich* shows that the diminution of the Polish population during the war was one of the arguments in post-war public discourses about reproduction and abortion. Giving birth was considered a women's task in the reconstruction of the Polish nation as a socialist entity.<sup>48</sup> She further shows the influence of Catholic church. War led to a loss of whole populations, but especially to the loss of men. In all European countries, women outnumbered men after the war. As mentioned, in the Soviet Union women outnumbered men by 20 million, an imbalance which took longer than a generation to correct. The surplus of women – beyond the ideology – was a reason in Central and Eastern European countries for including them as fit for jobs previously considered as traditionally male.<sup>49</sup> *Vita Zelče* offers a further argument by pointing to the fact that Latvian women, while men were mobilized in war, went through professional training and were hence better skilled after 1945. In sum, her paper presents a broad picture of Latvian women during and after the war. Alongside the socialist ideal of the “new woman” (that was itself changing) women had to perform different roles in work life, political life and in the family. To make a complex situation even more contradictory, Zelče stresses the fact that external signs of femininity became an important value in the post-war Latvian Soviet Republic – something that had its parallels in Western Europe, but there it

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<sup>47</sup> See e.g. the contributions in Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, eds., *Life after Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe during the 1940s and 1950s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Thereafter Bessel and Schumann, *Life Death*.

<sup>48</sup> Compare for the legal context Małgorzata Fuszara, 'Legal Regulation of Abortion in Poland', *Signs*, 17, 1 (1991), 117-28.

<sup>49</sup> See for Poland Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

happened without conflicting with the new role model of the working women.

Last but not least, *Irina Rebrova* provides insights into gendered remembrance processes. On the basis of oral-history interviews – something that she classifies as a “fairly new phenomenon in Russia” – she reconstructs gendered patterns of war remembrances. In women’s narration, everyday life during the occupation plays a key role. Russian women stress individual experiences more than presenting a patriotic master narrative.

### Gender and Sex: the Intrusions of World War II

Our authors see the gendered dimensions of World War II and its aftermath in Central and Eastern Europe mainly under two aspects. Firstly, they see it with regard to values and societal norms and role models, which are themselves always gendered. Secondly, they see it with regard to bodily experiences. If one means by *gender* (as distinct from *sex*) the cultural construct around biological gender, bodily experiences still remain a core concept of gender history. Experiences of one’s own body in extreme situations are accordingly a recurrent theme. The theses and results collected in this volume can be briefly summed up in what follows using both these core concepts.

#### Gender: Dynamization Gender Roles in Central and Eastern Europe through World War II

All our authors see a dynamization of gender roles in World War II. Some of them argue for a substantial change in gender roles, initiated by the war. Wiesinger points to the fact that the war created chaos and destroyed communities of social life and social control. She argues that for Yugoslavia this anomy also enabled girls and women to transgress gendered norms. Georgeta Nazarska and Sevo Yavashchev show in turn for Bulgaria that while the political activity of female inhabitants increased after World War II, the war itself was the starting point for the activity. Also, established patterns of gendered hierarchies were deeply shaken. Some governments argued in fact that women had earned their rights as citizens through their armed service, as for example in Yugoslavia (Wiesinger). Nazarska and Yavashchev show that some women who fought in the Second World War “used this symbolic capital to continue their education and carve successful political and professional careers for themselves.” Overall, that means that women did not just become active after the war, but were motivated to do

so by the war and in the war. The mobilizations in Central and Eastern Europe of the female population after the war need to be interpreted as a continuation of the war mobilization.

As far as the Soviet Union is concerned, both persistence of the old and radicalization of the new can be observed. Irina Rebrova notes no progressive changes in regard to women's roles. In partisan groups and the army, traditional gender role models were applied so no change resulted. Having conducted interviews with mainly a rural population, she argues that women were severely frightened by the changing gender roles in World War II. Although women had to organize farming life after 1945,<sup>50</sup> they were content for the most part to return back to their traditional occupations. Bischl argues, however, that the concepts of masculinity were radicalized in World War II. According to her, "a chauvinist masculinity became hegemonic" which also influenced the post-war societal contract.

For the Soviet Republic of Latvia, both authors (Lazda, Zelče) argue that there was a severe shock to gender relations. Having been a traditional society before the war, the two separate foreign occupations led to fundamental changes: men were away as soldiers or were imprisoned, and Latvian women performed male roles. Zelče argues that the boundary between "men's work" and "women's work" disappeared as the war progressed, but at the level of official discourse the spheres were kept separate. After 1945, the policies of the socialist regime took deeper root and the role was changed by economic policies which planned for women to take on traditional male occupations. "The regime insisted that women accept the Soviet way of life", Zelce concludes. Although they made up the vast majority of society, they were forced to adapt to new role models. Yet not everyone was convinced. Even during the Soviet occupation in 1939, traditional gender roles were used by locals to shield themselves from Soviet regime and ideology (Lazda).

In Ukraine, also a Soviet Republic, a "specific fight for female resources" took place. The participation of women in the underground movement was mythologized and politicized by different sides. Those allied with Soviet power portrayed the women who fought in OUN and UPA as having been seduced by their surroundings – their partners, friends, and husbands. Pető observes a similar pattern during the collaboration trials in the People's Republic of Hungary. She even sees gender politics at hand in the courts which served two aims: firstly, to reconstruct gender hierarchies and, secondly, to discourage women from participating in the public sphere – a clear attempt to untwist and restore the *deformed double helix*, one can say.

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<sup>50</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, 3.

The society in the People's Republic of Poland was completely changed after the war. The German and Soviet occupiers had murdered millions, with especially the professional members of the society having fallen victim. Further, the multi-ethnic character of the country was lost. Another severe result was the profound shock to the moral fabric of large parts of the society.<sup>51</sup> A kind of paradox is described in Łukasz Kielban's case study on the imprisoned officers. They were kept away by force from the war and from the fundamental political and moral changes in their home country. They came back to their country deeply confused. After their return from their bubble existence in captivity, they formed "a veritable museum".

### Bodily Experiences

The war was an extreme situation – for the body as well. Experiences with one's own body under extreme conditions have accordingly been recurrent themes (e.g. Rebrova, Leiserowitz). A further interface is presented in gender specific experiences of violence. In the research, the concept of sexualized violence is now preferred over that of sexual violence. The intention is to bring into consideration that we are dealing with a variant of violence that is directed towards the sexual, but without sexuality being the central aim. Regarding sexual violence at the Eastern front, the academic research has developed intensely in the last years. While the rapes by the Red Army on their way west had become a topic starting in the early post-war years,<sup>52</sup> in the West German debates about the forced migration in World War II, in the Central and Southeastern European countries which came under the influence of the Soviet Union, remembrance and research about the sexual violence of Soviet soldiers on their way west was taboo. Andrea Pető was one of the first to examine mass violence against women in this region. She focused on Hungary, the former ally of NS-Germany.<sup>53</sup> In the chapter for our volume, Pető refers to her studies about sexual violence and discusses them in a broader context: with regard to the forma-

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<sup>51</sup> Regarding Poland see the approach of Marcin Zaremba, *Wielka trwoga. Polska 1944-1947 [The Big Fear. Poland 1944-1947]* (Kraków: Znak, 2012).

<sup>52</sup> See Elizabeth Heineman, 'The Hour of the Women: Memories of Germany's "Crisis Years" and West German National Identity', *American Historical Review*, 101, 2 (1996), 354-95.

<sup>53</sup> See her English-language chapter Andrea Pető, 'Memory and the Narrative of Rape in Budapest and Vienna in 1945', in Bessel and Schumann, *Life Death*, 129-48.



tion of emotional commemoration groups and selecting specific gendered experiences for their political purposes.

What has until now been a non-issue was the sexual violence by German soldiers. In Holocaust studies, which is still a booming research field, the issue has been slowly addressed since the 1980s. In her interesting and systematizing essay “Sexual Violence in the Holocaust. Unique and Typical” from the year 2006, Doris L. Bergen stresses the strong presence of the experiences of sexualized violence in relationships of survivors.<sup>54</sup> At our conference, papers integrated the Jewish and non-Jewish questions, but did not deal exclusively with the Holocaust. Here we would like to mention the upcoming publication following our conference about “Women and the Holocaust” held in Warsaw.<sup>55</sup> At this point, we want to stress that many of the issues discussed here, like groping, rape, survival prostitution, street prostitution, were also a reality for men and same-sex gender relations.

For a long period of time, sexual violence by German soldiers against Jewish and non-Jewish women was not an issue. Only in the last decade have important studies provided us with facts about and interpretations of the sexual harassment by German soldiers.<sup>56</sup> Most of the attempts reconstruct how the authorities dealt with sexual assault by the occupiers. What is missing, however, are insights into the victims’ narratives and this is what Irina Rebrova sheds light on in her paper on Russian women’s producing a narrative about the shock of sexual violence. In addition to that, Rebrova and Bischl discuss experiences of gendered violence inside the Soviet Army. Among the unpleasant and seldom openly discussed issues was also sexualized violence in the army or the partisan groups. Irina

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<sup>54</sup> Doris L. Bergen, ‘Sexual Violence in the Holocaust: Unique and Typical’, in Dagmar Herzog, ed., *Lessons and Legacies VII: The Holocaust in International Perspective* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 179–200. A recently published volume by Sonia Hedgepeth and Rochelle Saidel relies in large parts on these survivors’ relations. See Sonja M. Hedgepeth, and Rochelle G. Saidel, eds., *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2010).

<sup>55</sup> See <http://womenandholocaust.eu/> (last visited 3 June 2012).

<sup>56</sup> See Birgit Beck, *Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt: Sexualverbrechen vor deutschen Militärgerichten, 1939–1945* [*The German Army and Sexual Violence: Sexual Crimes Before German Military Courts: 1939–1945*] (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004); Wendy J. Gertje-Janssen, ‘Victims, Heroes, Survivors: Sexual Violence on the Eastern Front During World War II’, Ph.D. thesis, University of Minnesota, 2004; see <http://www.victimsheroessurvivors.info/VictimsHeroesSurvivors.pdf> (last visited 31 July 2012); David R. Snyder, *Sex Crimes under the Wehrmacht* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Monika Flaschka, ‘Race, Rape and Gender in Nazi-Occupied Territories’, Ph.D. thesis, Kent State University, 2009, available at <http://etd.ohiolink.edu/send-pdf.cgi/Flaschka%20Monika%20J.pdf?kent1258726022> (last visited 26 April 2011); Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*.



Rebrova states in her paper that this was not part of public discussion in the Soviet Union in order not to damage the image of the glorified Soviet soldiers. She and Kerstin Bischl show here that it was a part of female fighters' experiences. According to Bischl, sexual gossip and chauvinism, and to some extent violent concepts of masculinity came to dominate. The line between consensual encounters and violent ones became very thin. Sexual violence also played a role in regard to the mobilization of women. One of the Yugoslavian women interviewed by Barbara Wiesinger claimed rumors about sexual violence as one reason to join partisans.

Our volume is but a further piece on the way to a gender-integrated history of World War II and its aftermath in Central and Eastern Europe. The research presented here raises many questions in need of further investigation, among them questions of the continuity of pre-war to post-war societal formations and consent, but also questions of similarities and differences to Western Europe.

# I GENDER RULES: THE POWER OF IDEOLOGICALLY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICALLY GENDERED INTERPRETIVE MODELS



ELIZABETH HARVEY

## HOMELANDS ON THE MOVE

### GENDER, SPACE AND DISLOCATION IN THE NAZI RESETTLEMENT OF GERMAN MINORITIES FROM EASTERN AND SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

In autumn 1940 the émigrée German-Jewish journalist Rosie (aka Countess) Waldeck travelled from her base in Bucharest, where she covered events in Romania for *Newsweek*, to a transit camp at Galați/Galatz on the banks of the river Prut dividing Romania from Soviet-occupied Bessarabia. Looking across the river, she witnessed the arrival of uprooted Bessarabian Germans en route to the Reich via Galatz.

“‘They are coming’, somebody in our little group said now, and far away on the flat horizon of the other shore the first wagon appeared. Someone gave me a Zeissglass, and I saw a spectacle which reminded me of engravings of the American frontier era: a long line of wagons, covered with white canvas, oxen drawn, sometimes with a colt or a horse running alongside. It was strange to find the covered wagon, America’s symbol of individual pioneering, become Europe’s symbol of the totally protective State.”<sup>1</sup>

Waldeck was struck by the cleanliness of the camp, the numbers of babies and children everywhere, and the youngsters who “marched and sang and heiled under the supervision of SS-men and *Volksdeutsche*”.<sup>2</sup> She noted the efforts of nurses, kindergarten teachers, and canteen girls doing their bit to care for the resettlers. She also remarked on the SS men who strolled around the camp and made a fuss over the children: whatever SS men were elsewhere, she observed, “here they were a gentle, baby-kissing lot”.<sup>3</sup> But if she was briefly impressed by the camp at Galatz, as she returned to Bucharest by train she overheard SS men whose casual anti-semitism was

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<sup>1</sup> R. G. Waldeck, *Athene Palace* (New York: McBride, 1942), 305. Thereafter Waldeck, *Athene*.

<sup>2</sup> Waldeck, *Athene*, 306.

<sup>3</sup> Waldeck, *Athene*, 307.

combined with a confident ruthlessness about what would happen to Romanians once the Germans were in charge. So much for SS men as baby-kissers, she observed: what she had seen and heard, taken together, was indeed the new European order in the making, created to benefit Germans at the expense of everyone else.<sup>4</sup> This snapshot of resettlers en route to the Reich was a sardonic take by an outside observer on elements of Himmler's resettlement operation that loomed large in contemporary National Socialist propaganda: the epic spectacle, seeming to belong to another age, of families trekking in covered wagons; the resettlement saga as part of the attempt to create a German 'New Order' in Europe; and the women volunteers and SS men demonstratively playing their distinctive roles as part of the 'totally protective state' caring for resettlers on the move. Waldeck's observations provide a point of departure for considering how a perspective of gender can sharpen an understanding of the violent reordering of space and population undertaken by the Nazi regime in its pursuit of long-term domination and ethnographic restructuring of Eastern Europe.

Historians of Nazi population planning and policy in wartime Eastern Europe have pointed out how space and race, blood and soil were connected in the minds of the planners in different ways.<sup>5</sup> The Nazi idea of Lebensraum meant that territory had to be brought into line with the perceived needs of the population: new space had to be conquered, secured, and organized in order to enable the racially-based community to flourish. Conversely, the security of the conquered territory depended on having only those of the right 'blood' in place to defend it. Forced expulsions and genocide were the prerequisite for the attempt to create homelands for Germans and those classified through processes of racial and national-

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<sup>4</sup> Waldeck, *Athene*, 308-9.

<sup>5</sup> Uwe Mai, *Rasse und Raum: Agrarpolitik, Sozial- und Raumplanung im NS-Staat* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002); Isabel Heinemann, 'Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut': *Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003). Thereafter Heinemann, 'Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut'. Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Alex J. Kay, *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder. Political and Economic Planning for German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1940-1941* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2006); Isabel Heinemann and Patrick Wagner, eds., *Wissenschaft, Planung, Vertreibung: Neuordnungskonzepte und Umsiedlungspolitik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006). Thereafter Heinemann and Wagner, *Wissenschaft*. Andreas Strippel, *NS-Volkstumspolitik und die Neuordnung Europas: Rassenpolitische Selektion der Einwandererzentralstelle des Chefs der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1939-1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2011). Thereafter Strippel, *NS-Volkstumspolitik*. – Annotation by the editors: The author wished to leave out title translations that were provided in the whole volume for purposes of transparency.

political sifting as German or ‘Germanizable’. The monstrous blueprints that constituted the different drafts of the so-called *Generalplan Ost* (General Plan East) projected the transplanting and decimation of Slavic populations decades into the future.<sup>6</sup> If those deemed to be ‘of German blood’ could not be imagined within the time frame of General Plan East as the sole inhabitants of the spaces of the East, they could be envisaged as its masters, organized spatially in ‘marches’ and ‘strongholds’ of Germandom.

The National Socialist regime’s drive to secure future homelands in the conquered East also entailed the forcible dissolution of older German ‘homelands’ outside the borders of pre-war Germany.<sup>7</sup> On the eve of the Second World War, the existence of scattered communities of German-speakers across Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe had posed a conundrum. On the one hand, the regime celebrated the link between ‘blood and soil’ both at home within the Reich and beyond its borders, while Nazi activists from the Reich and from within the minorities themselves sought to mobilize these ‘outposts of Germandom’ for Nazism.<sup>8</sup> But behind the scenes, National Socialist priorities were shifting: the preservation of historic areas of settlement in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe was becoming secondary to larger foreign policy and military-strategic considerations.<sup>9</sup> Population transfers were in the air: plans were already being laid in the early months of 1939 for the resettlement of the

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<sup>6</sup> Mechtild Rössler and Sabine Schleiermacher, eds., *Der ‘Generalplan Ost’: Hauptlinien der nationalsozialistischen Planungs- und Vernichtungspolitik* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993); Czesław Madajczyk, ed., *Vom Generalplan Ost zum Generalsiedlungsplan* (Munich: Saur, 1994). Thereafter Madajczyk, *Generalplan*.

<sup>7</sup> Recent work on the history of German minority communities abroad includes the contributions to Krista O’Donnell, Renate Bridenthal and Nancy Reagin, eds., *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Jerzy Kochanowski and Maïke Sach, eds., *Die ‘Volksdeutschen’ in Polen, Frankreich, Ungarn und der Tschechoslowakei: Mythos und Realität* (Osnabrück: fibre, 2006); Mathias Beer, Dietrich Beyrau, and Cornelia Rauh, eds., *Deutschsein als Grenzerfahrung: Minderheitenpolitik in Europa zwischen 1914 und 1950* (Essen: Klartext, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Mariana Hausleitner and Harald Roth, eds., *Der Einfluß von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus auf Minderheiten in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa* (München: IKGS, 2006); Paul Milata, *Zwischen Hitler, Stalin und Antonescu: Rumäniendeutsche in der Waffen-SS* (Köln: Böhlau, 2007), 11–48; Elizabeth Harvey, ‘Mobilisierung oder Erfassung? Studentischer Aktivismus und deutsche “Volkstumsarbeit” in Jugoslawien und Rumänien 1933–1941’, in Carola Sachse, ed., *‘Mitteleuropa’ und ‘Südosteuropa’ als Planungsraum: wirtschafts- und kulturpolitische Expertisen im Zeitalter der Weltkriege* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010), 363–90. Thereafter Sachse, ed., *Mitteleuropa*.

<sup>9</sup> Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries, The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933–1945* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 73–130. Thereafter Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*.

Germans of South Tyrol.<sup>10</sup> ‘Blood’ could – it was hoped – flourish elsewhere, and ‘space’ could be correspondingly re-organized.

Hitler’s speech of 6 October 1939 to the Reichstag announcing a “re-ordering of ethnographic conditions” given that Eastern and Southeastern Europe was allegedly filled with “unviable fragments” of German *Volks-tum*, and the appointment of Heinrich Himmler as *Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germandom* (Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums, or RKF) confirmed this new turn in policy.<sup>11</sup> The Nazi-Soviet pact and the accompanying secret agreements between Hitler and Stalin paved the way for treaties agreeing to the immediate removal to the Reich of the German minorities from Estonia and Latvia, who were sent by ship to Stettin and Gdynia in October and November 1939, and from the regions of Galicia and western Volhynia and the Narew district in Soviet-occupied eastern Poland, who were transferred by trek and train between December 1939 and February 1940.<sup>12</sup> The secret annex to the Nazi-Soviet pact also assigned Bessarabia in eastern Romania to the Soviet sphere of influence: this made the resettlement of the Bessarabian Germans a virtual certainty. When Soviet forces occupied Bessarabia and northern Bukovina at the end of June 1940, the machinery of resettlement that had been put in place the previous autumn and winter swung into action again, leading to the transfer of the Bessarabian, Bukovina and Dobrudja Germans in the autumn of 1940.<sup>13</sup> By 1941, several hundred thousand ethnic German resettlers had been channelled to the conquered territories of Poland and to resettler camps in the *Altreich*. Later in the war, planned resettlement operations dwindled and were in the end overtaken by improvised measures to evacuate ethnic Germans from the path of the approaching Red Army.

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<sup>10</sup> Markus Leniger, *Nationalsozialistische ‘Volkstumsarbeit’ und Umsiedlungspolitik 1933-1945: Von der Minderheitenbetreuung zur Siedlerauslese* (Berlin: Frank und Timme, 2006), 35-47. Thereafter Leniger, *Volkstumsarbeit*.

<sup>11</sup> Hitler, speech to Reichstag on 6 October 1939, in Max Domarus, ed., *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen 1932-1945*, vol. 2 (Würzburg: Domarus, 1963), 1383.

<sup>12</sup> Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*; Leniger, *Volkstumsarbeit*; Dietrich Loeber, ed., *Diktierter Option: Die Umsiedlung der Deutsch-Balten aus Estland und Lettland 1939-1941* (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 1972); Stephan Döring, *Die Umsiedlung der Wolhyniendeutschen in den Jahren 1939 bis 1940* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001). Thereafter Döring, *Umsiedlung*.

<sup>13</sup> Dirk Jachomowski, *Die Umsiedlung der Bessarabien-, Bukovina- und Dobrudscha-deutschen. Von der Volksgruppe in Rumänien zur ‘Siedlungsbrücke’ an der Reichsgrenze* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1984); Ute Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien: Eine Minderheit aus Südosteuropa (1814 bis heute)* (Köln: Böhlau, 2006). Thereafter Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*.

The resettlement programme, and the violence and coercion involved in ‘making space’ for ethnic Germans in the conquered territories of eastern Europe, have been explored from a number of angles: as part of the longer history of particular German-speaking minority communities, emphasising their perspective on and role in the process<sup>14</sup>; within the context of the Nazi attempt to restructure the population of Eastern Europe through policies of racial selection, exclusion, and destruction<sup>15</sup>; and as the precondition and trigger for the mass expulsion of German-speaking minorities from eastern Europe in the aftermath of the war.<sup>16</sup>

For all the important insights gained through recent scholarship on Nazi resettlement and ethnic restructuring, the gendered dimensions of this process still remain under-explored. A perspective of gender opens up questions both about the actors and agencies involved and about the discourses, concepts, and plans that informed their actions.<sup>17</sup> Questions can be posed about the men and women who implemented policy and chronicled events, what motivated them and how they self-consciously tested, developed, and reflected on their own (gendered) capacities and careers in the process. There is also scope for examining more closely the gendered assumptions about marriage, families, fertility and motherhood that coloured Nazi policymakers’ views of the population groups that the resettlement agencies sought to relocate and resettle, or displace and destroy. Such assumptions pervaded both the ethnographic and ‘racial-biological’ analyses carried out on German minorities in Eastern and Southeastern Europe before the Second World War<sup>18</sup>, and the destructive fantasies of the future entertained by the authors of and commentators on General Plan East with its reference to the future potential of anti-natalist measures to combat the

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<sup>14</sup> For example Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*.

<sup>15</sup> Götz Aly, *‘Endlösung’: Völkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995); Heinemann, *‘Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut’*.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Esch, ‘Kolonisierung und Strukturpolitik: Paradigmen deutscher und polnischer Bevölkerungspolitik 1939-1948’, in Christian Gerlach and Christoph Dieckmann, eds., *Besatzung und Bündnis: Deutsche Herrschaftsstrategien in Ost- und Südosteuropa* (Berlin: Schwarze Risse, 1995), 139-79.

<sup>17</sup> The author’s own study, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) focuses on the role of German women in monitoring and training ethnic German resettlers in occupied Poland.

<sup>18</sup> See contributions in Mathias Beer and Gerhard Seewann, eds., *Südostforschung im Schatten des Dritten Reiches: Institutionen – Inhalte – Personen* (München: Oldenbourg, 2004), thereafter Beer and Seewann, *Südostforschung*; and in Sachse, ed., *Mitteleuropa*.



“enormous biological reproductive power” of “the peoples who are our Eastern neighbours”.<sup>19</sup>

In the following, the gendered discourses and power relations involved in the resettlement programme are explored through an analysis of journeys and journey narratives. If journeys generally lend themselves to narratives of transformation, of self-fashioning and consciousness-raising, these journeys offered a supreme opportunity for turning experiences of travel into *völkisch* allegory.<sup>20</sup> The examples analysed below are texts – mostly published articles and memoirs – deriving from two major phases of the resettlement programme involving the predominantly ‘peasant’ populations with which Himmler was obsessed: the transfer of *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic Germans) from Volhynia, Galicia and the Narew district in Soviet-occupied eastern Poland in the winter of 1939/40, and the transfer of the German-speaking minorities of Bessarabia and Dobrudja via Yugoslavia in autumn 1940. Both the journeys taken by the resettlers – particularly the spectacular wagon treks – and the journeys taken by the resettlement teams across Europe in order to organize their transfer ‘back to the Reich’ generated an outpouring of reportage presenting the transformative effects of mobility, transit, and displacement. The resettlement programme was staged as a spectacle and used as a metaphor of a ‘world on the move’, a bold experiment in demographic reorganization signalling the power of the Reich and its leadership.

For the German men and women from the Reich who were agents and assistants of resettlement, the resettlement programme offered not only career advancement but travel and adventure, physical challenges, exciting encounters and the gratifying ‘discovery’ of German-speaking communities in remote corners of Eastern Europe. ‘Moving the peoples’ was also an opportunity for gendered self-fashioning and self-reflection. Examining texts written by men from the resettlement commandos who set out from Berlin in the winter of 1939/40 and by women propagandists who encountered the resettlers en route reveals, among other things, how the authors represented themselves as models of soldierly masculinity or motherly zeal and how they experienced travel as a form of empowerment.

The texts are also explored for their ideological justification of displacement as a mobilizing and educative process for those uprooted. Abandoning their homes and farms for an uncertain future in the Reich was presented as a character test for the resettlers. Here, a perspective of gender helps

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<sup>19</sup> Erhard Wetzel, ‘Stellungnahme und Gedanken zum Generalplan Ost des Reichsführers SS, 27 April 1942’, in Maďajczyk, *Generalplan*, 50–81, here 52, 74.

<sup>20</sup> Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, 162.

illuminate how those implementing the resettlement programme depicted 'homelands on the move' under the protection of the Reich. Gender shaped their sometimes admiring, sometimes critical reflections on resettler customs and their presentations of tough resettler men and resolute women who were galvanized by the upheaval but still responsive and grateful to those who led and managed them in transit.

### Masters over time and space: the resettlement teams and their narratives

In early November 1939 nearly three hundred men converged on the *Reichssportfeld* in Berlin, where they were quartered for a three-week 'training camp' in the *Friesenhaus*, a residential block built as athletes' accommodation for the 1936 Olympics. Under the command of *SS-Standardenträger* Horst Hoffmeyer from the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* (Ethnic German Liaison Office), these volunteers constituted the *Umsiedlungskommando* (resettlement commando) which was to be dispatched, once the detailed transfer agreement with the Soviet Union had been concluded, to organize the registration and transport of the German-speaking communities of Soviet-occupied eastern Poland 'back to the Reich'. The *Umsiedlungskommando* included SS men, ordinary policemen and members of the NS motorcycle corps (*Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrerkorps*, or NSKK); doctors, vets, pharmacists and other medical personnel; and Volhynian and Galician Germans with knowledge of the settlement areas and interpreting skills.<sup>21</sup> It was also a magnet for political activists, publicists, academics and administrators from organizations promoting German cultural identity in the borderlands and abroad who were eager to put their ethnographic knowledge and commitment to the *Volkstumskampf* (ethnic struggle) into action. Among them was Lothar von Seltmann, an Austrian Nazi who had spent several years as a Hitler Youth leader and student in Germany before 1938 and who returned to Vienna following the Nazi annexation of Austria. There, he became head of the Vienna branch of the Society for Germanism Abroad (*Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland*, or VDA).<sup>22</sup> For the author Rolf Bongs, volunteering for the *Umsiedlungskommando* was also – by his own admission – a chance to escape his desk

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<sup>21</sup> Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 90-93.

<sup>22</sup> Claudia Brunner and Uwe von Seltmann, *Schweigen die Täter, reden die Enkel* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2006), 111. Thereafter Brunner and von Seltmann, *Schweigen die Täter*. Seltmann became the local plenipotentiary (*Ortsbevollmächtigter*) for Kostopol in Volhynia.

job with the VDA in Düsseldorf.<sup>23</sup> Karl Kölsch, *Gaukulturwart* (warden of culture) of the Saarpfalz and editor of the periodical *Die Westmark*, saw an opportunity to encounter and 'bring home' Germans whose forebears had once come from his home region.<sup>24</sup> For the ethnographer Alfred Karasek, taking on the task of resettling the Volhynian Germans continued his long-standing connection to that particular community. This dated back to 1926 when he had taken part in a youth movement expedition to 'discover' German-speaking minority communities in Volhynia and document their folklore.<sup>25</sup> Karasek, who was employed before the war by the *Südost-deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (Southeast German Research Society) in Vienna, took part – like Bongs – both in the transfer of the Volhynian Germans from Soviet-occupied eastern Poland in winter 1939/40 and that of the Bessarabian Germans in autumn 1940.<sup>26</sup>

Seltmann, Bongs, Kölsch and Karasek, together with the reserve police officer Hans Richter, all published or contributed to books recounting their exploits as members of the *Umsiedlungskommando* in 1939/40.<sup>27</sup> They were

<sup>23</sup> Rolf Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße nach Westen* (Berlin: Wiking, 1942), 7, thereafter Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*; see also Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 152-55. Bongs was sent to Lomza and Jesiorka in the Narew district.

<sup>24</sup> Kurt Kölsch, *Galiziendeutsche Heimkehr: Ein Tagebuch* (Neustadt an der Weinstraße: Westmark-Verlag, 1940), 9. Thereafter Kölsch, *Galiziendeutsche Heimkehr*. Kölsch was assigned to Dornfeld in Galicia. On Kölsch, see also Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 206-7.

<sup>25</sup> Karasek was district plenipotentiary (*Gebietsbevollmächtigter*) in the area designated Wo I (Luck): Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 89. On Karasek and the Volhynian Germans, see Wilhelm Fielitz, *Das Stereotyp des wolhyniendeutschen Umsiedlers: Popularisierungen zwischen Sprachinselforschung und nationalsozialistischer Propaganda* (Marburg: Elwert, 2000), 48-74, 240-2, thereafter Fielitz, *Stereotyp*; on the youth movement expedition of 1926 to Volhynia, see also Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 107-8. Thereafter Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards*.

<sup>26</sup> On the *Südostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, see Michael Fahlbusch, 'Im Dienste des Deutschtums in Südosteuropa: Ethnopolitische Berater als Tathelfer für Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit', in Beer and Seewann, *Südostforschung*, 175-214, thereafter Fahlbusch, 'Im Dienst des Deutschtums'; on Karasek and the resettlement of the Bessarabian Germans, see below.

<sup>27</sup> Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*; Kölsch, *Galiziendeutsche Heimkehr*; Lothar von Seltmann, *Tagebuch vom Treck der Wolhyniendeutschen* (Potsdam: Voggenreiter, 1941), thereafter Seltmann, *Tagebuch*; Alfred Karasek, 'Der Wille zum Reich', in Otto Engelhardt-Kyffhäuser, ed., *Das Buch vom großen Treck* (Berlin: Grenze und Ausland, 1940), 14-29, thereafter Karasek, 'Der Wille zum Reich', and Engelhardt-Kyffhäuser, *Das Buch vom großen Treck*; Karasek, 'Brief eines Umsiedlungsbevollmächtigten', *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten*, 12, 4 (1940), 4-6, thereafter Karasek, 'Brief eines Umsiedlungsbevollmächtigten'; Hans Richter, *Heimkehrer: Bildberichte von der Umsiedlung der Volksdeutschen aus*

part of the flood of media coverage of the resettlement that contributed to the instant mythologizing of the ‘great trek’ of the Volhynian and Galician Germans in the winter of 1939/40 and its recapitulation in less perilous conditions by the Bessarabian Germans in autumn 1940. Targeting a popular audience, the books came decorated with trek motifs and illustrated with maps, photos, or artwork: such a book could be – for instance – given by a leader of the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* as a Christmas present in 1941 to one of her subordinates in the district of Merseburg.<sup>28</sup> The texts can be read as propaganda for the SS and the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* and their successful ‘rescue’ mission. This propaganda distracted attention from the disorder that ensued once resettled ethnic Germans arrived ‘in the Reich’ and were marooned for months or years in camps. It also drew attention away from the brutal expulsions of Jews and Poles: these deportations were an essential goal of Nazi Germanization policy and at the same time freed up resources for the incoming settlers. The texts can also be seen as exercises in ‘image management’, portraying resettled ethnic German peasants in such a way as to engage popular interest in them, to combat prejudices about their ‘backwardness’, and to promote their integration into the Reich.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, they presented a parable of pan-German comradeship, showing Reich Germans and *Volksdeutsche* cooperating within the *Umsiedlungskommando* and demonstrating comradeship in turn with the resettlers. At the same time, these accounts – typically presented in diary form to heighten the ‘eye-witness’ effect – can also be read as narratives of a quest that confirmed but also tested the authors’ masculinity through physical challenges, confrontations with Soviet officials, Poles and Jews, and experiences with other versions of manliness encountered among the ethnic Germans.

The members of the resettlement commando cultivated a paramilitary style: they left the Friesenhaus training camp kitted out in “field grey *Wehrmacht* uniform without insignia or weapons”.<sup>30</sup> Bongs professed astonishment at the way some of his colleagues once in uniform “lost the ability to walk naturally or speak normally”.<sup>31</sup> Bongs’ mockery notwithstanding, the uniform served its purpose: at any rate, a Volhynian German pastor later recalled that the uniform worn by the men of the *Umsied-*

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*Bessarabien, Rumänien, aus der Süd-Bukowina und aus Litauen* (Berlin: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1941). Thereafter Richter, *Heimkehrer*.

<sup>28</sup> Flyleaf inscription in a copy of von Seltmann, *Tagebuch*.

<sup>29</sup> Fielitz, *Stereotyp*, 23.

<sup>30</sup> Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 11.

*lungskommando* had served to impress his fellow-villagers.<sup>32</sup> Military references pervaded the texts: references to “general staff”, being “in the field” or on “home leave” underscored the mimicry of a military operation, while the descriptions of manly comradeship through long days on the road, late-night drinking, and shared living quarters echoed the style of a campaign memoir. The texts made much of the arduous routes travelled by the resettlement teams to their designated areas of operation, inviting the armchair traveller to share in the adventure of getting lost in snow and darkness and sometimes invoking a sense of an expedition into the unknown, with the rumbling lorries imagined as an “elephant herd”.<sup>33</sup> The vast horizons and long distances were invoked in order to underline the “historic” and “unprecedented” scale of their tasks and, in Karasek’s words, “inhuman” responsibilities.<sup>34</sup> Bongs and Seltsmann also traced how the journey was transforming them: with increasing distance from loved ones and home comforts, they observed themselves as they shook off the trappings of bourgeois life, became ‘wild’, stopped washing, wrapped themselves in furs and – in Bongs’ case – grew a beard.<sup>35</sup>

Along with their self-representation as wild freebooters and frontiersmen, the authors also stressed their identity as managers on the move with suitcases full of forms and the equipment to set up mobile offices, living out the model of the Nazi technocrat, implementing systems but capable of improvisation, and demonstrating “a hard, quiet heart”.<sup>36</sup> ‘Hardheartedness’ was directed towards those to be excluded from resettlement, since the task of registration was an initial sifting process to select those of German ancestry and reject any others – Poles, Ukrainians or Jews – seeking, for whatever reason, to cross the demarcation border into German-occupied territory.<sup>37</sup> (Further sifting in the form of the ‘sluicing’ process conducted by the immigration officials of the *Einwandererzentralstelle* awaited the resettlers on arrival on Reich territory – including a camouflaged ‘racial examination’ conducted by SS ‘racial experts’ masquerading as medical personnel).<sup>38</sup> How many were clamouring to enter the Reich who were then turned away by the resettlement teams is hard to

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<sup>32</sup> Pastor Reinhold Rudof Henke cited in Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 99.

<sup>33</sup> Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Karasek, ‘Brief eines Umsiedlungsbevollmächtigten’, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Seltsmann, *Tagebuch*, 49; Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 32, 48.

<sup>36</sup> Karasek, ‘Brief eines Umsiedlungsbevollmächtigten’, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 106-7.

<sup>38</sup> Strippel, *NS-Volkstumspolitik*, 98-129; Heinemann, *„Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut“*, 232-46.

verify.<sup>39</sup> For the purposes of the resettlement men's memoirs, it suited them to emphasise how they had stood firm against a throng of 'aliens' – presented as noisy or troublesome urban-dwellers, instantly distinguishable from the silent and respectful German peasant – and to play up their role as 'destiny' for the people they encountered seeking registration.<sup>40</sup>

The resettlement men depicted their encounter with the Galician and especially the Volhynian Germans as a colonial-style meeting with 'natives'. Elaborating stereotypes of peasant culture that were already well established in the ethnographic literature on 'Germandom abroad', the visitors expressed an astonishment tinged with ambivalence at the behaviour of men and women seemingly little touched by modernity: bearded patriarchs, fathers of countless children, who let their wives wait on them at table; mute, fecund women uninhibitedly breastfeeding in the presence of strangers.<sup>41</sup> They wondered at the profusion of children among the Volhynian Germans; but also at the high infant mortality. For all their admiration for the toughness they encountered (Seltmann felt sufficiently challenged to test his powers of endurance in a snowstorm against one "old Nikolai")<sup>42</sup> the resettlement officials' accounts implied that the resettlers would have to adapt their customs and attitudes – including their views of women's status – to the modern world they were entering.

The epic high point of the resettlement men's narratives was the transport of the resettlers, portrayed as a "battle against space and weather".<sup>43</sup> It was an operation which typically entailed separating families and sending the majority of the resettlers, including the elderly, the women, and the children by rail. The men of the resettlement teams then oversaw the trek by horse and wagon of the menfolk (some with their families) to the border points demarcating the Soviet from the German zones. The trek option had the straightforward purpose of allowing the resettlers to transport as much

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<sup>39</sup> Valdis O. Lumans, 'A Reassessment of *Volksdeutsche* and Jews in the Volhynia-Galicia-Narew Resettlement', in Alan E. Steinweis and Daniel E. Rogers, eds., *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and Its Legacy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 81-100, here 90, gives an impression based on contemporary reports. Some who sought resettlement may have been prevented not by German but Soviet officials: Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 106.

<sup>40</sup> Karasek, 'Der Wille zum Reich', 21; Karasek, 'Brief eines Umsiedlungsbevollmächtigten', 5; Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, 28; Kölsch, *Galiziendeutsche Heimkehr*, 21.

<sup>41</sup> Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 34, 42; Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, 53; Karasek, 'Der Wille zum Reich', 23; the artist Otto Engelhardt-Kyffhäuser, 'Aus meinem Tagebuch', in Engelhardt-Kyffhäuser, *Das Buch vom großen Treck*, 34, mentioned a father who had difficulties recalling the exact number of his children.

<sup>42</sup> Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, 75.

<sup>43</sup> Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, book jacket.

of their belongings as would fit on a wagon (for those who travelled by train, the baggage allowance was limited).<sup>44</sup>

However, for the purposes of resettlement propaganda the trek evoked much grander meanings associated with peoples in history setting out to new lands and frontiers.<sup>45</sup> It also provided the basis for much-repeated heroizing tales of endurance by a community united under Reich leadership bringing off an astonishing logistical feat in pitiless conditions.<sup>46</sup> Even with the positive gloss of these souvenir accounts, resettler officials admitted that things had gone wrong: treks had set off too late or not waited for the order to go, trains had been delayed for days leaving families stranded in sub-zero temperatures.<sup>47</sup> While the mortality from the train transports and the trek was outstripped by the mortality from epidemics that broke out in the resettler camps after arrival on Reich territory, it was clear from the resettlement men's memoirs that there were resettlers who perished en route.<sup>48</sup>

Along with their stories of dramatic action, the accounts of resettlement journeys were also political travelogues depicting a world in transformation. The descriptions did not only stress the distances travelled but painted for German readers a panorama of the borderlands of the emerging 'new Europe' in 1939/40 as envisaged by the Nazi leadership, a world in which German interests prevailed. The Soviet authorities – at this stage of the war, following the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939 – were portrayed as ready to cooperate with and recognise German power. Red Army soldiers were portrayed as riding to the rescue of the *Volksdeutsche* from their Polish tormentors, or as high-spirited drinking companions.<sup>49</sup> A glimpse of Cossacks gave Bongs the thrilling sight of warriors on horseback wielding sabres, while Ukrainian girls with "bright red lips and gleaming black hair" serving in a village tavern offered a touch of exotic allure.<sup>50</sup> Soviet officials appeared as sometimes vigorous and efficient, sometimes unreliable or recalcitrant partners in the business of resettlement. Meanwhile, hostile, defeated, and 'alien' peoples were of no consequence, glanced at

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<sup>44</sup> Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 68.

<sup>45</sup> Kölsch, *Galiziendeutsche Heimkehr*, 35-6; Karasek, 'Der Wille zum Reich', 26; on the cultural associations of the 'trek' see Fielitz, *Stereotyp*, 148-50.

<sup>46</sup> Selmann, *Tagebuch*, 82; Karasek, 'Der Wille zum Reich', 26.

<sup>47</sup> Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 52, 56; Selmann, *Tagebuch*, 21-22.

<sup>48</sup> Kölsch, *Galiziendeutsche Heimkehr*, 54-55; Selmann, *Tagebuch*, 59; on mortality figures during the trek and afterwards, see Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 124; Fielitz, *Stereotyp*, 137-9; Lumans, 'Reassessment', 90.

<sup>49</sup> Kölsch, *Galiziendeutsche Heimkehr*, 34, 42.

<sup>50</sup> Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 15, 35.



by the resettlement teams as they moved onwards. Poles were mentioned as a trigger for atrocity stories about the ‘martyrdom’ of the *Volksdeutsche* in September 1939.<sup>51</sup>

In the accounts by Kölsch, Karasek and Seltmann, Jews featured as the ultimate ‘other’. Short vicious passages portrayed Jews encountered en route as cowed and noisy and their settlements indistinguishable from one another: in Seltmann’s words “everywhere the same ghetto faces, the same filth, the same desolation”.<sup>52</sup> Sarcastic humour at the expense of Jews who dared to start discussions with the men of the *Umsiedlungskommando* served to remind readers of the hierarchies of power now in place.<sup>53</sup> What these narratives did not mention was the deployment of Jews as forced labourers to dig out resettler trains from the snow, or to carry the baggage of resettlers on disembarkation in the Warthegau.<sup>54</sup>

In their summings-up of their experiences in the Volhynia-Galicia-Narew resettlement of winter 1939/40, the reports’ authors conveyed their feeling of having mastered time and space, boasting how such an ‘incredibly small’ commando of 300 men had moved 135.000 resettlers over such distances within such a short time. Gazing at a column of horse-drawn wagons traversing the horizon, Karasek found that they reminded him of “a chain of toy figures, carefully arranged, each group separated from the next” – an image intended to convey martial orderliness, but also betraying German readiness to pick up and manipulate populations around the terrain of Nazi Europe.<sup>55</sup> Even as the transfer of the Volhynian and Galician Germans ended, the resettlement teams were already looking ahead. Bidding goodbye to his Soviet “partners” and taking part in group photos, Seltmann noticed that many were saying “see you again in Bessarabia!”.<sup>56</sup>

With the resettlement of Bessarabian Germans still pending, yet another resettlement ‘action’ was being prepared in the summer of 1940 within

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<sup>51</sup> Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, 61-65.

<sup>52</sup> Karasek, ‘Der Wille zum Reich’, 22; Kölsch, *Galiziendeutsche Heimkehr*, 53; Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, 97. For further references to anti-semitic passages in reports by resettlement officials, Lumans, ‘Reassessment’, 90-92.

<sup>53</sup> Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, 89-90. On the function of soldiers’ humour in the Second World War to assert ‘hierarchies of cleverness and power’, see Martina Kessel, “‘Laughing About Death?’ German Humor’ in the Two World Wars”, in Alon Confino, Paul Betts, and Dirk Schumann, eds., *Between Mass Death and Individual Loss: The Place of the Dead in Twentieth-Century Germany* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2008), 197-218.

<sup>54</sup> Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 142, 154; Lumans, ‘Reassessment’, 93-94. For an example of a contemporary text that did mention Jews carrying resettlers’ luggage: Felix Lützkendorf, *Völkerwanderung 1940: Ein Bericht aus dem Osten* (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 1940), 35.

<sup>55</sup> Karasek, ‘Brief eines Umsiedlungsbevollmächtigten’, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Seltmann, *Tagebuch*, 94.



German-occupied Poland. This measure was to relocate to the *Reichsgau Wartheland* the ethnic Germans from the Lublin-Cholm-Hrubieszów area of the *General Government* in exchange for Polish deportees from the Warthegau, a removal that took place in autumn/winter 1940/1.<sup>57</sup> Bongs spent June and July 1940 selecting and registering ethnic Germans in the Cholm area.<sup>58</sup> Seltmann, too, was involved in the Lublin-Cholm resettlement in summer 1940 as resettlement team leader; in August 1940 he joined the staff of the SS and police headquarters in Lublin as *Beauftragter* (delegate) of the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, at the end of August 1940, Bongs had been summoned to Romania to assist with the transfer of the Bessarabian Germans; there, he encountered Karasek, who was by then acting as the district plenipotentiary for Beresina and working once again with his Soviet opposite number from the Volhynian operation.<sup>60</sup> Hans Richter, involved in January 1940 in the transfer of the Volhynian Germans, went on to Dobrudja in the autumn of 1940, where he accompanied resettlers on ships up the Danube, moving on to southern Bukovina in December 1940 and Lithuania in February/March 1941.<sup>61</sup>

The men's encounters en route with other 'old resettlement hands' reinforced their sense of comradeship and shared knowledge gained through each station of their journey. Through repetition, the logistical challenge of setting tens of thousands of resettlers in motion became routine. For Bongs, pondering in the summer of 1940 a new map of the 'German East' showing the Warthegau and the *General Government* and the border with Soviet-held territory, and tracing on it in red pencil all the routes he had travelled on resettlement business, being 'on the road' summed up his sense of the historical moment: "We drive thousands upon thousands of kilometers, restlessly driven by our tasks. Each journey has an end, but that end brings forth new goals."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Heinemann, 'Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut', 377-8; Strippel, *NS-Volkstumspolitik*, 191-3.

<sup>58</sup> Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 69-112.

<sup>59</sup> Brunner and von Seltmann, *Schweigen die Täter*, 113.

<sup>60</sup> Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 169, 195; Waldemar Löbsack, 'Aus meinem Tagebuch während der Umsiedlung der Bessarabiendeutschen', *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten*, 12, 12 (1940), 2-6. On Bongs' and Karasek's role in the resettlement of the Bessarabian Germans, see Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 152-58.

<sup>61</sup> On the transfer of the Lithuanian Germans, see Christoph Dieckmann, 'Plan und Praxis. Deutsche Siedlungspolitik im besetzten Litauen 1941-1944', in Heinemann and Wagner, *Wissenschaft*, 93-118, here 98-101, thereafter Dieckmann, 'Plan und Praxis'; Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 168-9.

<sup>62</sup> Bongs, *Harte herrliche Straße*, 111.

## Communities on the move: the transit camp at Semlin

I turn now to a particular moment within the transfer of the Bessarabian and Dobrudja Germans en route to the Reich in autumn 1940 - the journey briefly witnessed by Waldeck at Galați/Galatz. One major locale that served as a propagandistic ‘stage’ in their journey was the transit camp at Zemun/Semlin near Belgrade.<sup>63</sup> Here, many of the paths involved in the resettlement programme crossed for a short space of time: those of male resettlement officials, a female photographer and a female artist, local Yugoslav German men and women drawn in to assist the resettlement operation, and the resettlers themselves. Exploring the accounts and images of this particular site of transit reveals how women and men as chroniclers and propagandists of resettlement presented themselves in action, reflected on the character of the resettlers, and produced a legitimating discourse of ‘rescue’ and ‘protection’.

The transit camp at Semlin, operated by the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* between late September and December 1940, was significant partly for its setting, its construction, and its layout. It was constructed, with the permission of the Yugoslav government, by Yugoslav German volunteers in five weeks between August and September 1940 as a temporary ‘holding point’ for thousands of resettled ethnic Germans from Bessarabia and Dobrudja who were disembarked from ships coming up the Danube from Romania and then dispatched onwards a few days later by train to the Reich and thence in due course to further camps and/or resettlement in Poland.<sup>64</sup> Built on sand on the left bank of the Sava river at the confluence of the Sava and Danube, the camp was endowed with particular meaning as embodying the German capacity for creating order, immediately juxtaposed and in contrast to the stereotypical ‘Balkan chaos’ of Belgrade. Narratives by Reich Germans recounting their arrival made much of the “disorder” and “foreignness” of Belgrade giving way to the regulated environment of Semlin, marked out by swastika flags round its perimeter, a world apart.<sup>65</sup> Visitors registered predictable wonderment at the camp’s clockwork routines and its exemplary hygiene facilities (including 24 washrooms, 8 shower rooms and latrines with 291-seat capacity), and noted how cheery brass bands played

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<sup>63</sup> A second camp was also constructed at Prahovo on the Yugoslav-Bulgarian border.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Das Lager in Zemun’, *Deutsches Volksblatt*, 18 October 1940, cutting in: Bundesarchiv [Federal Archive] Berlin, hereafter abbreviated BAArch B, R57 neu, 1070 box 2. See also Jachomowski, *Umsiedlung*, 84.

<sup>65</sup> Richter, *Heimkehrer*, 13; Hertha Strzygowski, ‘Bessarabiendeutsche Umsiedlung’, *Deutsche Monatshefte*, 8, 1, 2. Juli/August 1941, 48. Thereafter Strzygowski, ‘Bessarabiendeutsche Umsiedlung’.

as each shipload arrived and each trainload departed. With giant tents and ‘streets’ constructed of wooden slats, the camp combined the look and feel of a military camp with elements of a small ‘city’. With lugubrious humour, the main route through the camp was named “Kurfürstendamm” / “Unter den Linden” and various tents became designated as the “Hotel zu sämtlichen Jahreszeiten”, “Hotel Adlon” or “Café Bauer”.<sup>66</sup>

The camp was also significant because of the involvement of the Yugoslav German volunteers and how this was claimed to have forged new connections with the Reich and with their fellow-Germans from Romania. The construction and staffing of the camp, the donation of foodstuffs and clothing for distribution to the resettlers, and the supply of personnel to accompany the passenger ships plying up and down the Danube between the embarkation ports (Galatz and Reni) and Semlin, were celebrated as evidence of the *Volksgemeinschaft der Tat* (community of the deed).<sup>67</sup> It was described as a project that for the first time had united the disparate groupings of Yugoslav Germans of different classes and from different areas of German-speaking settlement in the service of their fellow Germans.<sup>68</sup> Three hundred Yugoslav German men were reported to have helped build the camp; 100 Yugoslav German women spent a month sewing clothes and other textiles for the incomers.<sup>69</sup> The whole enterprise served to raise the profile of the recent reorganization of the Yugoslav Germans which had taken place a year earlier and had put Sepp Janko in post as the new leader of the Yugoslav Germans.<sup>70</sup> According to propagandistic accounts by Yugoslav German women who had ‘served’ in Semlin, this had been their moment of national awakening, generating a sense of belonging to the pan-German *Volksgemeinschaft* for the first time.<sup>71</sup>

Semlin was also important as a site for encounters and reunions between resettlement experts from the *Altreich*, from Austria and from German-speaking areas beyond the Reich. Along with other transit camps like

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<sup>66</sup> Richter, *Heimkehrer*, 14; Strzygowski, ‘Bessarabiendeutsche Umsiedlung’, 48.

<sup>67</sup> Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 142.

<sup>68</sup> Spaeth, Lagebericht Jugoslawien: Volksgemeinschaft der Tat: Der Bau der Umsiedlungslager, o.D., BAArch B, R57 neu, 31.

<sup>69</sup> Lagebericht Jugoslawien; ‘Neusatz: Ortsgruppe des Kulturbundes’, *Deutsches Volksblatt*, 30 December 1940, cutting in: BAArch B, R57 neu, 1070 box 1.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division ‘Prinz Eugen’: Die Banater Schwaben und die nationalsozialistischen Kriegsverbrechen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 2003), 139-40.

<sup>71</sup> Liesl Obmann, ‘Frauen und Mädel im Dienst auf den Schiffen’; Lissi Lehmann, ‘Der Einsatz des Freiwilligen Arbeitsdienstes der Frauen und Mädel im Durchgangslager Zemun-Semlin’, *Volk im Osten*, 2, 8 (1941), 30-32.

Galatz and together with the ships going to and fro along the Danube, these were places where in the autumn of 1940 Germans could feel particularly pleased with themselves. To be in Belgrade assisting with the resettlement was, as the reserve police officer Hans Richter wrote in *Heimkehrer*, a good time and place to be a German.<sup>72</sup> It was also a gift for the media: the camp served, so to speak, as a showcase for the Bessarabian Germans with their traditional costumes, large families and much-vaunted faith in Germany and the Führer. Having been registered, gathered from their villages in Bessarabia, and now marshalled en masse in the camp, the resettlers were – in the absence of any privacy in the camp – in the spotlight and on display for visiting observers and journalists, who marvelled at the spectacle of such a large number of model and picturesque peasant families in one place and at the appealing sight of grateful German children being looked after and fussed over by fellow-Germans. The photos in Richter's 'souvenir' volume *Heimkehrer* included several appealing shots of uniformed members of the Order Police helping in Semlin by carrying a laundry-basket full of clean dishes, holding a baby, and using a spoon to help feed a small girl with blonde hair under the caption "Everywhere the police give a helping hand".<sup>73</sup> In a camp that presented itself as one big family, policemen could assume the guise of indulgent fathers.

The camp offered particular opportunities to women propagandists who travelled there in search of subject matter. Hertha Strzygowski, an artist specializing in ethnographic themes, was in Vienna in the summer of 1940 when she was tipped off by her old friend and later (second) husband Alfred Karasek (she married him in 1942) to go and draw the resettlers in Semlin.<sup>74</sup> She recalled years later that he had urged her to go, now, and draw them while they could still be recorded as "real Bessarabian colonists".<sup>75</sup> In Semlin, she stayed in a tent with the Yugoslav German girls and women helping in the camp, and produced a series of portraits of the resettlers there. One tent thrilled her in particular:

"I went in and saw an extraordinary and wonderful sight. On both sides of this tent, fifteen metres wide and fifty metres long, there were straw mattresses laid out on the floor in four rows. And on them: children, children and more chil-

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<sup>72</sup> Richter, *Heimkehrer*, 13.

<sup>73</sup> Richter, *Heimkehrer*, picture section (unpaginated).

<sup>74</sup> On Hertha Karasek-Strzygowski, see Alfred Karger, *Hertha Karasek-Strzygowski: Biographie und Bibliographie zum 70. Geburtstag* (Dortmund: Ostdt. Forschungsstelle im Lande Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1968); see also Fielitz, *Stereotyp*, 295-6.

<sup>75</sup> Hertha Karasek-Strzygowski, *Es führet uns des Schicksals Hand: Bessarabisches Tagebuch* (Marburg: Elwert, 1990), 17. Thereafter Karasek-Strzygowski, *Tagebuch*.

dren! Small, large, standing, sitting, rolling around, crawling and on every second or third mattress sat a mother breastfeeding her youngest infant.”

Strzygowski – who herself was in her mid-forties and had one child – could not get over how young the mothers were and how many children they already had.<sup>76</sup>

The sight of settler mothers and children being cared for was likewise a photo-opportunity for the ‘house photojournalist’ of the *NS-Frauenschaft*, Liselotte Purper, who travelled to Belgrade in late October 1940 in order to document ‘women’s work’ at the camp. Arriving at Semlin on 3 November, she encountered Werner Lorenz, head of the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*, who proposed that she document the resettlement of the Dobrudja Germans. Purper spent several days photographing in the camp before travelling downriver to Dobrudja to document the preparations of the German community there for their resettlement and returning to Semlin on the ‘Franz Schubert’ along with the resettlers a month later.<sup>77</sup> She wrote in her diary of the marvellous comradeship on the four-day Danube trip she had enjoyed with the ship’s crew and the accompanying nurses, doctors and other personnel on board. Arriving back at Semlin, with the ship bedecked with flags as it docked, Purper watched the ritual of disembarkation: the first to step off the ship was a mother with a child in her arms. There were far more hands stretched out to help those disembarking than were necessary, Purper observed: this, for her, seemed to sum up the help and protection offered at the camp.<sup>78</sup>

Thinking about Semlin as a crossroads bringing together once again resettlement officials and the resettlers en route to the Reich, there is a striking contrast between the experiences of the mobile ‘cadres’ and propagandists who organized and documented the resettlement as part of a sequence of rewarding wartime assignments well away from the front line, and the experiences of the resettlers themselves, subjected to a series of mass transports over which they had no control. In a symbolic act of immobilization en route to Semlin, still recalled sharply decades afterwards by

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<sup>76</sup> Karasek-Strzygowski, *Tagebuch*; Hertha Strzygowski, ‘Bessarabiendeutsche Umsiedlung’, *Deutsche Monatshefte*, 8, 1-2 (1941), 44-57, here 49.

<sup>77</sup> Liselotte Purper, *Tagebuch*, 3 November 1940. Deutsches Historisches Museum, Rep. I/ 2 Wk. / F1 / M11. On Liselotte Purper, see Katja Protte, “‘Bildberichterstatterin’ im ‘Dritten Reich’: Fotografien aus den Jahren 1937 bis 1944 von Liselotte Purper”, *DHM Magazin*, 7, 20 (1997); Elizabeth Harvey, ‘Seeing the World: Photography, Photojournalism and Visual Pleasure in the Third Reich’, in Pamela Swett, Corey Ross and Fabrice d’Almeida, eds., *Pleasure and Power in the Third Reich* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 177-204.

<sup>78</sup> Liselotte Purper, *Tagebuch*, 19 November 1940.

those interviewed by Ute Schmidt, the Bessarabian Germans had been forced to abandon their horses and wagons in Romania at the embarkation point of Galatz: these were later purchased by the Transylvanian Saxons or requisitioned by the Romanian state.<sup>79</sup> The world of the camp at Semlin portrayed in propaganda reports and photos banished many things from view that were later recalled by the Bessarabian Germans: in particular, the separation of family members from each other and the tearing apart of communities in the process of transit and later resettlement.<sup>80</sup> The enforced community life of Semlin was just the beginning, for many, of a sequence of camps, some bearable, some rife with epidemics, some corrupt and abusive, but all requiring adaptation to the norms and expectations of those in charge as Party organizations and rituals structured their days. While one former Dobrudja German resettler recalled being looked after well in Semlin and elsewhere, this recollection contrasted with the difficulties of constantly moving from one camp to another and finally in 1942 to what would be a short-lived resettlement in the 'Protectorate'.<sup>81</sup>

The camp at Semlin, built on sand and perhaps best evoked as a mirage of the energies harnessed for building the Nazi empire, was taken down in December 1940.<sup>82</sup> The microcosm of 'German order' was dismantled, and the Yugoslav Germans were dispatched homeward. Their own displacement, through resettlement or expulsion from 1944 onwards, still lay in the future; the destruction of German 'homelands' in Southeastern Europe had only just begun.

### Onward journeys

The journeys begun by some of the resettlement officials continued onwards to other parts of occupied Eastern Europe. Some pursued careers that took them into different institutions and agencies involved in occupation policy. Having arrived in Lublin in summer 1940, Lothar von Seltmann was involved in implementing SS and police leader Odilo

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<sup>79</sup> Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 349.

<sup>80</sup> Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 358-68.

<sup>81</sup> Irmgard Gerlinde Stiller, 'Heimat – Umsiedler, Ansiedler, Flüchtling, Neubürger', *Jahrbuch der Dobrudscha-Deutschen 1960*, 31-94, here 43-44.

<sup>82</sup> Under German occupation a year later a concentration camp was set up nearby in Semlin on the former exhibition grounds: an estimated 7500 Jews were imprisoned there before being murdered in gas vans between March and May 1942. See Walter Manoschek, *'Serbien ist judenfrei': Militärische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941/42* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995), 69, 169-84.

Globocnik's Germanization policies 'trawling for German blood' among the population of the Zamość district in autumn 1940 and subsequently, after the attack on the Soviet Union in summer 1941, in *Distrikt Galizien*, now conquered and absorbed into the *General Government*.<sup>83</sup> Seltmann transferred in 1942 to the staff of the SS and police in Krakow and was later involved in the suppression of the Warsaw ghetto uprising in spring 1943.<sup>84</sup> Alfred Karasek was recruited into an SS unit, the *Sonderkommando Künsberg*, attached to the German Foreign Office but integrated into the *Waffen-SS* in 1941, that located and seized maps, books, and other cultural artefacts in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. He was later involved in an operation to confiscate material from Jewish bookshops in Budapest in 1944.<sup>85</sup>

Other, broader lines of continuity make the connection evident between the work of resettling and 'protecting' the ethnic Germans and the work of deportation and murder following the attack on the Soviet Union. When the Reich Security Head Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, or RSHA) assembled from May 1941 onwards the four *Einsatzgruppen* in preparation for the attack on the Soviet Union, a similar recruitment model was used to that of the resettlement commandos, combining members of the SS and police with people who had specific regional knowledge. *Einsatzgruppe D* (destined for operations in the southern Soviet Union) included personnel who had been involved in the resettlement commandos, some of them from the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* and some of them *Volksdeutsche* who had recently lived in the Soviet Union or in Bessarabia.<sup>86</sup> The tasks of *Einsatzgruppe D* extended beyond the murder of Jews and capturing political commissars: it also became involved in the 'protection' of the *Volksdeutsche* in the Soviet Union.<sup>87</sup> A further line of continuity can be traced from the initial resettlement commandos to the later campaign in the

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<sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 241; Elizabeth Harvey, "'Wir kamen in vollkommenes Neugebiet rein': Der 'Einsatz' von Mitgliedern nationalsozialistischer Frauenorganisationen im besetzten Polen", in Marita Krauss, ed., *Wir waren dabei: Mitläuferinnen, Nutznießerinnen, Täterinnen im Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008), 83-102, esp. 92.

<sup>84</sup> Brunner and von Seltmann, *Schweigen die Täter*, 113-23.

<sup>85</sup> Ulrike Hartung, *Raubzüge in der Sowjetunion: Das Sonderkommando Künsberg 1941-1943* (Bremen: Temmen, 1997), 126; Fahlbusch, 'Im Dienst des Deutschtums', 199-200.

<sup>86</sup> Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: Die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion 1941-1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003), 85. Thereafter Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik*.

<sup>87</sup> Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik*, 265-6.



Soviet Union through the *Sonderkommando R* under Horst Hoffmeyer, which was sent to ‘look after’ the *Volksdeutsche* in Transnistria (part of Ukraine placed under Romanian administration) and which in early 1942 together with members of the local ethnic German militia (*Selbstschutz*) became involved in the murder of Jews there.<sup>88</sup>

The ethnic German resettlers on Reich territory, meanwhile, were channelled and shepherded from one point to the next and made to wait for their next move into the unknown. While the story of their resettlement generated spin-offs for the German propaganda industry ranging from the feature film *Heimkehr* (1941) to novels and children’s books celebrating their record and potential as peasant colonists,<sup>89</sup> male resettlers were recruited into the *Waffen-SS* and conscripted into the *Wehrmacht*.<sup>90</sup> Those that were selected for settlement in the territories of occupied Poland faced an uncertain future on farms and properties seized from deported Poles and Jews, while many – in May 1941 an estimated 270.000 – remained long-term in resettler camps.<sup>91</sup>

Some of those who had overseen the uprooting of the Bessarabian Germans sought to keep track of what had happened both to them and to their homelands subsequently. According to Hertha Strzygowski, Alfred Karasek wrote to her in October 1940 having returned to Bessarabia after the departure of the resettlers. He described the rapid decay of the empty villages, the plundered houses and the vineyards left unharvested. The steppe, he reported, was beginning to encroach on the cultivated land.<sup>92</sup> Strzygowski herself tracked down the Bessarabian German settlers to a camp near Łódź/Litzmannstadt in early 1941, seeing this as her last chance to make drawings and sketches of them while they had the time to “sit still”.<sup>93</sup> To her dismay, she found them “dreadfully changed”, weary and discouraged by life in the resettler camp.<sup>94</sup> On returning to Vienna, she put all the more energy into immortalizing in an oil painting the original trek from their homelands.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik*, 273-87.

<sup>89</sup> Fielitz, *Stereotyp*, provides a detailed analysis of this output.

<sup>90</sup> Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries*, 213-14; Döring, *Umsiedlung*, 155; Schmidt, *Die Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, 252.

<sup>91</sup> Estimated figure in Dieckmann, ‘Plan und Praxis’, 100.

<sup>92</sup> Karasek-Strzygowski, *Tagebuch*, 147-8.

<sup>93</sup> Karasek-Strzygowski, *Tagebuch*, 164.

<sup>94</sup> Karasek-Strzygowski, *Tagebuch*, 189.

<sup>95</sup> Karasek-Strzygowski, *Tagebuch*, 197.



In 1942, Strzygowski took another trip across Europe to ‘capture’ German colonists in situ. This time she had been summoned by her old acquaintance Walter Kuhn, a veteran of the 1926 youth movement expedition to Polish Volhynia and since 1936 professor of ethnography at the University of Breslau.<sup>96</sup> Kuhn’s proposition was that Strzygowski join a summer assignment by women students from Breslau among ethnic German villages in formerly Soviet eastern Volhynia, now under German occupation.<sup>97</sup> Strzygowski leapt at the chance: as she recalled, this was a unique opportunity to travel to these ‘distant settlements’ which had been so inaccessible under Soviet rule.<sup>98</sup> Once again Strzygowski found peasant women to portray, revere, and empathise with, while revelling in the sense of escape and freedom that travel and new sights and subject-matter gave her.<sup>99</sup> Decades after the war, Strzygowski published her wartime drawings along with her memories of encounters with villagers in eastern Volhynia, the tone and perspective little changed from what she had written in 1941, seemingly satisfied that even if the people she had drawn had perished in the upheavals and violence of war, they lived on in her art.<sup>100</sup> The gesture of presenting the stories of vulnerable ethnic Germans as a legitimating narrative while ignoring the destruction wrought by Himmler’s population restructuring proved astonishingly durable.

### Conclusions

As they travelled from one corner of Europe to another, the resettlement teams found that organizing mass migration over such distances gave them an exhilarating sense of power. The journeys of those resettled, meanwhile, were presented as the dramatic main event, with the resettlers as the stars of the propaganda show – but at every point subject to the authority of the resettler teams. The power relations and transformations involved in these different journeys can be analysed from a number of perspectives: they can, I have argued here, also be usefully read in terms of gender.

The reports and travelogues produced by the men of the resettlement commandos turned what was essentially a process of dissolution and decol-

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<sup>96</sup> On Walter Kuhn’s pre-war career and his wartime involvement in advising resettlement planners, see Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards*, 105-8, 176-8.

<sup>97</sup> Hertha Karasek-Strzygowski, *Wolhynisches Tagebuch* (Marburg: Elwert, 1979), 11. Thereafter Karasek-Strzygowski, *Wolhynisches Tagebuch*.

<sup>98</sup> Karasek-Strzygowski, *Wolhynisches Tagebuch*, 12.

<sup>99</sup> Karasek-Strzygowski, *Wolhynisches Tagebuch*, 13.

<sup>100</sup> Karasek-Strzygowski, *Wolhynisches Tagebuch*, 6.

onization into an inspiring political pilgrimage and a triumph of forward motion for Nazism. In these narratives, the authors presented their experiences beyond the borders of the Reich as formative for their gendered identities as men of action. From one angle, they presented themselves as volunteer soldiers on a bloodless pseudo-military campaign during which they wore uniforms, lived rough, slept little, forged comradely bonds, drank and jested with each other and with their Soviet counterparts. From another angle, they constructed a self-image as self-sufficient technocrats on the move, turning theory into practice, becoming ‘experts for everything’, taking on all-encompassing responsibilities, acting as leaders, educators and ‘fatherly’ role models for the resettlers and demonstrating toughness towards non-Germans.

A perspective of gender also highlights the fact that it was a vision of fathers, mothers and children that embodied the ‘homelands on the move’. Removed from their surroundings and stripped of their privacy, resettler families were rendered by their dislocation into the raw material for a gigantic human experiment. The prominent presence of resettled mothers and children opened up opportunities for female ‘experts’ and propagandists – historians, ethnographers, welfare organizers, artists, photographers – to add their own brand of caring and maternalistic engagement to the resettlement operation alongside the male architects and technocrats who dominated the resettlement apparatus. More generally, the focus on resettler mothers and children engendered a protective attitude among all the men and women involved in resettling them. This offered opportunities for SS men and other agents of the Reich to appear as patrons and benefactors and to present a benign picture of what the war was about and what it was achieving. At the same time, the potentially limitless neediness of the settlers – particularly of uprooted mothers and children – was used to legitimate the unlimited violence used against the non-German population.



MARA LAZDA

## THE DISCOURSE OF POWER THROUGH GENDER IN WORLD WAR II LATVIA

For Latvia, as for much of Eastern Europe, World War II meant occupation by two authoritarian powers: the Soviet Union from 1940 to 1941 and Nazi Germany from 1941 to 1945, when Soviet occupation returned.<sup>1</sup> This chapter considers how the occupiers and the occupied used gendered dialogue in a negotiation for power, and how this discourse shaped the narrative of wartime occupation during World War II.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, this discourse continues to influence how Latvians remember the past, and this chapter examines the evolution of a gendered historical narrative of World War II Latvia. More broadly, however, this analysis suggests that a gendered perspective of World War II may transcend the time period and provide insight into postwar societies more broadly.

First, I briefly trace the arc of gendered discourse during the war through an analysis of the Latvian-language periodical press under the Soviet and Nazi occupations. Both the Soviet and Nazi powers used gendered language and relationships to construct new national identities and

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<sup>1</sup> Soviet troops occupied Latvia on June 17, 1940. Nazi troops entered Latvia on June 26, 1941. The Soviet Army returned in July 1944, and Riga fell on October 13, 1944; Latvia's western-most province of Kurzeme remained under Nazi occupation until the end of the war in May 1945. The second Soviet occupation lasted until 1991, when Latvia regained independence. For an overview of the war, see Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940-1990*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Thereafter Misiunas and Taagepera, *The Baltic States*. The most recent and comprehensive history of both occupations is Björn M. Felder, *Lettland im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Zwischen sowjetischen und deutschen Besatzern 1940-1946* [Latvia in World War II. Between Soviet and German Occupiers 1940-1946] (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> See also, Mara Lazda, 'Family, Gender, and Ideology in World War II Latvia', in Maria Bucur and Nancy M. Wingfield, eds., *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 133-53, thereafter Lazda, 'Family, Gender, and Ideology'; and Mara Lazda, 'Latvia', in Kevin Passmore, ed., *Women, Gender, and Fascism in Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 124-47. Thereafter Lazda, 'Latvia'.

legitimize their regimes. Creating new Soviet and Nazi masculinities and femininities were integral to establishing political, social, and economic domination and to recruit Latvian collaborators for the new regimes.

However, contrary to the intent of both occupiers, the emphasis they placed on gender also contributed to Latvian resistance. This resistance appears in several forms, including in the very periodicals that the occupation regimes hoped would disseminate and reinforce their ideologies. As the years of occupation passed, Latvian authors used gendered language to formulate articulations of autonomy, cautiously creating alternative conceptualizations of the Latvian nation. In this way, gender became a forum for the discourse of power under occupation.

Importantly, this gendered discourse extends beyond wartime and also shapes postwar narratives and writings of history. The second part of the chapter turns to the oral histories from ethnic Latvians. One of the greatest challenges scholars of war face is understanding how local populations saw and interacted with occupation regimes. Even though (as many scholars of memory point out)<sup>3</sup> memories change under the influence of – among other factors – time, social constructions of the past, and personal backgrounds, I propose that the study of Latvian oral histories is a necessary step for assessing both the reception of the occupation powers as well as the long-term effects of the gendered nature of wartime occupation.

#### Soviet Occupation and the Press: *Cīņa* and *Darba Sieviete*<sup>4</sup>

Soviet forces occupied Latvia on June 17, 1940. On August 7, 1940, a local office of *Vserossiiskaia assotsiatsia proletarskikh pisatelei* (All-Union Association of Proletarian Writers, or VAPP) was established to control all aspects of publishing.<sup>5</sup> Interwar newspapers and publishing houses were

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<sup>3</sup> See for example, Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980); Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Susan A. Crane, 'Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory', *American Historical Review*, 102, 5 (1997): 1372-85; Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); James Wertsch, 'The Narrative Organization of Collective Memory', *Ethos*, 36, 1 (2008), 120-35.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the press focusing on images of the family, see Lazda, 'Family, Gender, and Ideology', 133-53.

<sup>5</sup> Three Latvian Communists staffed the Riga office: K. Silmalis, K. Dreimanis, and V. Ardamatskis. VAPP and the Commissariat for Communications supervised production and content. Copies of all publications had to be sent to VAPP. Rolfs Ekmanis, *Latvian Literature under the Soviets 1940-1945* (Belmont: Nordland, 1978), 45. The Commissariat for Communications was established on September 30, 1940.

closed in the first weeks of occupation<sup>6</sup>, and new Soviet publications appeared in their place. Two of the new creations with the largest circulations were *Cīņa* (Struggle) and *Darba Sieviete* (Woman Worker). The Latvian-language daily newspaper *Cīņa* produced 10.000 to 25.000 copies of the first nine issues but soon expanded to 60.000 to 200.000 copies. Latvian Communist Kārlis Ozoliņš, who had been active in the interwar communist movement, was the main editor for most of the newspaper's run.<sup>7</sup> *Darba Sieviete*, a bi-weekly women's magazine, was sent directly to women who had subscribed to mainstream, middle-class interwar women's magazines. The first issue appeared on August 1, 1940 and the last on June 15, 1941. Its circulation ranged between 20.000 and 30.000 copies. The main editor was Cirene Palkavniece. Palkavniece had also been active in the interwar Latvian Communist Party. *Darba Sieviete* was not sent to women who had subscribed to journals with an explicitly nationalist content such as *Latviete* (Latvian Woman).<sup>8</sup> Although specific characteristics of the readership are unknown, the articles clearly targeted mothers, especially mothers with young children.

From the first issues, *Cīņa* defined women's and men's roles to set the new regime apart from the nationalist Latvian interwar government.<sup>9</sup> Gender 'norms' were explicitly political. *Cīņa* derided interwar gender roles as limiting women to motherhood and, more importantly, as symbolic of the corruption and weakness of the nationalist interwar government. *Cīņa* targeted the image Latvian conservative groups had promoted – women in

<sup>6</sup> Elmārs Pelkaus, Andris Caune, Daina Kļaviņa, Jānis Riekstiņš, Nikolajs Rižovs, Heinrihs Strods, Irēne Šneidere, and Indulis Zālīte, eds., *Okupācijas varu politika Latvijā 1939-1991: Dokumentu krājums* [Occupation Regime Politics in Latvia 1939-1991: Document Collection] (Riga: Latvijas Valsts Arhīvs, 1999), 115. In 1937, forty-seven newspapers were published in Latvia. Of these, ten were dailies, published in Latvian (six); German (two); Russian (one) and Yiddish (one). Arveds Švābe, *Latvju enciklopēdija* [Latvian Encyclopedia] (Stockholm: Tris Zvaigznes, 1950-1955), 2003. Thereafter Švābe, *Latvju enciklopēdija*.

<sup>7</sup> Ē. Flīgere, comp., *Latviešu periodika: Bibliogrāfisks rādītājs* [Latvian Periodicals: Bibliographic Guide], vol. 4 (Riga: Latvijas Akadēmiskā Bibliotēka, 1995), 43-44. Švābe, *Latvju enciklopēdija*, 1817.

<sup>8</sup> Brempele, Ā., E. Flīgere, D. Ibule, L. Lāce, and M. Lazdiņa, comps. *Latviešu periodika*. [Latvian periodicals], vol. 3, part 1 (Riga: Zinātne, 1988), 45-46. The *Darba Sieviete* of 1940-1941, published by the Latvian Communist Party, was not a direct successor to the *Darba Sieviete* published by the Women's Section of the Social Democratic Party from 1923 to 1930. B. Gudriķe, ed., *Latviešu literatūras darbinieki: Biogrāfiska vārdnīca* [Participants in Latvian literature: Biographical Dictionary] (Riga: Zinātne, 1964), 217.

<sup>9</sup> Latvia had been ruled by a national authoritarian dictator, Kārlis Ulmanis, since his coup in 1934. While Latvia had been established on the civic idea of nation in 1918, by 1934, a more conservative vision of an ethnic nation had become dominant.

Latvian folk costumes as embodying the Latvian nation. *Cīņa* directly attacked this model of Latvian femininity as one author wrote with obvious contempt, “[t]he only rights women [under the old regime] had were to wear folk costumes (*uzģērbt tautiskos brunčus*) and to present bouquets of flowers to the ‘leaders.’”<sup>10</sup>

In place of these maidens in folk garb, *Cīņa* featured photographs of women as workers. Articles featured the “first women” in every job: “Women in metallurgy”, “Women – Tram Conductors”, “First Women Glassblowers”, “First Woman Machinist”.<sup>11</sup> The description of “first women” sent two, somewhat contradictory, messages to Latvian readers. First, the redefinition of roles for women was a natural outgrowth of the realization of a woman’s strength. *Cīņa* often published individual testimonies in which women confirmed that they were following their natural, true calling. “Irma” had been unhappy working as a hairdresser (the only option available to her in the interwar period) but now “most of my comrades and I [are training to work on the railroad] because we’re interested in railroad work. It is exciting and appeals to us”.<sup>12</sup>

The second message emphasized the extraordinary and unusual nature of women working in positions that had been dominated by men. *Cīņa* calls these jobs “men’s work”, for example: “Belova stands at the machine doing men’s work”, and “some men cannot even keep up with Kozlovskaja”.<sup>13</sup> Women working in these positions were depicted as the model for Latvian women but also suggested that they were out of the norm, even in Soviet Latvia. In doing so, the articles also recognized a tension between the traditional roles and the new Soviet ideals. Moreover, such commentary questioned the ability of Latvian men.

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Darba sieviete atgūst tiesības’ [‘The woman worker regains her rights’], *Cīņa*, 3 July 1940, 2.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Sievietes metalapstrādāšanas nozarē’ [‘Women in Metallurgy’], *Cīņa*, 7 May 1941; G. Brokons, ‘Sievietes tramvaju vadītājas’ [‘Women Tram Conductors’], *Cīņa*, 22 May 1941; L. K., ‘Stikla fabrikā ‘Komunārs’ [‘Visiting The Glass Factory ‘Commune’], *Cīņa*, 18 May 1941, 8; J. F., ‘Pirmā sieviete mašīnu rīkotāja’ [‘The First Woman Machinist’], *Cīņa*, 19 January 1941, 3.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Sievietei vienādas tiesības ar vīrieti’ [‘Woman has the same rights as man’], *Cīņa*, 5 December 1940, 6.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Priekšzīmīgas strādnieces’ [‘Model Women Workers’] 6; see also, ‘Sievietes vīriešu darbā’ [‘Women Doing Men’s Work’], *Cīņa*, 16 May 1941, 8; ‘Sieviete veic vīriešu darbu’ [‘Woman Does Men’s Work’], *Cīņa*, 1 June 1941, 8. See also Attwood’s discussion of “men’s work”, Lynne Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women’s Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity 1922-1953* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999), esp. 87-89, 97-103. Thereafter Attwood, *New Woman*. According to Attwood’s account, the ability of women to perform ‘men’s work’ was more contested in the pages of Soviet Russian press than in *Cīņa*.

Latvian men also found a new ideal model in the pages of *Cīņa*: the Red Army soldier. The portrayal of the Red Army in *Cīņa*, particularly in the first months of occupation, emphasized its awe-inspiring strength. Authors wrote that this army was like no other, for “we have never seen an army like this one, militarily the most powerful in the world, but also a true army of the people”.<sup>14</sup> However, if indeed the Red Army had ‘liberated’ Latvia, the Soviet regime had to explain the continued presence of arms and military forces. Thus in addition to describing the physical power of the Red Army and its peaceful intentions, *Cīņa* also dedicated much of its praise of the army as a nurturer and ‘educator of the people’.

Most significantly, the Soviet soldier was a father and husband – to the Latvian nation as well as to individual women and children. This model of masculinity – powerful, sophisticated, kind, and fatherly – countered the impression of occupation soldiers as outside enemies. The soldier was both a brave hero and a member of the intimate life of the family:

“[The Red Army soldiers show us] how to honor women, how to love children – we did not know how to do this either, but now the Red Army soldier is teaching us this, too. [The respect shown women] would be difficult for our reactionary compatriot in his well-made tuxedo [...] to understand [...]. [The Red Army soldier] never yells at a child, never pushes him aside.”<sup>15</sup>

But how did the gendered language of the occupation press differ from that in the Soviet Union proper? Numerous scholars have examined Soviet depictions of women as well as the Soviet construction of masculinity.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> D. Perns, ‘Sarkanā armija – tautas audzinātāja’ [‘The Red Army – the Guardian of the People’], *Cīņa*, 26 July 1940, 1.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Jaunā laika jausma’ [‘The Beginning of a New Era’], *Cīņa*, 14 July 1940, 2.

<sup>16</sup> There are numerous works on the Soviet ideology, women, and the family. To list just a few: Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), esp. 73-83; Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998); N. L. Pushkareva, *Russkaia zhenshchina: Istoriia i sovremennost’: Dva veka izucheniiia ‘zhenskoi temy’ rysskoi i zarubezhnoi nauko, 1800-2000* [Russian Woman: Past and Present: Two Centuries of study ‘women’s subjects’ in Russian and foreign science, 1800-2000] (Moscow: Nauchno-izdatel’skii tsentr, “Ladomir”, 2002), esp. 24-30, and the extensive bibliography; Susan E. Reid, ‘Gender and Power in Soviet Art in the 1930s’, *Slavic Review*, 57, 1 (1998), 133-73; Attwood, *New Woman*; Melanie Ilić, ed., *Women in the Stalin Era* (New York: Palgrave, 2001). On Masculinity see, for example, Karen Petrone, ‘The Paradoxes of Gender in Russian War Memory’, in Karen Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008); Barbara Evans Clements, Rebecca



The Latvian press under Soviet occupation reveals, however, that the press recognized particular culture and traditions in adapting its rhetoric to Soviet Latvia. The Soviet press did not simply export the same gendered images and rhetoric used in Soviet Russia.

The analysis of the press is most useful, therefore, for revealing the conflicts, tensions, and spaces of negotiation. Conservative women's groups in interwar Latvia had appealed to women to foster Latvian culture in their families; authors in Soviet publications turned to women to dismantle these traditions. This direct conflict is most evident in *Darba Sieviete*.<sup>17</sup> In the first issue of *Darba Sieviete*, for example, one author called for the reevaluation of “backward” Latvian traditions that were in conflict with modernization, such as weaving and sewing traditional costumes. The author conceded women could be interested in handicrafts, but she questioned the utility and originality of such domestic art. This directly challenged the work of interwar Latvian middle-class women's organizations, which saw such skills as key to contributing to national pride.

Anticipating a negative public reception, Latvian Communist Party leaders sought to tone down this attack on Latvian traditions. The second secretary of the LCP (Žanis Spure), wrote a public response in *Cīņa*, asserting that in fact the new regime valued handicrafts and would support craft competitions, tying this to the Soviet respect for national cultures. He dismissed the *Darba Sieviete* article as “empty words” (*tukša runāšana*). “We will not only allow handicrafts”, he wrote, “we will support them, organize exhibits, and the best works will receive awards.” Spure concluded by stressing that culture “blossoms and grows” in the family of the Soviet peoples, and so will culture in Soviet Latvia.<sup>18</sup>

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Friedman, and Dan Healey, eds., *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2002). For a comparative perspective on masculinity under authoritarianism, see Karen Petrone and Jiu-Hyun Lim, eds., *Gender Politics and Mass Dictatorship: Global Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> The first issue of *Darba Sieviete* appeared on August 1, 1940. Each issue was between twenty-eight and thirty-six pages. Like *Cīņa*, it reprinted articles that had appeared in Soviet Russian publications. For example, E. Orļikova, ‘Padomju sieviete sabiedriskā ražošanā’ [‘The Soviet woman in socialist production’], *Darba Sieviete*, 15 October 1940, 5-6 reprinted from the Soviet Russian paper *Problemy ekonomiki*; K. K., ‘Marksa un Engelsa domas par sievieti un ģimeni’ [‘The Thoughts of Marx and Engel on the woman and the family’], *Darba Sieviete*, 1 December 1940, 5-7; F. Putincev, ‘Neklausiet vilkiem avju drānās!’ [‘Don’t listen to a wolf in sheep’s clothing’ (anti-religion article)], *Darba Sieviete*, 1 February 1941, 3-4, reprinted from the Soviet Russian satirical magazine *Bezbozhnik*.

<sup>18</sup> Z. Spure, ‘Ko un kā raksta mūsu prese’ [‘What and how our press writes’], *Cīņa*, 4 August 1940, 2. In the August 15, 1940 issue, the editorship of *Darba Sieviete* explained that there had been a mistake in the article, but the explanation did not in fact criticize the original content of the article.

Despite the criticism of the image of women in folk costumes, the Soviet regime co-opted this symbol – subduing its connection to the Latvian nation of the interwar period. In the first days of occupation, a drawing of the three Baltic states as three sisters in traditional garb appeared in *Cīņa* as they faced the family of Soviet peoples. Notably, however, when women appeared in the pages of the press in folk costumes, they did not appear as mothers. Most often, these women appeared in parades of the peoples of the Soviet Union, sporting one uniform among many.<sup>19</sup> Undoubtedly, the Latvian woman in folk costume appeared far more rarely than the Latvian woman worker.<sup>20</sup>

The reconceptualization of the family and personal relationships was tied closely to the Sovietization of Latvians and contributed both to support of the regime as well as resistance to it. Even within the highly censored press, we can detect spaces of negotiation among Latvian authors and readers. At the very least, the Soviet regime and its supporters recognized the connection between Latvian gender roles and the Latvian nation.

### Press under the Nazi Occupation: *Tēvija* and *Mana Māja*

In July 1941, the Nazi occupation replaced that of the Soviet. For the Nazis as for the Soviets, the press was a central tool through which to shape a new Latvian identity and to recruit collaborators. For the Nazis the gendered rhetoric in the press also served as a channel to disseminate its racial, antisemitic ideology. But before turning to the images of masculinity and femininity in the Nazi press, we must consider two points about the Nazi racial hierarchy and the plans for Latvia in the New Europe.

First, it is clear that the long-term Nazi plans for Latvia and the *Ostland* territories were annexation and Germanization.<sup>21</sup> In the short-term, how

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<sup>19</sup> This is most evident in photographs of parades, where women in folk costumes proceed alongside women athletes, Stakhanovites, nurses, and so on. See, for example, 'Pirmā maija demonstrācijas ainas Rīgā' ['Scenes from May 1 demonstrations in Riga'], *Cīņa*, 4 May 1941, 8. See also Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 23-45.

<sup>20</sup> There were fewer than ten images of women in folk costume in the pages of *Cīņa* and *Darba Sieviete*.

<sup>21</sup> For example, Alfred Rosenberg, Nazi ideologue and head of the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories in Berlin announced even before the occupation that the Reich would ban "all expression of loyalty [to Latvia] or autonomy". Elmārs Pelkaus, ed., *Okupācijas varu politika Latvijā 1939-1991: Dokumentu krājums* [The politics of the occupation powers in Latvia 1939-1991: Collection of Documents] (Riga: Nordik, 1999), 173. H. Marnitz recalls instructions issued at a preparatory meeting before he took his position at the division of health: "We were instructed to never, not officially, not in writing

ever, Nazi officials pursued a policy of duality. This duality meant that on one level Nazi occupation policies suggested a return of Latvian culture and independence that the first Soviet occupation (1940-1941) had destroyed. For example, the regime established a local self-administration [*landes-eigene Verwaltung*] staffed by Latvians (selected in Berlin) to give the illusion of local autonomy, while in fact the administration's power was limited both by decree as well as struggles between German civilian and military leaders.<sup>22</sup> In addition, the regime calculatedly allowed the reappearance of Latvian national symbols forbidden under the Soviet regime, such as the national flag.<sup>23</sup> As became increasingly clear to the local population during the occupation, however, particularly with the brutality of the Holocaust, the Nazis did not intend to allow any autonomy.<sup>24</sup>

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or verbally, to use the words Latvian, Latvia, the Latvian people" [*latvisks, Latvija, latviešu tauta*]. Harijs Marnics, *Kāvi pār Daugavu* [*Struggles over Daugava*] (n.p.: Apgāds Latvija, 1958), 32.

<sup>22</sup> On the self-administration see Edvins Evarts, 'Okupācijas iestādes par zemes pašpārvaldes uzdevumiem un funkcijām (1941. g. jūlijs-1944. g. septembris)' ['Occupation institutions on the responsibilities and functions of the self-administration'], *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, 4 (2003), 120-40. At best, the self-administration acted as an intermediary between the Latvians and the occupying regime and offered limited protection from worse fates; but the self-administration's failure to effectively resist the Nazi regime also facilitated the murder and deportation of thousands of Latvian citizens, of whom Jews were the greatest victims.

<sup>23</sup> Policies regulating national expression underscored the unequal relationship between German and Latvian cultures. The Latvian national flag, for example, could be flown but only on approved occasions and in diminished size next to the Reich flag. Latvian Embassy in the United States, *Latvia under German Occupation* (Washington, D.C.: Press Bureau of the Latvian Legation, 1943), 69. Although Latvian could be used on the local level, German was the official language of the Reich Commissariat. Order issued by H. Lohse, August 18, 1941, as cited in Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), 301-02.

<sup>24</sup> The Nazi regime and Latvian collaborators murdered approximately 90,000 Jews in Latvia, of whom 70,000 were Latvian citizens. The Jewish population in 1935 in Latvia was approximately 93,000. In the first year of Soviet occupation, 5,000 were victims of deportations. After the German attack in June 1941, between 10,000 and 15,000 Latvian Jews fled to the Soviet interior, of whom approximately 5,000 were drafted into or volunteered for the Soviet Army. From November 29, 1941 to February 10, 1942, the Nazi regime deported to Latvia approximately 25,000 Jews from Germany, Austria, and the Czech protectorate. See Andrew Ezergailis, *Holocaust in Latvia, 1941-1944: The Missing Center* (Riga: Historical Institute of Latvia, and Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1996), 70, 356-57; Josifs Šteimanis, *History of Latvian Jews*, Helena Belova, trans., Edward Anders, ed. (Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs, 2002), 125. Misiunas and Taagepera calculate the Jewish evacuation to the Soviet east and enlistment in the Soviet army to be 18,000. See Misiunas and Taagepera, *Baltic States*, 64.

The second point to consider is the Latvian position in the Nazi 'racial hierarchy' as an important factor in the gendered dialogue that emerged. Clearly the greatest victims of the Nazi occupation and World War II were Latvia's Jews, who represented about five percent of the population.<sup>25</sup> The 'racial' position of ethnic Latvians and their Baltic neighbors, however, was ambiguous. The most-northern group, the Estonians, were considered "racially akin to the Germans", but Latvians and Lithuanians, along with the Czechs, were "partially Germanic."<sup>26</sup>

Nazi officials debated the potential of Latvians to be assimilated throughout the occupation but postponed more precise analysis until after the war was won when the Baltic States would be integrated into a greater Nazi German state. The evaluation of the 'racial purity' of Latvians changed throughout the war; the 'racial value' of ethnic Latvians seemed to increase as German need for labor, soldiers, and material resources grew. But most importantly for this analysis, the ambiguity of the Latvian 'racial evaluation' made gender, itself a fluid category, a particularly useful tool for the Nazi regime in disseminating its propaganda.

To compare with the Soviet construction of gender, my examination of occupation and identity discourse in the Nazi press comes from two Latvian-language publications: *Tēvija* (Fatherland), a newspaper with a broad audience, and *Mana Māja* (My Home), a semi-monthly periodical whose target audience was women.<sup>27</sup> As under the Soviet occupation, what

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<sup>25</sup> According to the 1935 census, the total population of Latvia was 1.950.502, with Russian (10.6 percent), Jewish (4.8 percent), German (3.2 percent), Polish (2.5 percent), Belorussian (1.4 percent), and Lithuanian (1.2 percent) minorities. Data according to 1935 census, as cited in Janis Rutkis, *Latvia: Country and People* (Stockholm: Latvian Nation Foundation, 1967), 292, 302.

<sup>26</sup> Ihor Kamenetsky, *Secret Nazi Plans for Eastern Europe: A Study of Lebensraum Policy* (New York: Bookman, 1961), 83, 89-90.

<sup>27</sup> The first issue of *Tēvija* appeared on July 1, 1941. The number of copies published ranged between 220.000 and 280.000; its position as the dominant news source was reinforced through the republication of *Tēvija* articles in provincial newspapers. At the end of the war, from late 1944 to 1945, the number of issues fell to 25.000. Flīgere, ed., *Latviešu periodika: Bibliogrāfiskais rādītājs*, vol. 4, 92-3; 125; (Latvian State Historical Archive, hereafter abbreviated, LVVA), 74, apr. 1, 1. 2, 27. *Mana Māja* was published from 1942 to 1945. *Mana Māja* had a circulation of approximately 60.000 issues per year. Flīgere, *Latviešu periodika: Bibliogrāfiskais rādītājs*, vol. 4, 14. The staff of the press was Latvian, but worked under the censorship of the local Division for Press and Propaganda supervised by the General Commissariat and Security Police (SD, *Sicherheitsdienst*). Arturs Žvinklis, 'Latviešu prese nacistiskās Vācijas okupācijas laikā' ['The Latvian Press under Nazi occupation'], in Andris Caune, ed., *Latvija otrajā pasaules karā: Starptautiskas konferences materiāli* [Latvia during World War II: Materials from an international conference], Latvijas vēsturnieku komisijas raksti [Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia], vol. 1 (Riga: Latvijas Vēstures Instituta Apgāds, 2000), 353-59.

the press could write was restricted<sup>28</sup>; however, Latvian authors found spaces within the restriction in which to carve out spheres of autonomy.<sup>29</sup> Again, many scholars have examined images of masculinity and femininity under Nazism.<sup>30</sup> However, the Nazis, like the Soviets, had to adapt their discourse to the local conditions and traditions. We must consider the specific nature of gendered images outside the Reich proper to uncover the

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<sup>28</sup> Press Chief W. Zimmermann of the Ostministerium in Berlin issued Confidential “Press Instructions” to the editors-in-chief of officially approved papers. LVVA, f. 74, apr. 1, 1. 2, 30.

<sup>29</sup> The instructions were distributed only to editors-in-chief (individual authors may never have seen them); moreover, editors were often directed to reword phrases provided before publication. See for example the “Press Instructions”, December 4, 1942, “Nur zur Information!”, “Wörtlicher Abdruck verboten!” LVVA, f. P-74, apr. 1, 1. 3, 8. With the declaration of total war in 1943, the Nazi officials reiterated the secrecy of the Press Instructions and limited their distribution to officially approved editors. LVVA f. P-74, apr. 1, 1. 3, 36. Censorship and control also increased. LVVA f. P-70, apr. 5, 1. 23, 83.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Jill Stephenson, ‘Propaganda, Autarky and the German Housewife’, in David Welch, ed., *Nazi Propaganda: The Power and the Limitations* (Totowa: Barnes and Noble, 1983), 117-42; Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan, eds., *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984); Gisela Bock, *Zwangsterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* [Forced Sterilization in National-socialist Germany: Studies in Racial and Women Politics] (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986); Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987); Lisa Pine, *Nazi Family Policy 1933-1945* (New York: Berg, 1997); Elizabeth Heineman, *What Difference does a Husband Make?: Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Claudia Koonz, ‘“More Masculine Men, More Feminine Women”: The Iconography of Nazi Racial Hatreds’, in Amir Weiner, ed., *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 102-34; Dagmar Reese, *Growing up Female in Nazi Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006). – Scholars have also begun to analyze the gendered rhetoric in Eastern Europe. In addition to Elizabeth Harvey’s work listed above, see Melissa Feinberg’s work on the Czech Republic, ‘Dumplings and Domesticity: Women, Collaboration, and Resistance in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia’, in Maria Bucur and Nancy M. Wingfield, eds., *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 95-110. The Nazi press in Latvia has also received recent scholarly attention. See, in addition to the above cited article by Žvinklis, Matthew Kott, ‘The Portrayal of Soviet Atrocities in the Nazi-controlled Latvian-language Press and the First Wave of Antisemitic Violence in Riga, July-August 1941’, in David Gaunt, Paul A. Levine, and Laura Palosuo, eds., *Collaboration and Resistance during the Holocaust: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 127-60. Didzis Bērziņš, ‘Nacistiskā antisemitisma propaganda laikrakstā Tēvija 1941. g. jūlijā: latviešu līdzdalības diskurss’, [‘Nazi Antisemitic Propaganda in the Newspaper Fatherland July 1941: The Discussion of Latvian Participation’], *Latvijas Arhīvi*, 4 (2009), 63-98.

interactions between populations under occupation and the occupation regime.

As in the case of the Soviets, the occupation soldiers represented a new masculinity. The German army was “all-powerful” and “crowned with praise and victory” (*slavas, uzvaras vainogāta*). Articles contrasted the chaotic, cowardly nature of the Red Army with the bravery and order of the Germans. ‘Eyewitness’ accounts described both the brutality of the Red Army and the alleged sophistication of the Germans. One author examined the quarters the Soviet soldiers had abandoned. He poked around and saw pits with “piles of fetid meat and fish, pieces of bread, bottles of alcohol, and as proof, that a ‘brave warrior’ really lived there, he [had] left his ‘business card’ – in some places slept next to it, in some places on top of it.” The author then turned to describe the German who stood guard nearby: “healthy, strong, with an open, intelligent expression.” He concluded: “What a contrast to the exhausted, raggedy, and stupid Red Army soldier.”<sup>31</sup> In sum, the comparison is deliberate and contrasting masculinities were a means by which to communicate the political transfer of power.

These first discussions of masculinity focused on the power and superiority of the Germans. In short time, however, there is a slight shift in the use of gender. If in the first weeks of occupation, gender served to legitimize the regime, its function soon became more active in appealing to and recruiting Latvian men and women in support of the new order. Articles also paid increasing attention to femininity and the role of women as mothers. Significantly, a change in article authorship accompanied the increased focus on women. In the first issue of *Tēvija*, no names of authors appeared.<sup>32</sup> However, within the first months of occupation, the names of Latvian authors appeared in the columns of *Tēvija* – often names of intellectuals, writers, and community leaders familiar from the interwar period of independence. It is with these articles that the significance of gender as a channel through which Latvians tried to negotiate for power within the occupation structure becomes evident.

The clearest illustrations of the manipulation of gendered language by both Nazis and Latvians appear in *Mana Māja*, the magazine for women.<sup>33</sup> The Nazi officials used the journal to assert the regime’s presence and influence in women’s lives. They regularly reported on the accomplish-

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<sup>31</sup> ‘Pa sarkano bandītu pēdām’ [‘On the trail of the red bandits’], *Tēvija*, 1 July 1941, 2.

<sup>32</sup> This continued to be the case for many articles throughout the Nazi occupation; authorship and the extent of the influence of Nazi overseers cannot, in many cases, be determined. The sources for *Tēvija* included orders and declarations issued locally and in Berlin as well as re-publications of articles from German sources.

<sup>33</sup> I discuss other examples in Lazda, ‘Latvia’.

ments of women in Germany. The message was clear – Germany and its women were superior to the Latvians. As stories of Latvian women appear, they do so in the shadow of Germans. Thus, while seeming to portray the Latvian family as strong, *Mana Māja* also emphasized that the ‘German way’ served as the ideal model and Latvians were subordinate to it. The first issues in particular offered this dual approach: praising Latvian culture and families but also pointing to Germany, where women had already made significant achievements.

However, Latvian authors soon modified these images. As in *Tēviņa*, we can detect a growing kind of national appeal that seemed to address Latvians, which was possible because it co-opted Nazi rhetoric. Articles on eugenics, for example, discussed the strength of families and the health of children, in accord with Nazi guidelines. In *Family and Nation*, the author asked: “How is a strong [*krieta*] family shaped? By strong women and men.” While incorporating National Socialist language, however, the ambiguousness of *which* nation the author means seems to suggest a sense of Latvian national pride and purity. He continued: “A nation [*tauta*] depends on the family. But the opposite is also true – a family will only be truly happy, if both partners of the marriage are from the same people [*tauta*].”<sup>34</sup> Another article went a step further, apparently criticizing the Germanization policies of the regime. The author instructed readers to “teach your children to honor and love the language of their father’s fathers. The most important factor that separates one people from others is language.”<sup>35</sup>

There are, of course, several possible readings of these lessons. These articles could have been a warning to both Latvians and Germans to avoid relationships with each other, fearing ‘contamination’ of both peoples. But, when seen in the larger context of the surrounding articles, as well as the increased pressures from the Germans for Latvian support, these articles also contain evidence of resistance, as a call to strengthen the *Latvian* nation against the Germans, offering a more direct challenge to the Nazi regime. This increased focus on the strength of the nation is accompanied by visual nationalist reminders such as a more prominent presence of Latvian women in folk costumes.<sup>36</sup> The timing of this change in emphasis is important, for these symbols appeared more frequently as the years of

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<sup>34</sup> E. Lauva, ‘Ģimene un tauta’ [‘Family and nation’], *Mana Māja*, 12 (June 1944), 177.

<sup>35</sup> K1. Siliņš, ‘Mūsdienų ģimene’ [‘The family in our time’], *Mana Māja*, 3 (February 1944), 35.

<sup>36</sup> See especially the images on the covers of April 10, 1943; March 1944; May 1944; and June 1944.



occupation passed, when the violence of the Nazis had become increasingly clear, and when the Nazi regime had drafted Latvian men into the military.<sup>37</sup> This somewhat ambiguous address to the nation is made more clear in the press of the resistance.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, it is also possible, or likely, that by incorporating racial rhetoric and ideas that seemed in accord with Nazi goals, Latvian authors contributed to support of the regime and aided collaboration. Latvians collaborated with the Nazis on several levels, including the carrying out of the murder of the Jews.<sup>39</sup> Though this may not have been the intent of

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<sup>37</sup> The Latvian SS Voluntary Legion remains a controversial part of Latvia's past under the Nazi occupation. Although there was a short period during which enlistment was voluntary, the response was insufficient for the military needs of the Nazi regime. Thus, in February 1943, men born between 1919 and 1924 were drafted, which was then expanded to those born between 1906 and 1926. The 15th division was the first to be established and fought first in Russia, then in 1944 in northern Latvia. In 1944 it was sent to Pomerania, where in 1945 it found itself in the U.S. and British zone. The 19th division fought primarily in Kurzeme, western Latvia. In 1945, most were sent to Siberia by the Soviet regime. Many Latvians saw, and continue to see, the Legion as the only opportunity to participate in the battle against the Soviet Union – and saw a fight against Germany as the next step that would free Latvia. The Legion as a whole did not participate directly in the murder of Latvian Jews; however it is known that individuals who had been part of the killings later joined the Legion. Andrew Ezergailis, ed., *The Latvian Legion: Heroes, Nazis, or Victims?: A Collection of Documents from OSS War-Crimes Investigation Files, 1945-1950* (Riga: Historical Institute of Latvia, 1997); Mirdza Kate Baltis, *The Latvian Legion: Selected Documents* (Toronto: Amber Printers and Publishers, 1999); Inesis Feldmanis, 'Latviešu un citu nevācu tautu ieroču SS vienības Otrajā pasaules karā: Kopīgais un atšķirīgais' ['Latvian and other non-German nations in the Waffen SS units during World War II: The Common and the Different'], in Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas, ed., *Okupācijas režīmi Latvijā: 1940-1956 [Occupation Regimes in Latvia: 1940-1956]*, Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti [Symposium of the Historians of Latvia], vol. 7 (Riga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2002), 165-78; Edvīns Brūvelis, ed., *Latviešu leģionāri [Latvian Legionnaires]* (Riga: Daugava Vanagi, 2005).

<sup>38</sup> For example, on March 30, 1942, the underground publication *Voice of the People* (*Tautas Balss*) wrote: "It is perfectly clear to anyone that the descendants from [a mixed] marriage are lost to the Latvian nation, but the Latvian woman must be aware that she received her blood from her nation and her only and greatest duty is to give it back [...] If the Germans have written laws to protect their nation's blood and honor, then we must also have the same demands."

<sup>39</sup> Latvians collaborated with the Nazi regime on several levels. At the beginning of the occupation, Nazi German officials worked with former members of the interwar extreme right, most notably the Thundercross, who hoped that the Nazi arrival would finally rid Latvia of the evils of communism and help establish a pure and ethnically Latvian Latvia. Although a few Thundercross leaders did serve in official positions in the Nazi governing structure, collaboration between these extremists and the Nazis was shortlived. – Although a precise number is unknown, it is clear that Latvians were participants in the Holocaust in Latvia. The most notorious of these collaborators was Viktors Arājs and the Arājs Commando formed soon in the summer of 1941. This group of approximately three hundred men



the articles' authors, their incorporation of ideas of 'purity' may have, at the very least, made the racist ideology of the Nazi regime more tolerable and tempered resistance.

In the end, it is difficult to know how Latvians received and read the press under either the Soviets or the Nazis. However, this challenge should not lead us to dismiss the official press during the occupation as formulaic rhetoric. Rather, a study of the changing conceptualizations of the Latvia under Soviet or Nazi ideology is significant to identify the successes and failures of propaganda in building support. Moreover, the gendered discourse that appears in the press under both occupations lives beyond the wartime period in the oral texts of Latvian participants and witnesses. Latvian interviewees repeatedly use gendered frameworks to recall their wartime experiences.

The construction of this framework may not be a deliberate choice, but it provides evidence of wartime perspectives that are difficult to uncover. That is, the prevalence of gender suggests that, first, on some level Latvians received and incorporated the ideology disseminated by the press. In sum, even the propaganda in the press were not just empty words. And second, the gendered narratives emphasize the continuity between wartime personal interactions and the writing of this experience after the war. Wartime frameworks shape postwar history writing. This influence is evident in oral histories from ethnic Latvians, to which I now turn.<sup>40</sup>

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murdered Jews throughout Latvia in the summer and fall. The number of collaborators outside this group is much larger, although the numbers are unknown. – For more on collaboration, see Rudīte Vīksne, 'Arāja komandas dalībnieks pēc padomju tiesas prāvu materiāliem: Sociālais stāvoklis, izglītība, iestāšanās motīvi, piespriestais sods' ['The Arajs command participants based on the Soviet court cases: Social status, education, motivation, and sentences'], in Andris Caune, ed., *Holokausta izpētes problēmas Latvijā: Starptautiskas konferences referāti* [The Problems in Holocaust Research in Latvia: Results of an International Conference] (Riga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2001), 350-83; Robert G. Waite, 'Reliable Local Residents: Collaboration in Latvia, 1941-1945', in Andris Caune, ed., *Latvija otrajā pasaules karā: Starptautiskās konferences materiāli. 1999* [Latvia during World War II: Materials from an International Conference], Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti [Symposium of the Historians of Latvia], gada 14.-15. jūnijs, Rīga, vol. 1. (Riga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2000), 115-44. Martin Dean, 'Local Collaboration in the Holocaust in Eastern Europe', in Dan Stone, ed., *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 120-40.

<sup>40</sup> My examples come from my work over a period of about ten years with the National Oral History Project (NOHP) at the University of Latvia. It was, in fact, my initial work with oral histories that led me to focus on gendered discourse and identity. I follow the NOHP model of life story approach, which means that each interview aims to record the entire life narrative of the individual rather than investigate a specific time. I began my discussion of World War II with two general questions: How do you remember the arrival of the Russians? How do you remember the arrival of the Germans? I used "Russian"

### “Old Wine in New Bottles”: Latvian Memories of Occupation

Recollections of violence are central to Latvian recollections of war, and these focused especially on the mass deportations under the Soviets and the Holocaust under the Nazis. However, most often Latvian narratives do not focus on clear alignments for or against the occupation power but rather on day-to-day survival and on the struggle to comprehend the changes and brutality around them. In these accounts, it was striking that interviewees most often tried to communicate their impressions through gendered language, that is, through explicit discussions of masculinity and femininity and the roles of men and women. Both men and women, of various class backgrounds, often made a comment on the masculinity and femininity they associated with the war.<sup>41</sup> The use of gendered language itself reveals small spaces of autonomy between collaboration and resistance in which Latvians sought to express some kind of national identity. The narrators work to reconcile the propaganda of liberators with the lived experience of personal interactions.

As one man (b. 1917) recalled, “[i]n 1940 something dark and rather senseless began, full of all kinds of contradictions.”<sup>42</sup> Other interviewees debated, half-jokingly, which would be the lesser evil – a Russian or German occupation. To many, the Russians would be the preferred occupying power. Latvians would have some freedom since everyone knew that “the Russian is a fool”. Latvians who had lived close to the border with Russia said they had seen the poverty of Soviet Russia first-hand and knew what

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instead of Soviet and “German” instead of Nazi because this is how Latvians colloquially refer to these occupations “The Russian times, the German times”.

<sup>41</sup> The oral history interviews with ethnic Latvians considered here are drawn from three sources. First, I selected eighteen oral histories in the National Oral History Project at the University of Latvia in Riga (*Nacionālā mutvārdu vēstures arhīvs*, further NMV), ranging in date from 1993 to 2003. Second, working closely with the staff of the archive, I conducted twenty-eight interviews in the summers of 1995, 1996, and 1997. Many of these focused on the Soviet deportation of Latvians to Siberia after the war. In addition, forty-two interviews took place during a ten-month stay in 1999-2000. The third group of sources consists of thirteen video interviews found at the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (*Okupācijas Muzeja Fonds*, further OMF). The structure and recruitment of these interviews differs slightly from the first two categories in that the OMF staff focuses on the years of the war and the postwar Soviet occupation. In total, these 101 interviews represent a range of socioeconomic, regional, and educational experiences. However, the interviews selected are all with people who identified themselves as Latvian rather than a member of a minority group, although I did interview Latvians of Polish, Russian, and Jewish descent. All names used in the citations are pseudonyms.

<sup>42</sup> Aleksandrs Mūrnieks, Interview by Mara Lazda (hereafter ML), June 2000, Latvia.

awaited them.<sup>43</sup> Others recalled their anti-German upbringing, as one woman (b. 1920) noted that “I remember clearly that [in school we were taught] the Germans were our historical enemies.”<sup>44</sup> The experience of both occupations, however, led many to conclude that the goals of the regimes were more similar than different, that both wanted to eliminate the Latvian nation and state. According to one account:

“It seemed that the Germans were as a nation a little more civilized, but to say that there was some kind of enthusiasm for them, that would be wrong. Nothing good could come of it whether the Russians or Germans won. They would have sent us away somewhere; we would have nothing. It was old wine in new bottles.”<sup>45</sup>

In trying to describe their interactions with each regime, interviewees call upon gendered images. For the Soviet period, I came to expect the “nightgown story”, a comment on the lack of sophistication of Russian women. I heard this story numerous times, even though I have not yet found any references or documentation outside this myth. According to one woman's (b. 1918) rendition, for example, she said that “[I will] never forget when we saw the officers and their wives. I said to my brother: ‘Look they’ve come in nightgowns!’” She explained that the Russian women went out on the town wearing nightgowns as evening dresses. “And you can imagine how beautiful our nightgowns were if a Russian woman would actually go out dancing in them!”<sup>46</sup>

The ignorance and inappropriate behavior of Russian women stayed in the minds of many as an illustration of the lack of civilization of the new regime. One woman (b. 1919) added that as well as inappropriately wearing nightgowns,

“[Russian women] all had boots; they were the ones who introduced the world to knee-length boots. Honestly. Before [the Soviet occupation] we did not know that women could wear such boots and with little skirts. For a long time I could not imagine wearing such boots because it was repulsive [*pretīgs*] to me. So there was such humor, too.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Skaidrīte Salmiņa, Interview by ML, June 1997, Latvia.

<sup>44</sup> Mirdza Pētersone, Interview by Māra Zirņīte, June 2003, Kuldīga, Latvia, NOHP. Mūrnieks, quoted above, thought that Latvians were simply more used to living with Russians in the independence period. They interacted more with Russians than with Germans because Germans had a more developed system of cultural organizations and thus kept to themselves more than the Russians.

<sup>45</sup> “*Tie paši vēži citā kuliņē*” [literally, the same crabs in a different bag]. Anna Krasīņa, Interview ML, August 2000, Latvia.

<sup>46</sup> OMF, 174, 175.

<sup>47</sup> Elvīra Eglīte, Interview by ML, August 2000, Latvia.

A particularly shocking memory for one woman (b. 1920) was coming face-to-face with a Soviet woman soldier, who “with a rifle on her shoulder shout[ed in my face] ‘who is not with us is against us, who is not with us, is against us.’”<sup>48</sup> Another (b. 1931) described the improper conduct of women soldiers when the Soviet occupying forces returned in 1945: “One memory that sticks out is how those Russian women from the front [*frontietes*] stood by the store – women in uniform – pouring shots of alcohol for themselves.”<sup>49</sup>

The appearance of Soviet Russian soldiers played a central role in life stories as a reflection of the foreign nature of the new rule and new ideology and seemed openly to contradict the image the press tried to project of Soviet military sophistication. Reactions to the appearance of soldiers on the street reflect confusion and fear. Although there are few direct references to sexual violence, interviewees acknowledged its occurrence. Latvians deported to Siberia alluded to incidents of sexual exploitation. Women specifically mentioned their fear of rape when the Soviet regime returned in 1945. One woman (b. 1925) and her sister waited for the return of the Russians with great fear, “we were afraid of being raped. We covered ourselves with mud as much as possible, so no one would touch us.”<sup>50</sup>

But in addition to fear, the narratives also contain humor and pity regarding the Russian soldiers. Some mocked the arriving soldiers “who were such little, little men [*mazi, mazi vīreļi*] who wore hats with a pointy top. We had a great laugh about them [saying] ‘a point on top and underneath a fool’ [*augšā pulķīts apakšā mulķīts*].”<sup>51</sup>

These impressions point to how Latvian understanding of gender norms acted as a filter through which they saw Soviet policies and ideology. Certainly for some Latvians, Soviet promises of liberating women as well as providing more opportunities for men, particularly from the working class, were attractive and helped recruit supporters such as the Latvian women’s delegate to the All-Union Soviet, Ieva Paldiņa. However, life stories reveal also how personal contact with the first Soviet representatives – Russian men and women – distanced many Latvians from the new regime. This reaction was not limited to Latvian members of the middle class or to urbanites. Latvians in a sense used accepted definitions of gender roles to create their own hierarchy and to protect themselves.

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<sup>48</sup> OMF 228, 229.

<sup>49</sup> Erika Granta, Interview by ML, August 2000, Latvia.

<sup>50</sup> Liliņa Kalniņa, Interview by NMV, 1992.

<sup>51</sup> Jānis Vilciņš, Interview by ML, August 2000, Latvia.

Even more importantly, moments in these life stories point to how Latvians used traditional gender roles to shield themselves from the Soviet regime and ideology. The story of resistance to Soviet women's fashion – such as the rejection in the woman's story above of short skirts and tall boots – is in part an amusing anecdote. These descriptions may offer a bit of humor, but they also indicate how Latvians used gender roles to distinguish themselves from the occupying power. Latvians carved out a space in which to protect their identities as Latvians despite the growing influence of Soviet ideology and Russian culture and language. The Soviet ideology and regime were associated with the unkempt, uncivilized appearance of the Russian male soldiers, which was in contrast to the daily praises that appeared in the newspapers of the valiant, sophisticated Red Army. The conduct of Russian women also resulted in a bit of pity for the foreigners as they did not understand something so 'basic' as proper dress. Moreover – as the somewhat mocking tone of the narrators as they describe the encounters with Russians indicates – Latvians could perhaps feel superior to the foreigners and maintain a measure of self-respect because of their knowledge of 'proper' gender norms.

In response to my question about the arrival of the Germans, many interviewees point out an inner conflict. The invasion by Nazi Germany came two weeks after Soviet mass deportations and seemed to many Latvians to bring relief from further Soviet deportations.<sup>52</sup> Yet this initially positive impression contrasted with the historical attitudes toward their neighbors as the "seven-hundred-year oppressors". One woman recalled the absurdity of the positive reception of the Germans. She said that in her education, "very little negative was said about the USSR. [...] [T]he whole

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<sup>52</sup> In one night, from June 14 to June 15, the Soviet regime arrested and deported 15,424 Latvian citizens of all ethnicities. See Heinrihs Strods, 'Septītā plauja (1940-1949)' ['Seventh Harvest'], in Anda Līce, ed., *Via dolorosa: stāļinisma upuru liecības* [*Via dolorosa: Testimonies of the victims of Stalinism*], vol. 2 (Riga: Liesma, 1993), 11. See Sindija Dimanta and Indulis Zālīte, 'Četrdesmito gadu deportāciju struktūranalīze' ['Structural analysis of the Deportations of the 1940s'], in Tadeušs Puisāns, ed., *Okupācijas varu nodarītie postījumi Latvijā 1940-1990: Rakstu krājums* [*The destruction by the occupation powers in Latvia 1940-1990: Collection of Essays*] (Stockholm: Memento, 2000), 148; Zālīte and Sindija Eglīte, '1941. g. 14. jūnija deportācijas struktūranalīze' ['Structural analysis of June 14, 1941 deportations'], in Andris Caune, ed., *1941. gada 14. jūnija deportācija – noziegums pret cilvēci. Starptautiskās konferences materiāli* [*The June 14, 1941 deportation – crime against humanity. Materials from an International Conference*], Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti [Symposium of the Historians of Latvia], vol. 6. (Riga 2002), 40-50; although the exact numbers are not known, scholars have calculated recently that approximately one-fifth of those deported survived life in exile. See Jānis Riekstiņš, '1941. gada 14. jūnija deportācija Latvijā' ['The June 1941 deportation in Latvia'], in Andris Caune, ed., *1941. gada 14. jūnija deportācija* [*The June 14, 1941 deportation*], vol. 6 (Riga 2002), 28.

time in school we were taught that Germany was our enemy.”<sup>53</sup> But after June 14, 1941, her attitude changed 180 degrees: “Imagine, after one occupying power, we joyfully welcomed another”.<sup>54</sup>

While the image of Russian women played a central role in the memories of the Soviet occupation, the presence of Latvian women was significant in memories of the German occupation. Interviewees remembered young women in traditional folk costumes who greeted the Germans with flowers and Latvian food. While curious boys were allowed to look at the soldiers’ guns and gas masks, “Latvian girls in folk costumes brought milk and *pīrāgi* [filled rolls] to the soldiers”.<sup>55</sup> The welcoming of ‘liberation’ was closely tied in Latvian memories to the appearance of women in national garb as the representatives of the Latvian nation. These Latvian women reinforced the contrast between Soviet emphasis on the image of women as workers: the Latvian women reclaimed the image of the woman in folk costume. The vision of these women, moreover, indicated to Latvians a return to an understanding of gender roles and order associated with the interwar period.

Interviewees also pay considerable attention to their first encounters with the German soldiers, particularly in contrast to their impressions of the Russians. Narrators emphasize the beauty and order of German soldiers:

“What beautiful boys [the Germans were], as if they had been especially selected [*izlasīti*]. Their uniforms and figures were beautiful. [...] And the first thing they did when they arrived was look for water – and in Rēzekne we have artesian wells – and they immediately went to the water and washed up and shaved.”<sup>56</sup>

The manners of the Germans were indicative of a sophistication the Russians had lacked.

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<sup>53</sup> Līvija Austriņa, Interview by ML, August 2000, Latvia.

<sup>54</sup> Austriņa, Interview.

<sup>55</sup> Edvards Liepiņš, Interview ML, August 2000, Latvia.

<sup>56</sup> Alise Lazdiņa, Interview by ML, August 2000, Latvia. See also Irēna Saleniece’s analysis of oral histories on Latvian attitudes toward Wehrmacht soldiers, Irēna Saleniece, ‘Vērmahta karavīri Latvijas iedzīvotāju atmiņā (pēc mutvārdu vēstures avotiem)’, in Andris Caune, ed., *Latvija nacistiskās Vācijas okupācijas Varā 1941-1945. Starptautiskās konferences referāti*. 2003 [Latvia under Nazi German occupation 1941-1945: Presentations from an International Conference], Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti [Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia], vol. 11 (Riga: Latvijas Vēstures institūta apgāds), 40-47.

“The Germans were polite [...] they asked to use the toilet. In this way their civilized attitude was evident. Representatives of the Red Army never asked [to use the toilet]. Afterward you just found [it] and had to clean it up.”<sup>57</sup>

In time, Latvians saw the polished Germans as conniving and not worthy of their trust; ‘gentlemanliness’ could not hide the violence of the antisemitic policies and the murders of the Holocaust.<sup>58</sup> One interviewee (b. 1930) concluded:

“The Germans committed their atrocities calmly, like a gentleman. [...] They knew how to commit their crimes with a smile on their lips. The Russians by contrast were horribly crude from the start. What they did was the same for both. Just the way they carried it out was different.”<sup>59</sup>

While interviewees describe the violence of the Holocaust, and also recognize the role of Latvian collaborators<sup>60</sup>, this violence coexists with the image of Germans as ‘civilized’.

These narratives provide evidence that individual Latvians responded to the gendered discourse that appeared in the press (as well as in occupation regime policies). However, even these brief examples about the appearance and behavior of Russians and Germans initially appear superficial and are disturbing for both the interviewee and the interviewer. It is difficult to comprehend, as the interviewer removed from the war experience, how those responsible for the murder of millions could be described as ‘civilized’ or even ‘beautiful’?

Nevertheless, I would like to suggest that rather than diminishing the violence of both regimes, in particular the German and Latvian murder of the country’s Jews, these narratives point to the inner struggles of individuals and the negotiation of power between occupation and regimes and people under occupation. Recognition of these struggles does not alleviate individuals of their responsibility in collaboration with the regimes, of course. The emphasis on personal interactions with soldiers, both Soviet and Nazi, allowed Latvians to make the distinction between individual men and the Soviet and Nazi ‘power’. As one woman, who initially had described her first impression of the Germans as “a beautiful painting”, noted later that, “the [real] German [*vācietis*] was not like those soldiers, like

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<sup>57</sup> Jūlijs Zaķis, Interview.

<sup>58</sup> Aleksandrs Mūrnieks, Interview.

<sup>59</sup> Zigurds Zālītis, Interview.

<sup>60</sup> When asked whether Latvians also participated in the shootings, Ausma Stārķe (b. 1912) responded frankly “Do you think Latvians [*latvietis*] were better than anyone else?”.



those boys, who were washing up by the well. [The German in power – *tas vācietis*] was making demands.”<sup>61</sup>

Central to this negotiation between occupier and occupied is the construction of narratives that allow the witnesses of an era to make a complicated reality comprehensible. In this case, interviewees need to distinguish between their individual interactions with soldiers and the larger occupation structure. The gendered language of these narratives is deliberate – the malleability of gender itself as a concept makes it an effective tool in articulating a wartime experience full of contradictions.

## Conclusion

Examination of the gendered experience of the World War II occupations in Latvia – and in Eastern Europe in general – helps us understand how Latvians continue to process this complicated past and write the history of the twentieth century. More importantly, however, this gendered lens contributes to scholarship beyond Latvia and World War II. There are at least two ways that the gendered analysis of World War II shapes a transnational history.

First, while several scholars have pointed to the inadequacy of categories such as collaborator, resister, and bystander and have pointed to the overlap between participatory roles<sup>62</sup>, a gendered analysis of the struggles for power between occupier and occupied reveals not only the existence of the overlap between categories, but also *how* individuals could both participate in and resist the occupation power. The lack of what Joan W. Scott calls “fixity” of gender<sup>63</sup> allowed groups with different ideologies to use similar gender constructions for very different purposes.

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<sup>61</sup> Marta Upīte, Interview by ML and Māra Zirņīte, 2000, Latvia.

<sup>62</sup> To list just a few, one of the most controversial interpretations of resistance was that of Martin Broszat’s *Resistenz*, who proposed a wider definition of resistance in addition to organized activity. See Broszat, ‘Resistenz und Widerstand’ [‘Resistance and Opposition’], in Martin Broszat, Elke Fröhlich, and Anton Grossmann, eds., *Bayern in der NS-Zeit [Bavaria during National Socialism]*, vol. 4 (München: Oldenbourg, 1981), 697-99. As cited in Neil Gregor, ed., *Nazism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 242. Works such as Philippe Burrin, *Living with Defeat: France under the German Occupation, 1940-1944*, trans. Janet Lloyd (London: Arnold, 1996), and Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: In Search of the German Occupation 1940-1945* (London: Macmillan, 2002) consider the idea of overlapping categories of resistance and collaboration.

<sup>63</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 5.



Second, a gendered analysis of World War II also suggests how this period shaped the politics of post-socialist tradition. The oral history conversations for this study took place in the 1990s and 2003, at a time when post-socialist societies were considering questions of citizenship, social policies (such as child subsidies and maternity leave), and school curriculum. In other words, while the interviews focused on the past, transition politics provided the context in which these conversations and research took place.<sup>64</sup>

In sum, the Latvian case study is not just about WWII or Eastern Europe. Nor is it just about how political language is gendered. If we think about gender as a channel for negotiation of power, then, I want to suggest, the experience of WWII in Eastern Europe can provide insight into questions of power and resistance more broadly. When occupied societies no longer have control over traditional political, social, and cultural institutions, gender emerges as a sphere in which they attempt to construct autonomy.

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<sup>64</sup> About Gender Politics in Post-War Latvia see Zelče in this volume.

ANDREA PETŐ

## WOMEN AS VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS IN WORLD WAR II

### THE CASE OF HUNGARY

Serendipity according to Wikipedia, one of the first research addresses in our digital age, is “a propensity for making fortunate discoveries while looking for something unrelated”.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I would like to argue against serendipity, claiming that yes, there is an underlying concept behind all those occurrences, especially in the case of the two case studies I will be describing in this paper on the dynamics of gender regimes after WWII. The first one I will be presenting is the case of transitional justice in Hungary after WWII where I analyze its activity and the characteristics of the activity of the people’s tribunals. The second case study is the rapes committed by the soldiers of the Red Army in Hungary. I will conclude with describing the general characteristics of gender regimes after WWII.

I would like to start this paper by asking the question: What is the case for serendipity in the case of women as victims and perpetrators?

My present work is on post-WWII trials, the people’s tribunals.<sup>2</sup> For illustrating my point first I need to summarize the characteristics of this legal process after WWII in Hungary. Hungary was an ally of Nazi Germany where with the solid cooperation of the Hungarian state apparatus, the quickest deportation in the history of the Holocaust took place in 1944, claiming 500.000 lives in two months. After the deportations stopped, the Regent of the empire, Miklós Horthy made a last attempt to exit from the war but his attempt failed on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1944, and the Arrow Cross, the Hungarian Nazi Party, took over for the last bloody and tragic ten months of the war.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serendipity> (last visted 15 September 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Andrea Pető, ‘Problems of Transitional Justice in Hungary: An Analysis of the People’s Tribunals in Post-War Hungary and the Treatment of Female Perpetrators’, *Zeitungsgeschichte*, 34, 6 (2007), 335-49.

The country was liberated by the Red Army after bloody fighting and tens of thousands of rapes were committed by the soldiers of the Red Army. In the postwar period the question was raised: How to deal with the collaborators and war criminals? Not only the country but the society was in ruins; social solidarity was non-existent. The number of court cases was between 27.000-60.000 depending on which historians you are reading.<sup>3</sup>

The uncertainty in numbers itself legitimizes the quantitative approach we are taking in our present research project. I am co-directing a research project on quantitative historical analyses of the people's tribunals with Ildiko Barna, entitled "Memory of WWII and Transitional Justice".<sup>4</sup> Based on the compiled file of data we will be able to give the background of war criminals and show how the Hungarian juridical system worked, what kind of crimes were committed during WWII, and how the survivors used and shaped the juridical system.

### The people's tribunals: characteristics and their consequences

As far as temporality of the political justice is concerned, the timing of the trials was crucial for two reasons. First, the trials started in February 1945 in Budapest, when in the western part of the country the Arrow Cross still ruled. The court processes were very much dependent on when they took place. The earlier the trial was scheduled, the surer it was that the verdict would be very harsh.

The Law on people's tribunals was amended several times. The changes were all pointing towards further regulation of the activity of the tribunal, first it was only a decree, and then a law. The process began with the adoption of Act VII of 1946 in the Criminal Law Protection of the Democratic Order of the State and the Republic, which incorporated a rather broad definition of so-called "anti-democratic statements". The legal situation was altered, and the people's tribunals became players in the broader

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the political justice in Hungary after WWII see László Karsai, 'The People's Courts and Revolutionary Justice in Hungary, 1945-46', in István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt, eds., *The Second World War and Its Aftermath* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 137-51; and István Deák, 'Political Justice in Austria and Hungary after WWII', in Jon Elster, ed., *Retribution and Reparation in the Transition to Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 124-46.

<sup>4</sup> The project encompasses a research team of 10 researchers working on analyses of people's tribunal files in Budapest. The samples are taken using stratified random sampling: 500 files have been randomly chosen from a total number of available files (70.000). The results will be analyzed by SPSS in order to to analyze a wider impact on the formation of Hungarian historical memory by introducing solid empirical evidence in the heated public debate about Hungarian war guilt or, to put it differently: to restore history to memory.

political chess game in which the communist ruled Ministry of Interior and the police were more interested in so-called anti-communist activity than in hunting down war criminals.

As far as the locality of post-war political justice is concerned, there was a big difference in the country in how the people's tribunals operated. In some counties or cities where the pre-war elite did not escape with the Arrow Cross thugs to the West because of the approaching Red Army, they kept their positions in the local administration till 1947. They used their positions to hinder or even to push back the communist driven legal machinery, seeking to maintain the status quo, and not to punish those who were actively involved in the WWII crimes. In territories however where the local elite escaped, the change happened more smoothly, and war crime verdicts were taken more quickly and harshly.<sup>5</sup>

As far as the structure of the people's tribunals is concerned, the Hungarian people's courts had a unique characteristic in comparison with other countries in Europe, even with the transitional justice of other countries under Soviet occupation. The decree on the people's tribunals, and later the bill about setting up exceptional courts were drafted by a lawyer who had lived for decades in exile in the Soviet Union and who actually wanted to transfer the Soviet type of exceptional court system to Hungary. He did succeed with all its consequences in introducing new institutions of criminal justice into the totally discredited Hungarian legal system. But this institution of people's tribunals which existed between 1945 and 1949 and later was renewed after 1956 to oppress the 1956 revolution, was a target of legalistic criticism as it was established apart from the totally discredited Hungarian legal system based on principle of retroactive justice.

And lastly, the issue of public participation should be examined. In the case of Hungary there was no public participation in the post-WWII legal processes. Lynchings, which were artistically represented in the renowned movie of "Novecento" (1976) by Bernardo Bertolucci, or in the photos by Robert Capa in France about the public shavings of collaborating women were absent in Hungary. In Hungary there was no partisan movement and the people's court was comprised of delegates from the five democratic parties which were operational before and during WWII, the communists being one of them. The process was ruled by the legal language of the

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<sup>5</sup> See more on the history of WWII in Hungary: Mária Ormos, *Hungary in the age of the two World Wars, 1914-1945* (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 2007); and Nándor Dreisziger, ed., *Hungary in the Age of Total War, 1938-1948* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1998). About gender history of WWII see Andrea Pető, 'Gendered Memory of Military Violence in Eastern Europe in the 20th century', in Sylvia Palatschek and Sylvia Schraut, eds., *The Gender of Memory. Cultures of Remembrance in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Europe* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2008) 237-53.

court, with the consequence of shaping the language of the memory of WWII. The consequence of all this was an unpredictability of the procedure. In my present research project, we are looking at the files of 70.000 perpetrators who stood before the people's court of Budapest and we are comparing their verdicts. What is obvious from the records is that for the same crime different punishments were given depending on the following factors: time of the trial, if the defendant had a paid lawyer, and, more importantly for the argument of this paper, gender.

### Gender regimes and people's tribunals

To start the gender analysis we can take an easy approach: simply counting how many women were present. It is not difficult to count women in legal institutions. Women were not allowed to enter into law schools till 1945 except during the revolutionary Károlyi government (1918-1919) for half a year. Those who were admitted with special permission could finish their legal education. Women who managed to graduate either worked as individual lawyers, benefitting from the flexibility of working hours (as did Margit Ungar who was the first female lawyer in Budapest admitted in the Bar Association in 1928, followed shortly by Lilly Gaspar in 1931), or they worked in the field of social affairs as did Erzsébet Koncz in Kecskemet. After 1945 Erzsébet Koncz served as a people's attorney since she had a 'clean' past as a woman. She 'only' was involved in non-political cases before WWII. Outside of these few exceptions, women were generally judged by men, with however one additional exception, namely, a handful of women from the illegal communist movement who served as judges delegated by the communist party. The number of women as perpetrators can also be counted.<sup>6</sup>

In my research on the Arrow Cross women's movement, I selected cases where women were tried by people's tribunals in Budapest. Thus, my research covered the documentation of 6.260 cases heard by the people's tribunals in Budapest – and roughly in 10 per cent of the total number of cases, the perpetrators were women. This is a very high number because if we compare it with the percentage of women today, more than 50 years later, in public life (for example, in the Hungarian Parliament) the numbers are the same. When analyzing the court trials, the traditional women's historical approach – quantifying how many women were present – does not lead anywhere.

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<sup>6</sup> Pető, Andrea, 'Arrow Cross Women and Female Informants', *Baltic Worlds*, 2, 3-4 (2009), 48-52.

The first aim of gender politics in the courts was to reconstruct gender hierarchies. At the trials, a much-repeated and rather successful argument was that the accused had been acting under the influence or pressure of others. In the case of accused women, this argument worked particularly well – especially when they had to answer for their crimes to male judges. Women who claimed to have been acting under the influence of their husbands received more lenient sentences than did other women who admitted to intentional deeds of their own volition. In the case of men, indictments were fitted to individuals and paid lawyers offered the possibility of an escape from the rigors of the justice system, whereas in the case of female perpetrators, the ‘femaleness’ of the accused parties, as a defense category, held out the prospect of a more lenient sentence.

The second aim was to discourage women from participating in the public sphere. As a witness noted during the trial of a woman who was convicted because of her alleged membership in the Arrow Cross Party: “My husband noted how ugly it is for a woman to be politically active – a member of a party who wears its symbol.”<sup>7</sup>

This quote refers to the metaphorical ugliness of these politically engaged women.<sup>8</sup> The perpetrators had become ‘men’ and thus were not ‘pretty’. Those women, who admitted to a political role, knew that they were confronting official expectations, and that this would have its consequence: a more serious conviction. During the lawless period of the Arrow Cross rule, social gender roles were mixed up. The people’s tribunals sought to re-establish the traditional gender hierarchy.<sup>9</sup>

Thirdly, we should analyze the confessions given in front of the courts.<sup>10</sup> I have read a lot of documents in files where the complainants, witnesses and the perpetrators were all women. In general I can say that a

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<sup>7</sup> Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (further ÁBTL) V-55964: 10.

<sup>8</sup> See more on “ugliness” Andrea Pető, ‘Who is afraid of the “ugly women”? Problems of writing biographies of Nazi and Fascist women in countries of the former Soviet Block?’, *Journal of Women’s History*, 21, 4 (2009), 147-51. Thereafter Pető, ‘Afraid of Women’.

<sup>9</sup> Andrea Pető, *Hungarian Women in Politics 1945-1951* (New York: East European Monographs, 2003); and Andrea Pető, ‘Frauenvereine in Ungarn (1945-1951). Vom Ende des Zweites Weltkriegs bis zur Zerstörung des Vereinswesens’ [‘Women’s associations in Hungary (1945-1951). From the End of World War II until the destruction of clubs and societies’], in Irene Bandhauer Schöffmann and Claire Duchens, eds., *Nach dem Krieg. Frauenleben und Geschlechterkonstruktionen in Europa nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg [After the War: Women’s Lives and constructions of gender in Europe after World War II]* (Herbolzheim: Centaurus Verlag 2000), 138-54.

<sup>10</sup> More on this: Andrea Pető, ‘Historicizing Hate. Testimonies and Photos about the Holocaust Trauma during the Hungarian post-WWII Trials’, in Naci Adler and Selma Leydesdorff, eds., *Evidence and Testimony* (New Brunswick: Transactions Publisher, forthcoming).

lot of women, more women than men, testified in these trials. The witnesses were following the legal structure when they retold their memories about the violence they experienced during WWII: systematic robbery, denunciation and the murdering of their loved ones. Following the typology of Campbell, four types of memories were presented in the court: the testimonial memories of witnesses, the prosecutor's model of memory in the paradigm of truth and error, the defense's concept of mentality, and the judge's evidential memories evaluating the material of the court as evidence.<sup>11</sup> Each of them understood memory in a different way, and this, in turn, influenced how the emotions were shaped. Applying Campbell's analysis to the people's court trials, the built-in discrepancies relating to the construction of meaning during the trial caused the most dissatisfaction with the activity of the court among the various parties involved. Moreover, all parties returned home with a belief that they were 'right'. However, in the case of the witnesses: "memory functions both as a description of the traumatic injury and as a claim of a wrong".<sup>12</sup> And because she was the complainant, she could not be 'neutral' according to the logic of the court. Accordingly, the legalism disadvantaged women. The testimony is not an individual activity: it is constructed to impress the audience and to appeal to the community. The defense defines memory as a mentality, and questions not only its content but also its reliability. In the case of the people's tribunals, this also questioned the legitimacy of the procedure. The prosecutor was expected to check the relationship between the event and the recollection of the event. I know of no cases of witnesses or perpetrators changing their testimonies after being cross-examined by the prosecutor. If there was a change, it always happened following the intervention of prosecutors who were 'professionally' and politically convinced that the accused was guilty.

Especially in the initial trials in the first half of 1945, the tribunal did not assess the accuracy of the facts presented by witnesses or the legal framework in which these acts were judged. Therefore the defendants and their lawyers tended to apply "cognitivist, empirical epistemology"<sup>13</sup>, and this enabled them to successfully challenge the verdicts – particularly in the low-profile cases. Arguing with the 'weak women' defense often led to acquittal. The trials heard by the people's tribunals lasted for years. Because of the sheer numbers, many defendants were on bail until the verdicts were given. Moreover, they very often were living together with survivors

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<sup>11</sup> Kristen Campbell, 'Legal Memories: Sexual Assault, Memory, and International Humanitarian Law', *Signs*, 28, 1 (2002), 165. Thereafter Campbell, 'Memories'.

<sup>12</sup> Campbell, 'Memories'.

<sup>13</sup> Campbell, 'Memories', 168.

of the crime in the same house where the crimes had been committed. Nor did this contribute to a process of reconciliation in post-war Hungary.

### Serendipity: stories and sources about sexual violence during WWII

I have written about the memory of the rapes committed by Red Army soldiers, comparing Budapest and Vienna.<sup>14</sup> Based on the number of reported venereal diseases, I estimated the number of rapes committed in Budapest right after the liberation at around 200.000. But I also argued in my article that these numbers themselves will not tell us much: counting if somebody was raped repeatedly or gang raped raises not only arithmetical but also ethical questions for the researcher. Therefore, what is important is the question: in what framework are we talking about the phenomenon? I argued that silence around this phenomenon was a gendered silence. In the case of the rapes committed by soldiers of the Red Army I claimed that the meaning was determined by men and for women only silence remained.

In my work I have argued that there has been a “conspiracy of silence” around this historical phenomenon. At the time of my research, in the late 1990s, I was desperately trying to get as much information as possible about sexual violence after WWII. I was mapping where I could find information about the phenomenon: in police reports, in diplomatic notes (the deeply passive and disoriented Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs sending notes to the victorious Red Army), and in health reports from hospitals where they were treating victims of rape and venereal diseases. I also interviewed survivors to collect oral histories of women. I did not have access to the military archive in Russia, so the minutes of the military tribunal cases against rapists of the Red Army were beyond my reach.

However, when I started to work on female perpetrators and the female members of the Arrow Cross, I found crucial and new documents about the rapes committed by the Red Army. In the next section of the paper I would like to answer the question of whether this was serendipity?

The first new sources I came across during this research were the reports filed by the Arrow Cross militia men in villages which they temporarily regained from the Red Army. They wrote detailed fact-finding reports about what they have found there. In the report they meticulously recorded

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<sup>14</sup> Andrea Pető, ‘Stimmen des Schweigens. Erinnerungen an Vergewaltigungen in den Hauptstädten des “ersten Opfers” (Wien) und des “letzten Verbündeten” Hitlers (Budapest)’ [‘Voices of silence. Remembering rape in the capital of the “first victim” (Vienna) and the “last ally” of Hitler (Budapest)’], *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften*, 47, 10 (1999), 892-914.



atrocities committed by the Red Army with the hope that this would increase the will of the civilian and military population to fight against the bolsheviks. These reports had a very limited circulation, and as I pointed out before in the article on rapes committed by Red Army soldiers, the anticommunist propaganda of the Horthy regime prepared the population for the worst to come together with the Soviets. This ‘worst’ was the food rationing, which after the disastrous loss of the war would have been introduced anyway and the so-called common ‘usage’ of women. In this latter one, the gender politics of the Soviet occupation were present in the propaganda of the Horthy regime for decades, so when it really happened, when the country was occupied by the Red Army, it was not a big surprise, maybe only for the very few homegrown communists.

The second type of document I found during this research on people’s tribunals concerned the trials against those who actually reported to the authorities the atrocities committed by the Soviets. Among the people’s tribunal papers I came across very interesting documents. One person was tried because she was reporting the rape committed by the Soviets and she wanted to report it to the authorities. She was convicted for political agitation by the people’s tribunal. The same verdict was delivered against the person who reported drunken soldiers rampaging on the streets close to the garrison. Another person was convicted as a war criminal because he shot at a drunken Soviet soldier who was trying to rape his wife. Somebody else was talking about the Soviets in an unfavorable light, naming them as “drunken band” who were only interested in pillaging in the pub, and he was reported to the police and served several years of imprisonment. I had not thought of finding sources about rapes committed by the Red Army soldiers among the court files of war criminals.

Should we label the recovery of these documents as a case of serendipity? In both cases, the Arrow Cross reports and the trials against victims of Soviet military aggression during so-called peacetime, the decisive factor was the frame of remembering which either mutes or encourages certain stories and experiences to be told. The stories about atrocities committed by the Red Army are influenced by this frame of remembering as well as the female perpetrators.

When the Red Army was stationed in Hungary after 1945, there was no way for speaking about atrocities committed by the Red Army openly. The Red Army was allowed to be labeled publicly only as victorious. Only in private stories, in families in the literature, or by emigrant historians could this experience be spoken about, of course with a strong anti-communist edge. After 1989 the trend changed. Counter-histories became dominant histories, and after 2000 I found myself as one of the most often quoted historians by conservative and extreme right wing journalists. In the

months of February 1945 Budapest was liberated, and in April when the war for Hungary was finished. In their view I was a historian who really wrote about the suffering of 'Hungarian women'.

### Frames of remembering: continuity and change

Remembering about the female perpetrators, however, followed a different path than the remembering of victims of sexual violence. A select group of female perpetrators were a part of the historical canon, fitted into writing history of post WWII history, I am arguing for in this paper. The antifascist and conservative historiography about WWII is fighting a fierce battle within itself with regard to selectiveness in the process making female perpetrators invisible so we do not have much difference between them. The extreme right historians, whose number is growing rapidly nowadays, are using information and communications technology to put together a hagiography of the Arrow Cross women on webpages. They are setting up a 'virtual' genealogy pointing out that these perpetrators suffered because of the communist *Justizmord* which fits into the general rhetoric of victimology and suffering of Hungarians under foreign rule. These web pages are also gold mines for the historians. I got the most interesting photos for my research on women in the Arrow Cross party from newly developed extreme right wing websites.

In accordance with the historical canon, the 'more famous' of the female war criminals and Arrow Cross women, such as the wife of Ferenc Szálasi, leader of the Arrow Cross party, as well as the well-known actress Sári Fedák, feature in the historical accounts, alongside the female perpetrators of the mass murder on Maros Street where the patients of the Jewish hospital were killed. This supports the fallacy that the Arrow Cross's female members were all middle-class and lower-middle-class women who, lacking their own professional aspirations, passively joined the party under the influence of male relatives, husbands, siblings and fathers. Or that, in addition to these misguided victims of male manipulation, as in the case of the murderers in the Jewish hospital located in Maros utca in Budapest, sadistic and insane women were members of the Arrow Cross – who then became pathological murderers.

I am arguing here again for a conspiracy of silence but of a very different kind of conspiracy. We know from the membership records of the Arrow Cross Party and also from the files of people's tribunals that women were present in high numbers. Who were these women and more importantly why were they omitted from the collective memory?

As part of our research, we processed the documents relating to women tried by the people's tribunal in Budapest. We made interesting observations about who were the missing perpetrators from the historiography.<sup>15</sup> Based on our research it can be stated that twenty-one per cent of the women were born before 1896, more than a half of them were born between 1896 and 1914, and the remaining almost one-fifth after 1914. The data show that the share of middle-class women in this group was significantly higher – 20 per cent higher – than in the general population. Most of the accused were middle-aged women who had been educated and socialized under the Horthy regime.

Four-fifths of the women had been born in Hungary, while one-fifth had been born in areas ceded by Hungary to other countries under the Treaty of Trianon (1920). The proportion of women born outside Hungary was thus significantly higher than the 7 per cent share for the female general population. Coming from outside the country's Trianon borders (1920) may have been a significant factor influencing the women's political radicalism. The left-wing alternatives to a radical transformation of society – the trade union, social democratic or communist movements – were closed to these women, since for them the national question was of central significance. Thus, as the arena for their political activity, they chose political organizations that offered them social integration and a response to their grievances.

Analyzing the women indicted for war crimes by their occupation, we discover that a surprisingly high proportion of the women were classified as housewives, widows or aunts (46 %).

As far as occupation was concerned, we found two other relatively striking features. First, in 1945, 8 per cent of the indicted women were concierges or assistant concierges – whereas in the general sample their share was just 5 per cent. These women were the common criminals who had emerged from the lower middle class and working class and whose specific aim was to get their hands on Jewish property. The post-war authorities were better acquainted with the concierges; those that did not flee were the first to be reported on by ordinary residents, which meant that they were soon included in the justice mechanism. Second, in 1950, agricultural laborers were strongly over-represented: 14 per cent of the indicted were from this group, while among the general population their share was just 6 per cent. Thus, contrary to popular belief, not only members of the *Volksbund* were put on trial (most of them later were expelled from the country) but also large numbers of Hungarian peasant farmers.

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<sup>15</sup> Ildikó Barna and Andrea Pető, “‘A csúnya asszonyok’. Kik voltak a női háborús bűnösök Magyarországon?” [“‘Ugly women.’ Who were the female war criminals in Hungary?”], *Élet és irodalom*, 26 October 2007, 10.

The typical war crime committed by women was denunciation (*besúgás* and *feljelentés*). If we include the denunciation of Hungarian soldiers, then the category of ‘denunciation’ accounts for more than 50 per cent of the crimes committed by the women.

Is the case of missing female perpetrators a gap in historical memory or a conspiracy of silence? Why were they forgotten while men committing the same types of crimes were remembered? Answering this question, I would give three reasons to argue for a conspiracy of silence as far as omitting these gendered stories from historical memory. One of the reasons why female war criminals have been omitted from historical memory concerns the gender-typical characteristic whereby after World War II and with the demise of “matriarchy born in need”, women who violated the norm were dealt with in a public and exemplarily strict manner.<sup>16</sup> Here we find a common point with the rapes committed by the Red Army. The war was also waged on women’s bodies. In the post-1945 public discourse, however, robbers, looters and murderers as well as the female relatives of party members made their appearance, because they fitted into a public discourse that sought to restore the male-dominated social order that had been upset by the war. So they were punished in an exemplary way.

According to estimates, 15.000 women were members of the Arrow Cross Party in Hungary. These women were active politicians in the fields of social work, and propaganda. It did not fit into the political mobilization rhetoric of the Communist Party to acknowledge that there was another mass party which had successfully mobilized women before, not to speak about the very unfortunate fact that both parties were targeting the very same social group. After 1945 the communist party conveniently took over those concierges or housekeepers who had been reporting to first the Arrow Cross and later became informants of the communist party. So it was not their interest to shed a light on the massive crimes committed by them.

The second reason for forgetting was that women with criminal records coming from the lower social classes who used the Arrow Cross movement to take vengeance on their adversaries or who sought to enrich themselves by taking the property left behind by Jews, could not be regarded as ‘success stories’ and so received less publicity. Most of the women convicted for war crimes were ‘ordinary’ common criminals; they were ignored by historians since they had no ‘political’ significance. They were non-historical actors, so they did not fit into the elitist political history writing. They did not leave documents behind and more importantly did not catch the attention either the mainstream or the feminist historians.

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<sup>16</sup> For more, see Pető, ‘Afraid of Women’.

The third reason is related to the specific complex character of the committed crime. Ethnic cleansing is also associated with crimes against property, since it provides opportunities for looting.<sup>17</sup> As Norman Naimark has argued, ethnic cleansing is always linked with war;<sup>18</sup> in the chaos, paramilitary units – in this case, the Arrow Cross – become the instruments of political leaders. The Hungarian society was never faced with the Holocaust as a social policy, while in this policy the ‘ordinary men and women’ played a very important role. The Hungarian society did not come to terms with its past. The main frame of remembering represents the Hungarian society as a victim. Therefore, those women who were actively participating in shaping their own future would not fit there.

At times of war, women are portrayed as loyal mothers and citizens who send their sons to war – or, on the contrary, as collaborators who are a threat to soldiers’ morals. The question is what to do and more importantly how to remember the women who do not fit into this framework of remembering?

## Conclusion

After 1989, in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the hegemonic historical remembrance culture, different social groups supported their political claims with “just memories” which questioned the hegemonic leftist version of history writing.<sup>19</sup> This type of newly emerging counter-canonized history writing in Eastern Europe was lenient towards these politically active women because they were persecuted by the communist legal system. Therefore, in this logic they were first of all the victims of the communist legal system. And only secondly were they war criminals. The narrative framework of victimology is a trap which creates mutually interchangeable social groups and which depends on political change.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Andrea Pető, ‘About the Narratives of a Blood Libel Case in Post Shoah Hungary’, in Louise Vasvari and Steven Totosy de Zepetnek, eds., *Comparative Central European Holocaust Studies* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2009), 240-53.

<sup>18</sup> Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred. Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 187-88.

<sup>19</sup> For more on this see Andrea Pető, ‘New Differences? Competing Canonisation of History of WWII’, in Dietlind Hüchtler and Alfrun Kliems, eds., *Überbringen – Überformen – Überblenden. Theorietransfer im 20. Jahrhundert [Deliver – Transfer – Superimpose. Transfer of Theory in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century]* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2011), 67-75.

<sup>20</sup> Andrea Pető, ‘Death and the Picture. Representation of War Criminals and Construction of Divided Memory about WWII in Hungary’, in Andrea Pető and Klaaertje Schrijvers, eds., *Faces of Death. Visualising History* (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2009), 39-57.

Therefore as a conclusion I am suggesting a new approach, which might be a result of serendipity. In both cases: of sexual violence and of perpetrators during WWII, a better conceptual framework would be to think about emotions as constructs. Both the people's tribunals and the rapes committed by the Red Army constructed "emotional communities".<sup>21</sup> Reading the recollections of the perpetrators and talking to their children, one gets the impression that the people's tribunals were passionate and violent places of revenge. On the other hand, talking to the victims and witnesses, the impression gained is one of fear and dissatisfaction. The analysis of the data in our database revealed that women were receiving harsher sentences for the same crime as men, with one exception: if they brought in the argument that they did it because they followed the order coming from a husband or brother. Then the court was ready to forgive. The matriarchy born in need was restored.

From the interviews I conducted with rape victims, it is clear that loneliness and isolation were the most important feelings on the topic: women as victims evaporated in the public discourse, losing agency. In both cases crimes remained unpunished which undermined trust in the legal system and in justice in general, which had far reaching consequences.

In the Cold War context, criticizing the process of the people's tribunals or mentioning the extensive number of rapes committed by the Red Army were also aiming at undermining the dominant antifascist historical narrative frame. This paper was an attempt to illustrate what are the consequences of the availability or rather non-availability of gendered narrative spaces. At the end, we can sadly state: serendipity does not work for post-WWII gender roles.

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<sup>21</sup> Barbara Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *American Historical Review*, 107, 3 (2002), <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/107.3/ahr0302000821.html> (31 July 2012).



## II GENDER ROLES AND GENDERED IDENTITIES IN ARMIES





ŁUKASZ KIELBAN

## HONOR AND MASCULINITY IN THE POLISH OFFICER CORPS DURING WORLD WAR II IN CAPTIVITY

### ESCAPES AND COURTS OF HONOR: THE CASE OF OFLAG VII-A MURNAU\*

The outbreak of World War II was not a surprise for the Polish Army. The tension between Poland and the Third Reich had been steadily rising, and an armed conflict was expected. The military forces were preparing to mobilize, and soldiers were trained in case of a real threat. They were prepared not only physically but also ideologically. The experience of 120 years of Partitions of Poland, national uprisings, and the struggle for independence during World War I meant that, in the Second Polish Republic, one of the fundamental characteristics of a patriot and a good citizen was readiness to fight for the motherland.

The Officer Corps felt itself to have a special role to fulfill. It was not only to be the guarantor of power and effectiveness of Polish defense, but also the core of the highest level of citizenship. Hence, a very strong emphasis was placed on the patriotic education of cadets. Each officer was obliged to ensure compliance with the principles of good manners, and especially honor within the Corps. Thanks to that, a single ethos of the officer was maintained.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Officer ethos is the key category in my PhD project on the masculinity of Polish officers in the interwar period *Etos oficerski w Polsce międzywojennej. Ideal a realia życia codziennego* [The Officer Ethos in Interwar Poland. The ideal and reality of the everyday life], Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań (the estimated date of dissertation defense is 2012). Cases described in this article are for me a great example of the consequences of dominant ideals in the army.

In this chapter, I will analyze the situation of officers, who were kept in German Prisoner Of War (POW) camps (*Offizierslager für kriegsgefangene Offiziere*) for officers called *Oflag* during the war. By doing so, I will show the role of the principles of honor in the Polish military, and its shift during the war. Analyzing the captured officers' sense of honor is a perfect starting point for research in the history of masculinity.<sup>2</sup> An army is a natural field to begin that kind of analysis because this is where honor and so-called true masculinity were most strongly stressed.

### Honor and masculinity

According to the philosopher Eugène Dupréel, honor is an idea that separates an aristocratic minority from the rest of society and legitimizes its possession of power. It is a value that one owns, but always has to take care of, because losing it is the greatest and most unforgettable disgrace.<sup>3</sup> For Polish interwar elites, and especially for the officer corps, honor was a value that had not changed since the Middle Ages and the high period of 16th and 17th century Poland. They wanted to see in it knightly and noble traditions. However, as all similar categories, the Polish sense of honor evolved through centuries. For example a Polish 17th century noble would never accept the cold French style of duels with all the rules and sober minds. It was perceived to be more like a murder attempt than an honor defense.<sup>4</sup> However, from the second half of 18th century on, the western way of dealing with cases of honor became more popular in Poland.

This was also the time when the modern officer corps started to form as a separate group among elites, burdened with the task of defending the country and with a great sense of honor. This model of an officer, a man of honor and gentleman consolidated during the Napoleon wars, the Polish national uprisings and the great war, but also during the partitions, when a military career was available to Polish men in the Austrian, Russian and (less so) Prussian armies.<sup>5</sup> By its history the Polish definition of honor was

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<sup>2</sup> As an example of using honor as a main category for history of masculinity, see Ute Frevert, *Men of Honour. A Social and Cultural History of the Duel*, trans. Anthony Williams (Cambridge: Polity, 1995); Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Eugène Dupréel, *Traktat o moralności [Discussions on Morality]*, trans. Zygmunt Glinka (Warsaw: PWN, 1969), 279.

<sup>4</sup> Andrzej Garlicki, *Piękne lata trzydzieste [Beautiful 30's]* (Warsaw: Prószyński i S-ka, 2008), 181.

<sup>5</sup> Tadeusz Hołówko, *Oficer polski [Polish Officer]* (Warsaw, 1921), 32 and further.

a mixture of analogical patterns from France, Great Britain and Germany. Its military provenance explains also why women were called “impropre au duel”.<sup>6</sup> Women owned honor only when their “natural defender” – husband, father or brother – was a man of honor. They could offend or become offended but it was men’s role to defend or satisfy.

Despite the fact that there has been research conducted on honor<sup>7</sup>, and even on officers’ everyday lives<sup>8</sup>, and that gender perspective is known to many Polish historians, there are no published works putting the male identity in the center of its concern. Even authors of publications about Polish officers in Nazi Oflag do not ask what influence imprisonment had on the sense of honor and masculinity of the captives.<sup>9</sup>

Honor symbolically divided elites from common people and as such was above the law in the officer’s hierarchy of values. It required special treatment in the military environment. Due to the great importance of this value in interwar Poland, hundreds of cases of honor were fought in the Corps each year. In peacetime, any conflicts of honor between officers were solved in accordance with the *Code of Honor*<sup>10</sup> and the *Statute of the Courts of Honor for Officers*<sup>11</sup>. These cases were not only started based on the officer’s own wishes, but most of all it was their soldier’s duty to defend and always explain, with all vehemence, any issues that may call into doubt the reputation of the Corps.

Honor was the main factor influencing the attitudes of officers, and thus constituted the foundation of their identity. Even if they tried to bring to life different patterns of masculinity (such as a good father or a head of the family), the model of a man of honor – a gentleman – stood unmoved in the first place. Boundless devotion to military service was required from officers, who were to be the elite of society. They indeed formed the elite,

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<sup>6</sup> Władysław Boziewicz, *Polski kodeks honorowy [Polish Code of Honor]* (Warsaw and Kraków, 1939), 11. Thereafter Boziewicz, *Polski kodeks honorowy*.

<sup>7</sup> Andrzej Tarczyński, *Kodeks i pistolet, o niektórych przejawach honoru w międzywojennej Polsce [The Code and the Pistol: About some of the Manifestations of Honor in Interwar Poland]* (Bydgoszcz: WSP, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Franciszek Kusiak, *Życie codzienne oficerów Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej [Polish Army Officers’ Everyday Life in 1918-1939]* (Warsaw: PIW, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Even if Kisielewicz gives in her work much valuable information for the gender historian, she does not seem to be interested in the masculinity analysis. Danuta Kisielewicz, *Oficerowie polscy w niewoli niemieckiej w czasie II wojny światowej [The Polish Officers in the German Captivity During World War II]* (Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 1998). Thereafter Kisielewicz, *Oficerowie polscy*.

<sup>10</sup> Boziewicz, *Polski kodeks honorowy*.

<sup>11</sup> *Statut Oficerskich Sądów Honorowych [Statute of the Courts of Honor for Officers]*, (Lviv, 1927). Thereafter *Statut Oficerskich*.

who defended all citizens, but also had the right to govern them. It was expected from men of honor to demonstrate great courage, tenacity, and a willingness to sacrifice their own lives for a just cause. That cause was the freedom of their homeland, but also the good name of the regiment, or army. In this context, this ideal was inconsistent with the model of the head of a family and the father, which puts the good of his relatives in the first place. For this reason, officers had doubts whether, in the event of war, they would be able to fully devote themselves to the cause and not put the welfare of their children and wives above it, risking being accused of cowardice.<sup>12</sup>

One can venture to say that many officers had been waiting impatiently for the war as the event which would allow them to demonstrate unquestionably their courage, manliness, and honor.<sup>13</sup> The war was, after all, the military's element. But certainly the young soldiers did not have in their minds the full picture of its horrors. They were inspired rather by the "Myth of the War Experience" derived mostly from novels and stories of war, as were most of the boys at that time.<sup>14</sup>

As already mentioned, the officers were not surprised by the outbreak of war on the 1st September 1939. They were prepared to sacrifice their lives for their homeland, and many did so. During the September Campaign about 3.300 officers were killed. Even before the end of the invasion, a large part of the army fled abroad to Romania, Hungary and Lithuania to join the military forces of the Western allies and later attack the Third Reich. In this group there were about 10.000 officers. Most of them managed to escape and join the Polish Armed Forces in the West to continue to fight the Germans. After the capitulation of Poland, a large part of Polish troops were captured by the Nazis, including about 17.000 officers. They were placed in Oflags and spent the rest of the war there. The worst fate befell about 8.000 officers, who were taken prisoner by the Soviets. They were shot in the spring of 1940 in the so-called Katyn Massacre.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> J. L., 'Rodzina odciąga od wielu obowiązków' ['Family Keeps Away from Many Duties'], *Polska Zbrojna*, 21 January 1926, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Jan Kamiński, *Od konia i armaty do spadochronu. Wspomnienia uczestnika II wojny światowej [From the Horse and the Cannon to Parachute. The Memories of A World War II Participant]* (Warsaw: PAX, 1980), 9.

<sup>14</sup> See George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> See Sławomir Kalbarczyk, 'Zbrodnia Katyńska po 70 latach: krótki przegląd ustaleń historiografii' ['Katyn Crime after 70 Years: Short Review of the Findings of Historiography'], in Sławomir Kalbarczyk, ed., *Zbrodnia Katyńska: w kregu prawdy i kłamstwa [Katyn Crime: in the Circle of Truth and Lies]* (Warsaw: IPN, 2010), 3-20.

From among these groups, I will analyze the situation of the officers who were kept in German Oflag. This is a specific example, which will help me show the role of the principles of honor in the military, and its shift during the war. The situation, in which those soldiers found themselves went far beyond the scenarios assumed previously. A Polish officer was prepared to give his life for his country. He tried at all costs to find a way to continue the fight against the invaders, either in the Polish resistance movement or in the ranks of the Allied forces. He was also prepared for captivity, but past war experiences did not lead them to expect long-term imprisonment of such a large group of officers, while the war was fought on without their participation. This situation must have strongly shaken the officers' self-esteem and sense of honor. They had lost the defensive war, their homeland was invaded, their families lived in constant fear of the enemy. Their colleagues, who managed to escape captivity, fought on different fronts, and they themselves, healthy and strong, could not do anything to contribute to weakening the enemy. The officer's honor, the basis of their masculinity, seemed to be heavily compromised.

In this article I will examine the strategies that were undertaken by Polish officers captured by Germans to save their good name – their honor. As it turns out, defense of honor often required risking one's life, opposing military rules, and provoking conflicts among prisoners. However, no price was too high for honor. I intend to describe two strategies in detail – fighting against the enemy by means of escape from the camp and defending their good name in the Courts of Honor for Officers. For the analysis of each strategy one example will be used. I will examine the officers' attitude to the escape of Cpt. Edward Mamunow internal to the camp and a series of cases of honor against Gen. Roman Abraham. Both events took place in the same POW camp in Murnau. To support my arguments, I quote similar cases from other camps.

### The life of a surrendered officer

Most officers who were captured by Germans had to face a situation very difficult for all commanders: the need to surrender. The part of Andrzej Bukowski's memoirs on officers defending Warsaw shows how hard the decision to surrender was. He writes that many of them chose to shoot themselves in the head rather than fall captive.<sup>16</sup> Józef Bohatkiewicz men-

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<sup>16</sup> Andrzej Bukowski, *Za drutami oflagów. Dziennik oficera 1939-1945* [*Behind the Barbed Wires. The Diary of an Officer 1939-1945*] (Warsaw: PWN, 1993), 36. Thereafter Bukowski, *Za drutami oflagów*.

tions that many officers did what they were taught in the cadet school and left the last bullet for themselves.<sup>17</sup> The ideal of a man of honor stipulated that suicide was sometimes a better option than living with shame, and voluntary surrender to the Germans was certainly shameful. Most of them however hoped that they were losing their freedom only for a short time, and would still have the opportunity to fight for their motherland. Soldiers were persuaded that this surrender was 'honorable', which meant that commanders were allowed to keep their side-arms, and all prisoners would be released to their homes after a couple of days.<sup>18</sup> They did not oppose being transported to numerous camps as they were still hoping to stay captive only for a few weeks, maybe months.

During the Second World War in the Third Reich and areas occupied by it, there were about 130 Oflags, of which 38 were intended for Poles. In later years, this number dropped to seven. The number of Polish officers kept there was estimated at more than 17.000. In the biggest camps, such as Oflag II-C Woldenburg and VII-A Murnau, there were between five and a half and six and a half thousand prisoners at peak times.<sup>19</sup> In general, officers were kept captive from October 1939 to the spring of 1945.

With such a large concentration of people in the same area, unable to get out for over five years, and being always in the same company, Polish officers were exposed to various mental problems. Not only did they have to deal with numerous conflicts with co-prisoners, but also with their own egos. They were mostly young, strong and healthy officers who were ordered to surrender, deprived of the chance to struggle and to heroically die for their homeland, and in return received a miserable life behind the barbed wires.

One of the first problems with which officers had to deal was to acquire the belief that the loss of the Defensive War did not undermine the honor of the whole army. It could be done either by finding those responsible for the disaster, or by searching to identify heroic achievements. The latter was much easier after the surrender of France, considered a world power. The conquering of France, which took Germans two weeks, was perceived by the Polish officers as a complete absolution their army, which had held out

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<sup>17</sup> Józef Bohatkiewicz, *Oflag II B Arnswalde* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1985), 19.

<sup>18</sup> Wiktor Ziemniński, *Wrzesień..., Oflag..., Wyzwolenie... [September..., Oflag..., Liberation...]* (Warsaw: MON, 1963), 90; Stanisław Miśkiewicz, *Wojna 1939 roku i niewola. Fragmenty wspomnień i listy [War 1939 and Captivity. Fragments of Memories and Letters]* (Poznań: Drukarnia Swarzędzka, 2008), 39. Thereafter Miśkiewicz, *Wojna 1939 roku*.

<sup>19</sup> Kisielewicz, *Oficerowie polscy*, 53; Edmund Ginalski, ed., *Oflag II C Woldenberg: wspomnienia jeńców [Oflag II C Woldenberg: Prisoners Memories]*, (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1984), 5.

for over a month.<sup>20</sup> In addition, during the five years of captivity, officers had to deal with a situation which was much more difficult to accept – the inability to participate in the war. As skilled soldiers, they felt a great need to continue the fight. There were several ways to satisfy this hunger. The most obvious was to escape from the camp. It was believed that a soldier attempting to flee from the Oflag was “a fighting soldier”, because not only was he making a stir in the ranks of the enemy, but also trying to join the Polish Armed Forces in the West, or the Polish resistance.<sup>21</sup> Escape attempts were, however, a risky and difficult undertaking to bring off successfully. Captive officers could also conspire with the resistance, which worked well in POW camps,<sup>22</sup> or participate in the secret training courses preparing them for the future struggle. Being weakly-armed, the prisoners considered any fight against the camp guards as a meaningless suicide when there was no real threat to the prisoner’s lives. Nevertheless, if such a threat was posed, this scenario was planned as the ultimate meaning of an honorable death.

The officer’s honor was also tested for another reason. Its rules required not only dedication on the battlefield, but also proper maintenance and care of the uniformity of the Officer Corps. This gave the opportunity for a continuous revision of Corps members’ values and maintaining as far as possible an ideologically and socially uniform environment. However, in war-time all the cases of honor were suspended by the rules until the end of struggle.<sup>23</sup> Only the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces could change this regulation. So when there were disputes between officers in the Oflags, they had no adequate means to defend their good names. Conflicts were often quite harsh, especially since prisoners were anxious, and not all of them still equally believed in the ethos of the officer. Sometimes they simply did not want to comply with the rules of coexistence. Despite prohibition by Polish and German laws, in two Oflags, Courts of Honor for Officers (in Woldenburg and Murnau) there were illegally created, and in other camps issues were resolved in less organized ways.<sup>24</sup> Some former prisoners claim that this helped maintain proper atmosphere in the camps,

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<sup>20</sup> Tadeusz K. Gruszka, *W Murnau [In Murnau]* (Hove: Caldra House Ltd., 1994), 62. Thereafter Gruszka, *Murnau*.

<sup>21</sup> Szymon Datner, *Ucieczki z niewoli niemieckiej 1939-1945 [The Escapes from Nazi Captivity 1939-1945]* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1966), 22. Thereafter Datner, *Ucieczki z niewoli*.

<sup>22</sup> Especially through contacts with Union of Armed Struggle in Poland, see Kisielewicz, *Oficerowie polscy*, 224-43.

<sup>23</sup> *Statut Oficerskich*, 54.

<sup>24</sup> Kisielewicz, *Oficerowie polscy*, 128.



however, as I shall show, it was also a cause for an escalation of some conflicts between officers.

Isolation from relatives and continuous contact with the same people from the block, contributed to the disclosure of mental illnesses among prisoners. Collectively all the psychological problems associated with difficult conditions in the camps were called “disease of barbed wires”. It consisted of, inter alia, cases of hysteria, anxiety and neuroses. It was a kind of psychoneurosis that appeared due to an unspecified time of imprisonment with no prospect of freedom, and living in crowds only escalated the sensation of restlessness.<sup>25</sup> “Disease of barbed wires” led to numerous conflicts, loss of faith in the previous ideals and attempts to isolate oneself from co-prisoners. In extreme cases, some of ill officers tried to commit suicide.

Captivity compromised their honor as officers because it emphasized the defeat of September 1939. It hurt them not only as soldiers but also as men, fathers, and husbands. They no longer had any influence over their families, and could not directly provide them with safety and economical stability. Many worried about whether after their release they would be able to have sexual relations with women, as malnutrition reduced their sex drive and vitality. Nevertheless the biggest problem for them was not lack of sex, but lack of any contact with women in general.<sup>26</sup>

In this situation, officers had to find opportunities to prove to each other their soldierly values, courage and honor. As in other camps, in Oflag VII-A Murnau it was not easy. This camp, however, differed somewhat from the rest. It was located in the picturesque foothills of the Alps in Bavaria. After the experience of war, many prisoners who came to this place associated it more with a spa, rather than a prison. Since 1942, 29 out of 33 Polish generals, held in German captivity, stayed in this very camp.<sup>27</sup> Although officers of the camp in Murnau made several courageous attempts to escape, it was also probably the only camp with Polish officers from which no escape had succeeded. One of the officers in his attempt even reached Hungary, where, however, he was captured and sent back to the camp.<sup>28</sup> Murnau was also one of the two Oflags in which the Courts of Honor for Officers operated and the only camp where the Court of Honor for Generals was active. The existence of these institutions was incompatible with the “Statute of the Courts of Honor for Officers”, but had been

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<sup>25</sup> Kisielewicz, *Oficerowie polscy*, 166.

<sup>26</sup> Kisielewicz, *Oficerowie polscy*, 165.

<sup>27</sup> The list of POWs in “Oflag VII-A Murnau” (The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum London, hereafter abbreviated PISML, Kol.176/25).

<sup>28</sup> Datner, *Ucieczki z niewoli*, 189.

approved by the highest ranking officer in the Oflag – the unofficial commander of all the allied prisoners held there. In 1945 a group of prisoners from the camp in Woldenburg was transported to Murnau. One of the new dwellers described the atmosphere they found in the camp as follows: “It has something that worries and annoys. The atmosphere here is somewhat dense, stifling.”<sup>29</sup>

This atmosphere was illustrated in the 1957 movie directed by Andrzej Munk titled “Eroica”, one of whose two parts titled “The Escape” is devoted to the everyday life of Murnau oflag. The author of the screenplay, Jerzy Stefan Stawiński (1921-2010), a prominent Polish writer, was a former prisoner of this very camp. Knowing the reality of the life in the Oflags, and facts connected with the stay of Polish officers in Murnau, it is easy to realize that both the screenplay<sup>30</sup> and the movie are very honest, even if some facts and names are mixed up or changed. There are several movies based on Stawiński’s wartime experiences, but as he himself said, only this picture was realized exactly as he wished.<sup>31</sup>

Both the scenario and the production itself are so very important because they pay special attention, unlike other sources, to matters of honor, sometimes so complex that at first sight they could be considered fiction or propaganda. Although the facts presented in the movie are confirmed by various memoirs and diaries, I will devote my attention only to the atmosphere that prevailed in the camp, to show the prisoners’ attitude to the Polish officer’s honor.

Of all means available to Polish officers to defend their manhood and honor in captivity, I have chosen two of the most striking: courts of honor and escapes. As an example of breaking out from an Oflag, I will use the story of Cpt. Edward Mamunow, who was accused by the Gestapo of murdering German civilian population. He fled inwards the camp to avoid torture and death. This escape ended tragically, but because no news of his capture came during the next few days after his escape everybody was convinced that Mamunow had gained his freedom. The fact of the failure is not of significance here, as in this example I am going to show only the attitude of officers towards escape attempts. To explain the role of the

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<sup>29</sup> Bukowski, *Za drutami oflagów*, 323.

<sup>30</sup> Jerzy Stefan Stawiński, *Opowieści powstańcze: Godzina “W”, Węrzy, Kanał, Ucieczka* [Uprising Stories: “W” Hour, Hungarians, Canal, Escape] (Warsaw: Trio, 2004). Thereafter Stawiński, *Opowieści powstańcze*.

<sup>31</sup> Bogumiła Prządka, ed., *Jerzego Stawińskiego scenariusz życia* [Jerzy Stawiński’s Screenplay of the life], Polskie Radio, 8 February 2010, available at <http://www.polskieradio.pl/24/286/Artykul/253893,Jerzego-Stawinskiego-scenariusz-zycia> (last visited 21 September 2011).

Court of Honor for Officer I will use the case which is also not typical, nevertheless it more clearly reveals the importance of these courts in the Oflag. I will discuss the case of Gen. Roman Abraham, who was accused by other generals of behavior shameful to the dignity and honor of his uniform. Because of the Abraham's boycott of the Court of Honor, he was eventually excluded from the Officer Corps. Even in peacetime, bringing accusations like this against a general officer was unusual, and excluding one from the Corps was unprecedented. In this case it is particularly important that the court in fact acted illegally, though it had the support of the majority of generals in the camp. Moreover, Gen. Abraham was an educated lawyer and was well aware of his rights.

### The escape

Officers in captivity kept licit contact with the outside world mainly through letters from relatives, and the German press, both censored. They also managed to smuggle in conspiracy newspapers and radio receivers. They had therefore fairly up-to-date information on the ongoing struggles in the world. There were instances of letters coming from old friends, who managed to escape, and who went in the direction of the allied troops to join them.<sup>32</sup> The knowledge that somewhere out there an important game went on in which officers could not take part led many to one thought only: to escape.

Historians interpret the will to escape and join the troops as the "duty of an officer". Attempts to break out of the camp made them "fighting soldiers"; they became a "part of their army's continuing armed struggle".<sup>33</sup> This fact is confirmed by memoirs of some prisoners who wrote about the "natural impulse" and "obligation of a prisoner".<sup>34</sup> But the memoirs of a very keen observer, Marek Sadzewicz, show rather that the fleeing officer was guided mainly by "a feeling of jealousy towards his colleagues who remained in the game". Sadzewicz thought it was a state similar to that felt by a boy closed in a room who could not play with the others making noise in the backyard. His colleagues in fact still "made noise" on the front.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Datner, *Ucieczki z niewoli*, 23; Marek Sadzewicz, *Oflag II D Gross-Born* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1977), 61. Thereafter Sadzewicz, *Oflag II D*.

<sup>33</sup> Datner, *Ucieczki z niewoli*, 26; See also Kisielewicz, *Oficerowie polscy*, 242.

<sup>34</sup> Stefan Majchrowski, *Za drutami Murnau [Behind the Barbed Wires of Murnau]* (Warsaw: MON, 1970), 147. Thereafter Majchrowski, *Za drutami*.

<sup>35</sup> Marek Sadzewicz, *Oflag* (Warsaw: PIW, 2005), 36; see also Majchrowski, *Za drutami*, 15.

One may of course deny that all attempts to escape were motivated merely by jealousy. Even captain's Mamunow escape, which I am going to describe, was not. But I am convinced that this feeling largely shaped the officers' attitude to such attempts. Escapes were similarly treated by Germans. They respected the honorable right of officers to make efforts to exit the oflag, and sometimes even congratulated captured prisoners on their attempts. It was treated as a knightly act undertaken to defend the officer's honor.<sup>36</sup>

When in June 1940 Cpt. Edward Mamunow vanished from custody while he waited for trial, accused of shooting German civilians during the September Campaign, no one knew exactly what happened. The officer disappeared from his cell and left one of the windows looking out to the outside of the camp open. That was the direction in which the first brigade started the pursuit. The information about the escape of Mamunow began circulating among the prisoners. The next few days did not bring news of his capture. With time, all became convinced that the attempt was successful.<sup>37</sup>

Cpt. Mamunow's story is known mainly from the testimony of Maj. Marian Siarkiewicz<sup>38</sup> (then Lieutenant), who was the first to give him assistance and who helped him till the end. All the extensive information on this subject available to me is based on his testimony. It is most likely because not many officers were familiar with this issue at all. A total of five prisoners supported Mamunow, and his place of hiding was known only by 21 people. The single source known to me, which is not based on Siarkiewicz but which can bring something to this case is Munk's movie, "Eroica". In this picture, despite the fact that the hero has a different name, and the action takes place about four years later than in reality, the scale of similarities to the Mamunow's case is striking. The officers' feelings to this escape are presented quite fairly. However it is important to stress that Stawiński had been a prisoner of Oflag VII-A just since 1944, so he could only get acquainted with this matter secondhand.

The protagonist, Lt. Zawistowski, just as Mamunow, fled from the Gestapo after being accused of killing German civilians in Bydgoszcz, and like him was hiding in the attic over the washroom where he eventually committed suicide. But what is most important, this movie shows us clearly the attitude of officers to this escape, which is hard to find in other testimo-

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<sup>36</sup> Datner, *Ucieczki z niewoli*, 33, 86.

<sup>37</sup> Majchrowski, *Za drutami*, 148.

<sup>38</sup> Marian Siarkiewicz's letter (Kalisz, June 06, 1964), available at <http://www.info.kalisz.pl/siarkiewicz/strona7.htm> (last visited 21 September 2011). Thereafter Marian Siarkiewicz's letter.

nies on this issue. Most of the prisoners defined this achievement as heroic, saying that Zawistowski “saved the honor of the camp” from which no one else managed to escape.<sup>39</sup> Indeed Mamunow, who successfully hid in the washroom attic for ten months, was for the longest time proof for the others that it was possible to leave this Oflag. This very strong impulse awoke hope in officers. Lack of news from the escapee did not mean that something had gone wrong. There have been instances when co-prisoners knew nothing about the effects of a break out until the end of the war.<sup>40</sup> It is no wonder that the self-esteem of prisoners sank when absolutely no one had managed to gain freedom, and it was the reason why they did count so much on the next daredevils.<sup>41</sup> Stawiński, in “Eroica’s” screenplay, suggested that officers fully believed in the success of Mamunow’s project and no other sources deny this. The Siarkiewicz’s testimony even implies that when he was organizing food for the hidden officer, some did not believe his story, and accused him of trying to extort supplies for himself.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, based on available sources, we can say that escapes from the camps were valued by the prisoners because it was an officer’s duty in captivity and necessary to preserve the army’s honor. In the above mentioned movie, one of the protagonists speaks about “saving the honor of the camp”. We may even wonder if it was not the result of some competition with other camps in which escapes succeeded more often. This high regard for escapes was also due to the belief that the escapee would try to participate in the war.<sup>43</sup> Moreover any attempt to regain freedom, even unsuccessful, was perceived as a mockery of the enemy, unsettling his ranks. This situation reminds one of a game in which prisoners try to escape, and guards to prevent this from happening, but all fully respect their assigned roles and deal honorably with each other until the end. Commanding officers, though rarely taking part in such actions, encouraged the prisoners. In the Oflag II-C Woldenburg in 1940, Col. Misiąg said that: “the escape from captivity is a measure of the Polish soldier’s value, is a classic example of personal courage and sacrifice in the fight against the enemy.”<sup>44</sup> “Eroica’s” screenplay, based on Stawiński’s memories, also suggest a special role of the escape – it was a cause for pride for the officers.

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<sup>39</sup> Stawiński, *Opowieści powstańcze*, 167.

<sup>40</sup> Sadzewicz, *Oflag II D*, 57.

<sup>41</sup> It was similarly to other oflags, see Oflag II C Woldenberg, 6.

<sup>42</sup> Marian Siarkiewicz’s letter.

<sup>43</sup> Kisielewicz, *Oficerowie polscy*, 243.

<sup>44</sup> Andrzej Toczewski, *Oflag II C Woldenberg w Dobiegniewie [Oflag II C Woldenberg in Dobiegniew]* (Zielona Góra: MZL, 2009), 54.

After ten months of hiding in the attic, in narrowness and loneliness, Cpt. Mamunow accidentally started a fire. In order to avoid torture when caught, he hung himself in a prostrate position because of the lack of space. Gen. Emil Krukowicz-Przedzimirski, a former prisoner of Murnau, stated in his report that the failure of all escapes contributed to the decline in the number of new attempts made by the officers.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, prisoners of the Oflag VII-A developed a different way of defending their sense of manliness – the Courts of Honor for Officers.

### The Courts of Honor for Officers

The courts were fully organized in only two camps, in Woldenburg and Murnau, but their simplified versions - courts of arbitration - operated in other Oflags too.<sup>46</sup> Some of the memoirs give negative feedback on them, suggesting that the courts and the trusted representatives (“seconds”) were not treated seriously,<sup>47</sup> but most opinions were quite the opposite. Courts of honor had to take care of the moral behavior and camaraderie among the officers. They were considered an important tool for maintaining discipline.<sup>48</sup> The main matters discussed there could seem very trivial for an outsider, but the conditions in which prisoners lived meant that conflicts arose, even in the distribution of food. According to Tadeusz Gruszka, the courts allowed them to “starve with dignity”.<sup>49</sup>

In his extensive report on life in the camp, Przedzimirski posted that the courts of honor were very important institutions for the preservation of unity among the captives. Prisoners formed various political and social parties which led to conflicts and the breaking down of solidarity. The quarrels that had grown on this background contributed to a reduction in the social culture among the officers, who began to accuse each other of shameful behavior, staining the honor of their uniform.<sup>50</sup> Even in peacetime, that kind of imputation was seen as a threat to the reputation of the entire Corps. In such situations the Courts of Honor for Officers were a means to discipline the accused soldiers. In extreme cases, soldiers were ultimately excluded from the army. The POW’s situation was more diffi-

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<sup>45</sup> Gen. Emil Przedzimirski’s report of residence in POW camps (PISML, Kol. 176/23), 10.

<sup>46</sup> E.g. in the oflag II D Gross-Born: Sadzewicz, *Oflag II D*, 134.

<sup>47</sup> Majchrowski, *Za drutami*, 73.

<sup>48</sup> Sadzewicz, *Oflag II D*, 133.

<sup>49</sup> Gruszka, *Murnau*, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Gen. Emil Przedzimirski’s report, 9-10.

cult because of two main reasons. The first one was the gap in the regulations for officers living in captivity. It had not predicted a situations like this and had prohibited Courts of Honor for Officers, which were a very important institution dealing with the ill atmosphere.<sup>51</sup> The second one was the attitude of many officers to the discipline. With time, they cared less and less about the maintenance of it which contributed to a rise in the number of cases of honor. It is possible that in Murnau the situation became more tense, since there lived almost thirty generals in the camp. Among them, Gen. Przedrzymirski was one of the most active proponents of military order. He was also the principal opponent of Gen. Roman Abraham, against whom he initiated many cases of honor.

The Courts of Honor for Officers in the Oflags were formed based on those functioning in time of peace. They followed the *Statute of the Courts of Honor for Officers* from 1927 and the *Polish Code of Honor*, written by Władysław Bożewicz. Despite the prohibition, the highest ranking officer in Murnau accepted them, as he believed that the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces favored such actions and that this court was necessary for the moral good of the Officer Corps.<sup>52</sup> Like the Polish provisions, German ones also did not permit their functioning, but the number of files produced by the courts were impossible to hide. However, in accordance with the memoirs of Stefan Majchrowski, the guards deliberately did not check the contents of these documents. For lack of a suitable place, the court meetings were often held in block washrooms, where debates took hours, angering the officers who could not use them.<sup>53</sup> In the Murnau camp, since 1942, every block had its own Court of Honor for the younger and older officers. This was because of the great number of conflicts. Even though the conflicts could be resolved out of court by the seconds, who could explain their causes and lead to their elimination, the vast majority of cases ended up in the Court of Honor. There simply was no will to settle cases amicably.<sup>54</sup> Apologies and compensations, but also exclusion from the Corps were the most common judgments imposed by the courts. Although the exclusion was enforced only after the war, it was so offensive to the officer that there were cases of suicide because of it.<sup>55</sup> This verdict was in fact associated with total social ostracism, the breaking of a career and

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<sup>51</sup> Gen. Emil Przedrzymirski's report, 10.

<sup>52</sup> Court of Honor for Generals Archives: Gen. Rómmel's letter to Gen. Abraham from 10 XI 1942 (PISML, A.XII.87/10 A.N.IV).

<sup>53</sup> Court of Honor (PISML, A.XII.87/10 N.1); see also Majchrowski, *Za drutami*, 73.

<sup>54</sup> General characteristics of Polish POW camp "Oflag VII-A" (PISML, Kol.176/23), 15-16.

<sup>55</sup> Kisielewicz, *Oficerowie polscy*, 161.



years of training, and the ultimate undermining of the honor of the convicted person, which could be regained almost exclusively through suicide. The cases of this ultimate act after exclusion from the Corps show perfectly how important honor was to those officers.

Exclusion from the Officer Corps was the last and rarest resort even in peacetime, and the exclusion of a general was totally unprecedented in the Polish Army. Such a judgment, however, was applied to Gen. Abraham while in captivity. Abraham was a hero of the Polish-Soviet War (1919-1921) and the Defensive War (1939). He was the only general who lost no battle in September 1939. During captivity he tried twice to escape from the POW camp VIII-E Johannsbrunn.<sup>56</sup> He was also a doctor of law, so he knew the military regulations very well.<sup>57</sup> This is why he boycotted courts in the Oflag.

General Przedzimirski associated discipline in the Oflag with the unity and power of the Officer Corps. Therefore, quickly he got involved with the Court of Honor for the Generals (CoHfG). He had a strained relationship with Gen. Abraham from about 1940, when he began to boycott the activities of CoHfG. That period, however, is poorly documented in the archives. We have good knowledge about this conflict from 1942 on, when it grew to a large scale. It lasted until the liberation of the camp.<sup>58</sup> After Abraham ignored the court's demand to testify, Przedzimirski strongly spoke out against such undisciplined behavior of the general. He accused him of "abuse of dignity and honor of the officers", of "sabotaging the Courts of Honor for the entire period of captivity", "the disregard of the obligation of regular military salute to the senior-ranking", "intentionally pushing others when entering the room, slamming the door in other's faces, etc.", and of "insulting a group of generals [through] ostentatious isolation from this very group", which gave bad example to younger officers. He also sabotaged the CoHfG elections by not giving a valid vote. The accusations also had a personal background as the pushing or unkind remarks concerned Przedzimirski himself among others.<sup>59</sup> As he pointed out, he had no earlier conflicts with Abraham prior to the captivity.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> See Datner, *Ucieczki z niewoli*, 326.

<sup>57</sup> Leszek Laskowski, *Roman Abraham: losy dowódcy [Roman Abraham: The Life of the Commander]* (Warsaw, Poznań: PWN, 1998); Gen. Roman Abraham (Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe w Warszawie, hereafter abbreviated CAW, Generals Collection).

<sup>58</sup> Court of Honor (PISML, A.XII.87/10).

<sup>59</sup> Court of Honor (PISML, A.XII.87/10 A.N.I a, A.N.I b).

<sup>60</sup> Personnel files do not contain any traces of cases of honor of this officer (which however does not necessarily mean that there were none at all): Gen. Emil Krukowicz-Przedzimirski (CAW, Generals Collection).



By his behavior, Gen. Abraham could significantly break the solidarity of prisoners, but he was not simply a “brawler”, as he was called. Knowing the rules very well, he was aware that CoHfG operated illegally and he did not hide this knowledge. In his letter to the highest ranking officer, Gen. Juliusz Rómmel, from 5th Nov 1942, he explained that the camp court, “in accordance with the act and the regulations of the *Statute of Courts of Honor for Officers*, is not a legal Court of Honor for Generals.” He expressed his distrust of that institution and its members, and asked for a postponement and transfer of the case to the appropriate CoHfG in the country after the war.<sup>61</sup> Abraham, when he appeared in the court as the offended back in August 1940, tried to solve the quarrel through the arbitrator, thus avoiding the illegal court. His opponent, however, did not accept the arbitrator’s verdict, and sent the case to CoHfG, which canceled the sentence and gave an opposite one. These and other situations convinced Abraham that he could not count on fair judgments in this court and he started to boycott it.<sup>62</sup> The problem was that other generals acknowledged that institution and took to heart any rebellious behavior.

As a result of the continued insubordination of Gen. Abraham, on 23rd May 1943 the Court of Honor adjudicated that he was “guilty of the infringement of an officer honor”, for which he was sentenced to “the penalty of exclusion from the Officer Corps”.<sup>63</sup> It was stated that the foundations of officer ethos had been undermined by his behavior, which threatened the solidarity and the strength of the Corps, and, above all, it stained the honor of the officer’s uniform. Salvation could only be achieved by cutting off Abraham, who even to that point had not manifested the will to improve. The General confirmed that by not appealing the verdict.

But this sentence had to be approved by the Polish president, which was possible only after the war. Abraham therefore still lived among other generals, who had a big dilemma. The year after that judgment no change was reported in the convict’s behavior. In fact in his opinion, he had no reason to do that, because he did not regard this verdict as a legal one. The problem was bigger this time because he could not be judged by the CoHfG any more, since he was considered neither an officer, nor a man of honor. Despite the orders of the highest ranking officer, generals continued to feel provoked by his looks, offended by his words, and slighted by his not saluting. There were fears about the morale of younger officers who witnessed this situation. Moreover, other generals, who could no longer count on the efficacy of CoHfG in this case, would try to seek justice on their

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<sup>61</sup> Court of Honor (PISML, A.XII.87/10 A.N.III a).

<sup>62</sup> Court of Honor (PISML, A.XII.87/10 A.N.III b).

<sup>63</sup> Court of Honor (PISML, A.XII.87/10 A.N.XXXVIII c).

own.<sup>64</sup> The inability to maintain discipline and defend an officer's dignity and honor eventually led to a conflict with the highest ranking officer.<sup>65</sup>

Preserving dignity, however, was understood differently by different officers. Many of them preferred to voluntarily conform to the regulations, statutes and codes, be subject to coercion and accept sanctions in order to avoid conflict with others. Life in conflict was for them a lower category of existence, which hurt their sense of honor.<sup>66</sup> Others, such as Gen. Roman Abraham, regarded subjecting themselves to illegal and self-styled institutions as disgraceful and shameful. They preferred to trust their conscience in the matters of honor. No matter on which side they were standing, each party firmly and constantly defended their position, sometimes leading to absurdities. Still the most important thing was to preserve honor in one's eyes. Without this, the prewar officer could not sleep peacefully.

The case of Gen. Abraham had significantly spoiled the atmosphere among generals, but his stubbornness was not in vain. After the liberation of Murnau camp, all documentation went to the Polish Ministry of National Defense in London to consider. There was no doubt that the verdict and the court itself were illegal. Therefore, the immigration authorities did not consider whether to validate the sentence, but were looking for the best way out of this delicate matter. The whole process was to be started again from the beginning, but Abraham left the army and returned to Poland, which made it impossible to continue.<sup>67</sup> The case was closed, and the general himself, at relatively high cost, proved that he was right.

### The relicts of the old era

By the end of the war, even the officers had come to a realization that everyday life in Oflags was perceived as a relic of the old era. Officers, who fiercely defended their pride, constantly referring to the dignity and honor of the uniform, really lived according to values that in the meanwhile had become outdated. They were an extremely uniform social group collected in one place and in such a large number. Even in peacetime they were distinguished from the rest of society by their own traditions, but now those officers created a veritable museum. Prisoners could not experience the reality of war and did not understand how it had changed people. As

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<sup>64</sup> Court of Honor (PISML, A.XII.87/10 A.N. XXXIX b, A.N. XXXIX c, A.N. XXXX).

<sup>65</sup> Gen. Emil Przedzrymirski's report, 7.

<sup>66</sup> Majchrowski, *Za drutami*, 73.

<sup>67</sup> Court of Honor (PISML, A.XII.87/10, l.dz. 37/45).

noted by Stefan Majchrowski, after some outsiders arrived at the camp, prisoners realized that they themselves had created a “strange human species, which is preserved and protected under a bell jar”, people who had fallen asleep for a few years playing cards and still considering their heroics of 1939.<sup>68</sup>

The first outsiders they met were officers of the *Armia Krajowa* captured after the surrender of the Warsaw Uprising. They came in large groups to Oflag in October 1944. There was great excitement because of their arrival in all the camps. Prisoners were hoping to meet familiar faces, but above all, to learn something about the world firsthand. But it turned out that these were two completely different elements. *Armia Krajowa* officers, brought up by the war, young boys, who were often not even in the army before 1939, did not socially go together with those trained during peacetime. In addition there were among them a number of small crooks, who attached officers stars to themselves just before the end of the uprising in order to get to an Oflag instead of work camp.<sup>69</sup> It turned out that the concept of officer honor and dignity was for them something quite trivial in comparison with the need to save their lives or satisfy hunger. From superb sources of information, the new residents quickly became unwanted intruders and the cause of many conflicts.<sup>70</sup> Bronisław Konieczny, who actually fought alongside the officers of the *Armia Krajowa* after leaving the Oflag, noted their brutality, which would have been unacceptable before, a brutality borne of the cruelty of war.<sup>71</sup>

Defending the honor and dignity of the uniform to prove their bravery and courage was the most important matter for an officer. It was crucial in captivity too, because it prevented losing respect and helped him to stay, until the end, a true soldier. But it required a lot of effort to overcome the difficulties standing on this path. Officers put their lives in danger trying to escape the Oflags, or risked being ridiculed defending their own good names in the courts of honor. Some chose the path of taking lessons and practicing in the event of a sudden return to battle even though this was hardly expected. None of the paths was ultimately wrong. Most of the

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<sup>68</sup> Majchrowski, *Za drutami*, 168.

<sup>69</sup> Barbara Giza, *Do filmu trafiłem przypadkiem. Z Jerzym Stefanem Stawińskim rozmawia Barbara Giza [I Came to the Movie by Accident. Jerzy Stefan Stawiński Interviewed by Barbara Giza]* (Warsaw: Trio, 2007), 37.

<sup>70</sup> Bukowski, *Za drutami oflagów*, 333; Gruszka, *Murnau*, 65-7; Sądzewicz, *Oflag II D*, 162.

<sup>71</sup> Bronisław Konieczny, *Moje życie w mundurze. Czasy narodzin i upadku II Rzeczypospolitej [My Life in the Uniform. The Times of the Birth and Fall of the II Polish Republic]* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2005), 334.

officers staying in captivity had failed to contribute to ending the war. Even though old-fashioned, preserving honor and manliness was just a means to survive another day of isolation from the world. If the chosen path would facilitate the survival and maintain a healthy mind, it was worthy. The most tragic fate befell those who, shortly before the liberation, broke down mentally and committed suicide, throwing themselves on the fence of the camp. In such cases, the guards fired without warning.<sup>72</sup>

Stanisław Miśkiewicz wrote in his memoirs that “the beautiful dream about the war turned into a black abyss of anguish and suffering”. During their entire military career officers had been preparing to sacrifice their lives honorably for their motherland, or to fight until victory. Heroism was to be their destiny regardless of the result of their war struggles. “Contrary to the wishes it ended otherwise, it ended in the worst way, because each of us was prepared for death, but none for captivity.”<sup>73</sup> While the officers were imprisoned, the reality outside had changed so much that they were no longer able to come to terms with it. After release from prison they had to re-learn social life, abandoning the ethos of the officer, or to find an enclave where they could live in the old way. That is why most freed soldiers emigrated to Great Britain and to further countries, such as the United States, Canada, Argentina or even Australia. Only a few of them joined up with Polish Armed Forces in the East who were themselves dependent on the USSR, and even fewer got permission to stay in the army after the war.

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<sup>72</sup> Majchrowski, *Za drutami*, 150.

<sup>73</sup> Miśkiewicz, *Wojna 1939 roku*, 52, 98.



KERSTIN BISCHL

## TELLING STORIES. GENDER RELATIONSHIPS AND MASCULINITY IN THE RED ARMY 1941-45\*

The focus on female Red Army soldiers and its shortcomings

In his memories, the former Red Army soldier and dissident Lev Kopelev remembers his female comrades primarily as women, who cared for their outer appearance, and in regard to their relations with other soldiers:

“Many commanders had their ‘constant battle companions’ (this friendly expression replaced the ordinary PPZh [Pokhodno-Polevaya Zhena, marching field wife]). Some generals thought of news assistants, waitresses, nurses, typists as their fair game. A special type of cute, perky girl emerged, with fitting uniforms, chrome leather boots, crimped hair, make up, coquettishly put on field cap or Cossack fur cap, and white furs half-way down their waists. The soldiers looked at them with cheerful malice, sometimes reluctance, but most of the time they envied those for whom these princesses glowed.”<sup>1</sup>

His description differs a lot from what we are actually to think about the 800.000 female Red Army soldiers, who served as nurses, cooks, secretaries and radio-operators, or who fought as pilots, snipers, machine gunners or medical orderlies in front-positions:<sup>2</sup> Especially in the 1960s and 1970s<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lev Kopelev, *Khranit vechno [To Be Preserved Forever]* (Moscow: Vsva Moskva, 1990), 81-82. All quotations are translated by myself.

<sup>2</sup> For exact figures see Vera Murmantseva, *Sovetskie zhenshchiny v Velikoy Otechestvennoy Voynе [Soviet Women in the Great Patriotic War]* (Moscow: Izd. Mysl, 1974); Yuliya Ivanova, *Khrabreyshie iz prekrasnikh: Zhenshchiny v Rossiі v Voynakh [Beautiful Becomes Brave: Russian Women in Wars]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2002); Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat. A history of Violence at the Eastern Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Thereafter Krylova, *Soviet Women*. The noteworthiness of female Soviet soldiers becomes clear by comparing them to the 500.000 women serving in the Wehrmacht, for instance: These were regarded as ‘helping hands’, unarmed and declared combatants just at the very end, on August 8, 1944. For their experience see Franka Maubach, *Die Stellung halten. Kriegserfahrungen und Lebensgeschichten von Wehrmacht-*

they were presented as very patriotic and heroic women, who along side men carried the burden of the Great Patriotic War.<sup>4</sup> The Belarusian journalist Svetlana Alekseevich drew our attention to yet another aspect of female life in the Red Army.<sup>5</sup> In the 1980s she collected the stories of former female soldiers and presented them as women who wanted to fight like men at the beginning of the war,<sup>6</sup> but then reverted to female behavior and identity. While experiencing the bloody everyday life of a war full of

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*helferinnen [Holding the Line. War-time Experience and Eife-stories of Female Auxiliaries in the Wehrmacht]* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2009). – In contrast to Germany and other nations the Soviet Union already had some experience with women serving in the army: Several thousand women fought in the Russian army in World War I as well as on both sides of the Civil War afterwards. For figures and stories see Laurie S. Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland. Russia's Women Soldiers in World War I and the Revolution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> At that time in official discourse the victory upon Nazi-Germany was taken away from the Generalissimus Iosif Stalin and given to the ordinary people. Joachim Höslér, 'Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit – Der grosse Vaterländische Krieg in der Historiographie der UdSSR und Russlands' ['Coming to Terms with the Past – The Great Patriotic War in the Historiography of the USSR and Russia'], *Osteuropa*, 55, 4-6 (2005), 115-26. Thereafter Höslér, *Aufarbeitung*.

<sup>4</sup> For a list of publications from the 1960s and 1970 see the sources in Krylova, *Soviet Women*. For a Western historian who also blew this horn later on see Kazimiera Cottam, *Women in War and Resistance. Selected Biographies of Soviet Women Soldiers* (Nepean: Focus Pub, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Svetlana Alexijewitsch, *Der Krieg hat kein weibliches Gesicht [War's Unwomanly Face]*, trans. Ganna-Maria Braungardt (Berlin: Berliner Taschenbuchverlag, 2004). Thereafter Alexijewitsch, *Weibliches Gesicht*. Other oral history projects with women who served in the Red Army in WW II are the internet publication *Zhenshchiny – Pamyat – Voyna [Women – Memory – War]*, available at <http://wmw.gender-ehu.org> (last visited 7 July 2011); the exhibition "Mascha + Nina + Katjuscha" Frauen in der Roten Armee 1941-45" ['"Mascha + Nina + Katjuscha" Women in the Red Army 1941-45'] at Deutsch-Russisches Museum Karlshorst, Berlin, 2002; and the interview with Vera Ivanovna Malakhova, 'Four Years as a Frontline Physician', in Barbara Alpern Engel, ed., *A Revolution of their Own. Voices of Women in Soviet History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998). Thereafter Malakhova, 'Four Years'.

<sup>6</sup> The Russian-American historian Anna Krylova argues that it was a shift in the gender-relationships in pre-war times that enabled women to serve. In the 1930s women were still perceived as being binary to men, but no more as oppositional. They could and should combine their reproductive features with handling weapons. As a consequence, a lot of girls were trained in parachuting, shooting and other 'male' activities in the komсомол, the young communist league, and volunteered afterwards. Krylova, *Soviet Women*, 18. For a different perspective on the pre-war gender-relationships which denies that women became equal to men – or equally valued – even when they entered the workforce or military see Thomas G. Schrand, 'Socialism in One Gender: Masculine Values in the Stalin Revolution', in Barbara Evans Clements, Rebecca Friedman, and Dan Healey, eds., *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002).

deprivations, at least some of them became eager to care for their bodies or sewed and ironed for their field-husbands.<sup>7</sup>

In the following paper, however, I will not continue with this perspective on women and female behavior. Instead, I want to draw attention to some facts and perspectives which are oftentimes forgotten, and this is that next to the 800.000 female soldiers almost 30 Million men served in the Red Army, who had their own gender-identity<sup>8</sup> as well and a perspective – as we will see – as Kopelev did. Consequently the male soldiers' social universe will be described in my paper in order to specify their role(s) in the theatre of war. By focusing on them and the evolving hegemonic masculinity<sup>9</sup>, I want to strengthen my thesis that while serving in the army, male soldiers had to present themselves as brave soldiers. This gendered identity included a focus on a man's (hetero-) sexual potential and the soldier's right to (hetero-) sexual intercourse.<sup>10</sup> It becomes obvious by the ways the men perceived women, their demands on them and by the stories they told about them. I will argue that in the course of the war and the shaken social structures of the Red Army, this focus and its accompanying behavior became more and more narrow, reducing women to sexuality. To put it briefly, due to German total war and internal dynamics, the gender-relationships within the Red Army radicalized as a chauvinistic masculinity evolved.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Alexijewitsch, *Weibliches Gesicht*, 49, 55, 79, 86-90, 104-5; Malakhova, 'Four Years', 197.

<sup>8</sup> It is Joan Scott's meanwhile revised, but still canonical definition of gender, that will be applied: Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *American Historical Review*, 91, 5 (1986), 1067-8.

<sup>9</sup> For the definition of hegemonic masculinity, a concept based on Antonio Gramsci, see Raewyn W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995). Examples for the production of masculinity within the army are Pinar Selek, *Zum Mann gehätschelt. Zum Mann gedrillt. Männliche Identitäten [By Love and Force. Masculine Identities]*, trans. Constanze Letsch (Orlanda: Berlin, 2010); and Frank Barrett, 'Die Konstruktion hegemonialer Männlichkeit in Organisationen: Das Beispiel der US-Marine' ['The Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity in Organizations: The US-Marines as example'], in Christine Eifler and Ruth Seifert, eds., *Soziale Konstruktionen - Militär und Geschlechterverhältnis [Social Constructions - Military and Gender-relationships]* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> There are no hints in sources or literature of homosexual encounters or desires among Red Army soldiers.

<sup>11</sup> Actually, the gender relations within the Red Army not only led to sexual harassment towards female comrades but also to sexual violence towards civilian women in the liberated and defeated states of Eastern Europe, especially in Germany. This last aspect will only be touched upon, even when it still remains a research desiderata explaining the Red Army soldiers' sexual violence in 1944/5 by terms of masculinity as it is done for phenomena of sexual violence in other contexts. For the Wehrmacht and the founding literature see Regina



Unfortunately, all my statements in this article are only of an illustrating nature and contain several generalizations which still have to be analyzed more profoundly. I can offer just a structural explanation, because the landscape of sources on the Soviet war is highly fragmented. Even when we have some diaries, letters and memories from a few male soldiers out of 30 million,<sup>12</sup> they have no statistical reliability nor cover a longer period of time. Oftentimes we also lack further information about the authors, their social backgrounds, or (combat-) positions.<sup>13</sup> And we have to take into account that the Great Patriotic War is still a highly politicized topic in Russia – as it was in the Soviet Union with a tendency to make heroes of the soldiers.<sup>14</sup> Such a political framework makes it even more difficult to remember and speak of fear and doubt, or of behavior that harmed comrades.

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Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen. Sexuelle Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutscher Soldaten in der Sowjetunion 1941-44* [*Conquests. Sexual Violence and Intimate Relationships of German soldiers in the Soviet Union 1941-44*] (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2010). – Publications which deal with rape committed by Soviet soldiers in Germany, either rely on ahistoric, sometimes even racist explanations like their “Asiatic mentality”, “the dark side of men’s sexuality”, group behavior, alcohol or (over-) emphasize the results of the so-called Soviet hate propaganda. See Alexander Werth, *Russland im Krieg 1941-1945* [*Russia at War*], trans. Dieter Kiehl (München: Droemer Knauer, 1965), 644. Thereafter Werth, *Russland im Krieg*. Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany. A history of the Soviet Zone of occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 107-14; Manfred Zeidler, *Kriegsende im Osten. Die Rote Armee und die Besetzung Deutschlands östlich von Oder und Neisse 1944/45* [*End of the War in the East. The Red Army and the Occupation of Germany east of Oder and Neisse 1945/45*] (München: Oldenbourg, 1996), 105-9, 120-32, 147-51; Antony Beevor, *Berlin. The Downfall, 1945* (London: Viking, 2002), 30-60, 326-49; Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, ed., *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa. Bd. 1: Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neisse, Teil 1* [*Documentation of the Expulsion of Germans from Middle-East Europe. Part I: The expulsion of the German inhabitants from regions east of the Oder-Neisse*] (Bonn, 1953), 60.

<sup>12</sup> We lack such sources from female combatants widely. Their testimonies had to be produced by oral-history projects, i.e. in interviews. For them see footnote 6 and the essay of Irina Rebrova in this volume.

<sup>13</sup> Despise all these shortcomings the perspective remains fruitful as it provides quite different results as the US-historian Karen Petrone, for instance, who analyzed masculinity and comradeship in the Soviet Union until 1939 by looking at literature on the Russo-Japanese-War 1904/5. She also emphasizes the need to be a hero, but states furthermore his honorable features and the racist implications of the concept. Karen Petrone, ‘Masculinity and Heroism in Imperial and Soviet Military-Patriotic Cultures’, in Barbara Evans Clements, Rebecca Friedman, and Dan Healey, eds., *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Höslér, *Aufarbeitung*. Catherine Merridale, *Ivan’s war. Life and death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Picador, 2006), 10-11. Thereafter Merridale, *Ivan’s war*.

### The German war of annihilation and the consequences for the Red Army

The German war against the SU – as it is widely known – was a sudden attack and a war of annihilation. Even before the first step onto Soviet territory, orders were issued which commanded the murder of Soviet commissars (*Kommissarbefehl*) or which denied the legal responsibility of German soldiers committing crimes against civilians (*Kriegsgerichtsbarkeitserlass*). There were also plans to colonize the territory and to get rid of the population (*Generalplan Ost*) which resulted in a policy of hunger (*Politik des Hungers*) to which particularly the masses of Soviet prisoners of war fell victim. Together with the SS and sometimes with a different pace of brutalization,<sup>15</sup> the Wehrmacht fought a blitzkrieg neglecting all international laws of warfare. A huge territory in Eastern Europe fell under occupation and millions of Soviet soldiers were killed or captured. The Red Army had to retreat thousands of kilometers and stopped the Wehrmacht just before Moscow. After several months of bloody static warfare, with a back and forth full of bodily violence, the Red Army got the upper hand and began its march on Berlin.

In this setting, the Soviet soldiers not only had to face the ruthless fighting of the well-equipped and motivated Wehrmacht,<sup>16</sup> they also had to deal with internal deficits. Due to purges in the late 1930s and the sudden German attack, the Red Army was not prepared for this war by any means. The commanders and officers were young and lacked experience. Soldiers complained about their incapacity – it was they who seemed to be responsible for the heavy losses and occasions of friendly fire.<sup>17</sup> There was also a

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<sup>15</sup> Christian Hartmann, *Wehrmacht im Ostkrieg. Front und militärisches Hinterland 1941/42* [*Wehrmacht in Eastern War. Front and Military Hinterland 1941/2*] (München: Oldenburg, 2009), 282-3. For an interpretation of the Wehrmacht's brutalisation from within, see Omer Bartov, *Hitlers Wehrmacht: Soldaten, Fanatismus und die Brutalisierung des Krieges* [*Hitler's Army. Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*], trans. by Karin Miedler and Thomas Pfeiffer (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1999). For the perceived normality and other explanations of mass murder, see Harald Welzer, *Täter: Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden* [*Perpetrators: How Ordinary Men Become Mass Murderers*] (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2005); and Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> For an interesting comparison of both armies see Gabriel Temkin, *My Just War. The Memoirs of a Jewish Red Army Soldier in World War II* (Presido: Novato CA, 1998), 38. Thereafter Temkin, *Just War*.

<sup>17</sup> Nikolay Inozemtsev, *Frontovoy dnevnik* [*A Diary From the Front*] (Moscow: Nauka, 2005), 53, 283; thereafter Inozemtsev, *Frontovoy dnevnik*. Vladimir Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy*

huge lack of material, weapons and food. The soldiers had to organize most of it themselves; sometimes they stole it from others or bribed the ones responsible for it.<sup>18</sup>

Within these circumstances, the Soviet soldiers also had to cope with the war-time measures their leaders took to make them withstand the Wehrmacht. At a harmless level, propaganda posters called out for heroism by presenting images of male soldiers who protect their mothers, wives, and children by fighting the Germans with their own hands.<sup>19</sup> But these aspirations were translated into Stalinist laws and a Secret Service within the Army, the *Smert Shpionam* (Death to Spies, or SmerSh), which ordered traitors and cowards to be shot immediately. This could be anybody who showed fear in front of the Wehrmacht, who overreacted and caused panic, who retreated or stayed alive as German prisoner of war, or who was absent from the front without permission.<sup>20</sup> There were also so-called blocking units created – armed forces from the People's Commissariat for the Interior which stood behind the regular soldiers and forced them to go into manslaughter with the Wehrmacht.<sup>21</sup> Backed by all these laws, *Pravda*,

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*dnevnik: voennye stranitsy* [A Soldier's Diary: Pages of War-time] (Moscow: Agraf, 2005), 40, 45, 47, 126. Thereafter Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy dnevnik*. Temkin, *Just War*, 117.

<sup>18</sup> Temkin, *Just War*, 125; Sergey Polyakov, 'Zapiski malenkogo soldata o bolschoy voyne' ['Notes of a Little Soldier About a Big War'], *Sever*, 9 (1995), 115, 117; Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy dnevnik*, 74; Ivan Yakushin, *On the roads of war. A Soviet cavalryman on the eastern front* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2005), 37; Antony Beevor and Luba Vinogradova, *A Writer at War. Vassily Grossman with the Red Army 1941-1945* (London: Pimlico, 2006), 94; thereafter Beevor and Vinogradova, *Writer; Poslednie pisma s fronta 1941* [Last Letters from the Front 1941] (Moscow: Voennoe Izdat., 1991), 88; thereafter *Poslednie pisma 1941*. Alexijewitsch, *Weibliches Gesicht*, 61; Leonid Rabichev, 'Voyna vse spishet. Neskolkto fragmentov iz knigi vospominaniy o voyne' ['War Writes Down Everything. Some Fragments from Memoirs about War'], *Znanya*, 2 (2005), 149; thereafter Rabichev, 'Voyna'. Levka Rubinshteyn, 'Isповed chastlivogo alpinista. Glavy iz trilogii' ['Confession of a Happy Alpinist. Chapters from a trilogy'], *Zvezda*, 5 (1995), 7. Thereafter Rubinshteyn, 'Isповed'.

<sup>19</sup> Such posters are published in Pavel Aleksandrovich Snopkov, ed., *Plakaty vojny i pobedy. 1941-1945* [Posters of War and Victory, 1941-45] (Moscow: Kontakt-Kultura, 2005); thereafter Snopkov, *Plakaty*. Nina Ivanovna Baburina, ed., *Rossiia - XX vek. Istoriya strany v plakate* [Russia 20th century history of the country in poster] (Moscow: Panorama, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> The orders are published in Iosif V. Stalin, *O Velikoy Otechestvennoy Voyne Sovetskogo Soyuza* [On the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union] (Moscow: Kraft+, 2002). For tribunals see Jörg Baberowski, *Der rote Terror: die Geschichte des Stalinismus* [The Red Terror: the History of Stalinism] (München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2003), 229. Thereafter Baberowski, *Rote Terror*; and Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 157.

<sup>21</sup> Altogether, about 158.000 men were sentenced (and probably shot) as traitors or cowards throughout the war; a much higher number served in penal battalions. Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 157-9; Baberowski, *Rote Terror*, 229-32.

the main Stalinist newspaper, could make a clear cut distinction and considered all those as traitors who did not support the Red Army wholeheartedly.<sup>22</sup> A further measure taken by the state was that being shot as a traitor rather than being killed as a hero in battle meant harsh consequences for the soldiers' families at home. They could be arrested, lose the social support by the state and their jobs, not to mention the public disrespect.<sup>23</sup>

As a consequence, the Red Army soldiers accepted this being forced to be brave soldiers when they welcomed, obeyed, and even enforced the Stalinist orders themselves by taking part in tribunals or preventing comrades from escaping.<sup>24</sup> Mansur Abdulin, an infantryman, perceived them as a "relief from uncertainty".<sup>25</sup> The results of this force can also be traced in the soldiers' Ego-documents, especially in the letters where they applied the vocabulary of heroism and its implications for their own identity: They sent "Red Army greetings" to their relatives and wives and let them know, how they were beating the Germans.<sup>26</sup> They were convinced that cowards die faster<sup>27</sup> and reminded their wives that it was better to be a hero's widow than a coward's wife.<sup>28</sup>

### Shaken social structures within the Red Army and the implications of violence

But the Soviet soldiers' eagerness to become and to present oneself as brave soldiers was also shaped by the social structures among them and the atmosphere within the army, because throughout the war, these structures

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<sup>22</sup> Pravda dated on July 30, 1942 is quoted in Werth, *Russland im Krieg*, 300.

<sup>23</sup> Marius Broekmeyer, *Stalin, the Russians, and Their War 1941-1945*, trans. Roz Buck (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 151.

<sup>24</sup> Aleksandr Danilovich Shindel, ed., *Po ob storony fronta - pisma sovetsskikh i nemetskikh soldat, 1941-1945* [On Both Sides of the Front – Letters from Soviet and German soldiers, 1941-1945] (Moscow: Sol, 1995), 154. Thereafter Shindel, *Po obe*. And Olmehchenko in Alexijewitsch, *Weibliches Gesicht*, 157.

<sup>25</sup> Mansur Gisatulovich Abdulin, *Stranitsy soldatskogo dnevnika* [Pages of a Soldier's Diary] (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 1990), 30. Thereafter Abdulin, *Stranitsy*.

<sup>26</sup> As examples see *Poslednie pis'ma s fronta 1942* [Last Letters from the Front 1942] (Moscow: Voennye Izdat., 1991), 332; Thereafter *Poslednie pisma 1942. Poslednie pis'ma s fronta 1943* [Last Letters from the Front 1943] (Moscow: Voennye Izdat., 1992), 251; Shindel, *Po obe*, 59-69.

<sup>27</sup> *Poslednie pisma s fronta 1944* [Last Letters from the Front 1944] (Moscow: Voennye Izdat., 1993), 39; thereafter *Poslednie pisma 1944*. Abdulin, *Stranitsy*, 61.

<sup>28</sup> *Poslednie pisma 1941*, 58, 244; *Poslednie pisma 1942*, 72; *Poslednie pisma 1944*, 554.

were heavily shaken and the Red Army became a *total institution*.<sup>29</sup> Right in the middle of the scorched earth, the soldiers had no exit nor access to civilians and their own civilian life, because in the Soviet Army there were no furloughs<sup>30</sup> and the field-post was not working properly.<sup>31</sup> Relationships with friends and relatives, who also served in the Red Army, were also not stable, because oftentimes these served in different units. And once in the army, they could die there as fast and arbitrarily as oneself through German, sometimes even through Soviet bullets.<sup>32</sup>

As a consequence, we have testimonies that tell us about the experienced loneliness within the masses of soldiers.<sup>33</sup> Distrust was felt widely,<sup>34</sup> which was probably connected to the theft, the political surveillance, and the fact that due to the heavy losses and constant replacements a lot of the comrades were unknown strangers. Furthermore, there were ongoing conflicts, sometimes violent ones, among the soldiers, especially with officers.<sup>35</sup> The lieutenant for supply, Andrey Kovalevskiy, describes the atmosphere in his unit, when there was no fighting at all, as “not healthy.”

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<sup>29</sup> All armies are total institutions as it is analyzed by the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman. Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (New York: Doubleday, 1961). But in the Red Army and due to the war the measures taken were more rigid than average.

<sup>30</sup> Baberowski, *Rote Terror*, 232.

<sup>31</sup> It could take a letter several weeks to reach its recipient, when it did not get lost at all. As a consequence letters maintained furthestmost a list of greetings just to stay in relationships with one's family and friends. As examples see Shindel, *Po obe*, 150; Evgeniy I. Ovsyankin, ed., *Pisma s fronta 1941-1945 [Letters from the Front 1941-1945]* (Arkhangelsk: Severo-Zapad. Kn. Izdat, 1989), 211. For furthergoing analysis of field post by Red Army soldiers, see Elke Scherstjanoi, ed., *Rotarmisten schreiben aus Deutschland. Briefe von der Front und historische Analysen [Red Army Soldiers Write from Germany. Letters from the front and historical analysis]* (München: Saur, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> The British historian Catherine Merridale states that it was just a few weeks that an average rank and file Red Army soldier from the infantry was likely to survive. See Merridale, *Ivan's war*, 16, 199.

<sup>33</sup> Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy dnevnik*, 63; Rabichev, *Voyna*, 148; *Poslednie pisma 1941*, 88, 196, 202.

<sup>34</sup> A. Zharikov and P. Jurchenko, “...v polk pribyli sibiryaki” [“In the Regiment were Siberians...”], *Sibirskie ogni*, 5 (1989), 147; *Poslednie pisma 1944*, 39; Abdulin, *Stranitsy*, 61; *Poslednie pisma 1941*, 95-96.

<sup>35</sup> Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy dnevnik*, 45-47, 59; Beevor and Vinogradova, *Writer*, 73; Wladimir Gelfand, *Deutschland-Tagebuch 1945-1946: Aufzeichnungen eines Rotarmisten [German Diary 1945-1946: Records of a Red Army Soldier]*, trans. Anja Lutter (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2005), 35, 48-50, 53, 57; Grigoriy Pomerants, “Zapiski gadkogo utenka” [“Notes of a Rotten Duck”], *Znamya*, 8 (1993), 129. Thereafter Pomerants, ‘Zapiski’.

[...] There were plenty of all kinds of mutual ‘banter’ and cliques. Also, the superiors became somehow grim and exceedingly capitious.<sup>36</sup>

In this muddled situation some of the soldiers became depressive and were close to nervous breakdowns, a state of mind they hoped to relieve with alcohol. Jakov Aronov, about whom we lack further information, tells his sister in a letter that something in his head is knocking, he wishes to drink in order to stop it.<sup>37</sup> Also Vladimir Stezhenskiy, who worked as a translator for the army, considers in his diary drinking himself into oblivion after he had seen the results of a bombardment.<sup>38</sup> And Nikolay Inozemtsev, a spotter who constantly drinks,<sup>39</sup> states in his diary: “[H]ere you have not only stagnation; here you have moral intimidation, a consciousness of your own total nothingness, a beastly fear for your physical existence.”<sup>40</sup> Some pages later he describes the soldiers’ moods to be like a suitcase: packed and stuffed, they are just waiting to explode, to get rid of everything in the fights. “The huge losses, the absence of letters, everything that determines the everyday life of war, is lightened up by one thing, by the expectation of the attack.”<sup>41</sup>

As we can conclude from that, moments of fighting did not only enable the soldiers to get rid of the Wehrmacht and the war. They also offered relief and delight, and they provided the soldiers with a feeling of unity<sup>42</sup> as Viktor Gladkov, about whom we also lack further information, describes in a letter to his wife:

“The war turned out to be more frightful in our imagination than it was in real life. As soon as they had given us an assignment and it was clear what we had to do, everything became somehow easy and simple. I don’t know what the others felt, but I personally wanted from the bottom of my heart to start fulfill-

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<sup>36</sup> Andrey Kovalevskiy, “Nynche u nas peredyshka.” *Frontovoy dnevnik* [‘“Today, we have breathing space.” A diary from the front’], *Neva*, 5 (1995), 72. Thereafter Kovalevskiy, ‘Nynche’.

<sup>37</sup> Shindel, *Po obe*, 127-8.

<sup>38</sup> Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy dnevnik*, 71.

<sup>39</sup> Inozemtsev, *Frontovoy devnik*, 47, 56, 68, 70-72, 95-98, 117, 131, 138, 145, 150, 155, 159.

<sup>40</sup> Inozemtsev, *Frontovoy devnik*, 286.

<sup>41</sup> Inozemtsev, *Frontovoy devnik*, 140, 180, 194.

<sup>42</sup> Such phenomena can be traced for most acts of group violence. Ulrich Bielefeld, ‘Ethnizität und Gewalt. Kollektive Leidenschaft und die Existenzialisierung von Ethnizität und Gewalt’ [‘Ethnicity and Violence. Collective fervors and how they come into existence’], in Wolfgang Höpken, ed., *Politische und ethnische Gewalt in Südosteuropa und Lateinamerika* [Political and Ethnic Violence in South-East Europe and Latin America] (Köln: Böhlau 2001), 14; Wolfgang Sofsky, *Traktat über die Gewalt* [A Tract on Violence] (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1996), 161.

ing the assignment as quickly as possible. We went into battle singing songs, we laughed and made jokes. Obviously no one thought of death. When we came under fire [...] and the shells started falling on our armour like hammers I got into such fervour and rage that I started to entirely forget about myself.”<sup>43</sup>

Also Mansur Abdulin states that in moments of fighting, the army turned itself into a “great living being.”<sup>44</sup> And to be part of this, one had to be brave. And so he comments in the following on falling asleep while on duty:

“I hate myself for this! If only I had to suffer alone now, it would be less disgraceful. But it’s a pity for Suvorov. [...] Probably he is now thinking: ‘I have to blame myself for entrusting the alert post to Abdulin. What can you expect from him? That Mansur is useless and irresponsible, and he’s a brat. If I manage to get out of this story unscathed, I won’t be friends with Abdulin anymore. I don’t have time for this careless scapegrace [...]’ I sit and think it through and through, and I come to the conclusion: ‘Yes, I am greedy for sleep [...] Yes, Suvorov doesn’t need a friend like me.’ Even I myself don’t need someone like that. But after all, why am I so useless? If we escape [...] and return to our battalion, the commanders won’t say thank you anyway. They’ll take my medal ‘For Bravery’ [za otvagu] and they’ll expel me from the party.”<sup>45</sup>

Taking together all this evidence, we can state that becoming and being a brave soldier was not just a soldier’s obligation in wartime, strongly enforced by military orders. For the Soviet soldiers and their unstable social situation it was also the only way to exist and to be part of social structures within and outside of the army. By that it became a deeply necessary and accepted identity – and as most identities it was gendered.<sup>46</sup>

### Gendered features of the male Red Army soldier

The fact that the identity of a soldier was assumed to be a male one was officially stated by the mobilization orders. These conscripted just men and intended to have women in non-fighting positions as it was also articulated

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<sup>43</sup> *Poslednie pisma 1942*, 332.

<sup>44</sup> Abdulin, *Stranitsy*, 48.

<sup>45</sup> Abdulin, *Stranitsy*, 45.

<sup>46</sup> Usually, gender as a social category works in relation to other categories such as age, class, age etc. Because of the fact that reference to these categories is less detectable in the sources or even non-existent we can conclude that gender became the dominant category among Red Army soldiers.



in war propaganda showing only men as fighting soldiers.<sup>47</sup> Women were either presented as mothers calling their sons to fight against the *Wehrmacht*, as substitute workers in factories and fields, or as medical orderlies helping the soldiers. But the men's identity as soldiers included also an appeal to their sexual potential and access to women, which can be traced in the propaganda as well. Starting in 1942, posters showed kidnapped female Soviet citizens hoping for the liberating Red Army, or, in 1943, loving wives waiting for their fighting men. Especially the former were presented in a highly sexualized manner.<sup>48</sup> Such an idea of the sexually active soldier had also a very prominent place within the discursive practices of the army. There were the typical military expressions which said fighting the enemy means to fuck him; that a weapon in battlefield should work as well as a woman in bed, and that a soldier, who did not dare to fight bravely, should be too ashamed to talk to a woman.<sup>49</sup>

How much these ideas were present in the soldiers' behavior is articulated in an incident, which the mountain rifleman Levka Rubinshteyn relates to us in his memories: After three years of war, he had the opportunity to visit his wife Ira, who happened to be in unoccupied territory. When he arrived, she was not able to hug him in order to welcome him. The whole evening she tried to keep her mother around. Even when Rubinshteyn was already lying in his bed with Ira, she did not want to send her away, although he asked to:

"She couldn't tell her mother to leave, but she couldn't stay with me neither. Because of exhaustion she had no menstruation. For her, all this was very difficult, even frightening. Finally her mother left. My little Ira tried very hard to do well, but... Still, I didn't really feel pity for her. Probably I couldn't really understand. Maybe I had become a real warrior, hadn't I ... And, by the way, I remembered a phrase from my sergeant: 'A gun should be as reliable in fight as a woman in bed.' That's higher wisdom and justice."<sup>50</sup>

It does not become quite clear what happened between Rubinshteyn and his wife after his mother-in-law had left. But it will not bend the interpretation too much to argue that Rubinshteyn had sexual intercourse with his wife, not paying too much attention to her 'I can't', considering it her duty.

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<sup>47</sup> Andrea Moll-Sawatzki, "Freiwillige an die Front" ["Volunteers to the front"], in Peter Jahn, ed., *Mascha + Nina + Katjuscha. Frauen in der Roten Armee 1941-1945* [*Mascha + Nina + Katjuscha. Women in the Red Army 1941-1945*] (Berlin: Museum Berlin Karlshorst, 2002), 23.

<sup>48</sup> See the posters No. 87, 93, 94, 118, 124, 132, 179 in Snopkov, *Plakaty*.

<sup>49</sup> Rubinshteyn, 'Ispoved', 31; Beevor and Vinogradova, *Writer*, 80, 88, 102; Shindel, *Po obe*, 86; Pomerants, 'Zapiski', 163.

<sup>50</sup> Rubinshteyn, 'Ispoved', 31.



### A narrowed perception of women and a radicalization of masculinity in wartime

This demanding behavior and vulgarity as masculine features were to a high degree shaped in the soldiers' actual environment. That is, by the army and its social structures, especially by the position into which the female soldiers were forced and the way they were perceived. It started out with the idealization of women as waiting mothers and wives representing the homeland and the coziness of civil life.<sup>51</sup> They were seen as the opposite to war, and so Vladimir Stezhenskiy, who constantly describes the madness of war and his own loneliness in his diary, hopes to fall in love with a woman.<sup>52</sup> But Stezhenskiy, as the majority of the soldiers, had very little access to women, by whom he wanted to get his mind off war. The only ones available for them were their female comrades, as there were no furloughs and contact with civilian women on Soviet territory was rare.<sup>53</sup>

Many of the Red Army women, to some extent accepting their 'female' tasks and idealization, wanted to care for the soldiers' needs and desires. In her diary, the nurse Tatyana Atabek writes that she cared for wounded soldiers as her mother had done for her.<sup>54</sup> Other female soldiers remember their extra burden as well. Sometimes it was their commanders who asked them to smile in order to keep up the moral support, as we hear from Tatyana Kurilenko, a secretary of the political section, in an interview:

"The commander himself met up with the women, the front and division commander. And he kind of gave instructions on how we were supposed to help them to survive, how to raise their mood, you see. Never start whining yourself, although you may feel bad, and stuff. We should always have a smile on our face. [...] There was great, great moral support, when there were women in the battalion or, let's say, in the division."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Inozemtsev, *Frontovoy devnik*, 289-9; Temkin, *Just War*, 151, Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy devnik*, 171-2.

<sup>52</sup> Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy devnik*, 63.

<sup>53</sup> At least, there is very few contact to civilian Soviet women mentioned in the soldiers' Ego-Documents. When the soldiers met civilian women for short periods of time they describe these contacts in terms of love or of sexual exploitation. Cf. Beevor and Vinogradova, *Writer*, 103; Kovalevskiy, 'Nynche', 70-83.

<sup>54</sup> Tatyana Atabek, 'Ozhidanie chastya. Dnevnik i pisma voennogo felshera Tatyany Atabek. 1941 -1945' ['Waiting for Happiness. Diaries and Letters of the Military Feldsher Tatyany Atabek. 1941-1945'], *Izvestiya*, 22 June 2002.

<sup>55</sup> Tatyana Kurilenko, Interview, available at <http://wmw.gender-ehu.org/docs/interviews/3.doc> (last visited 13 July 2011).

But in the end, there were too many men who had experienced war for these few women. They were overstrained by the war and their comrades. And so they saved their time and qualities for the officers and commanders, as the operator Zoya Gorokhova tells in an interview:

“And horrible were also the men around us. And they, of course, and every one of them, thought that he was alive that day, and where he’d be tomorrow was uncertain. And every one of them, he wanted something warm, you know, tender from life. He needed a woman. But there were only few of us, we struggled to fight our way out, it was very hard for us to exist in that zone. For that reason many of the girls got off with one single guy, in order to protect themselves from advances from the rest of them. [...] It was very hard. Even now here it’s difficult to speak about it.”<sup>56</sup>

The medical orderly Sofia K-vich, who is also being interviewed, is more direct and hints that the men’s aspirations had furthermost sexual implications:

“After a few months I went to his [the commander’s] dugout. What could I do else? Around you were just men; it was better to live with one constantly than to be afraid of all. During the fighting it wasn’t that bad as afterwards, in the breaks. After the fighting they were ambushing us constantly. In the night, you didn’t dare to leave your dugout.”<sup>57</sup>

When he died, she went to the second commander, whom she loved but who left her after the war for his family at home.

By analyzing these statements we can state for the gender-relationships in the Red Army that the women had to deal with a lot of sexual harassment, so that there was much pressure to become a so-called *Pokhodno-Polevaya Zhená* (a marching field wife, or PPZh).<sup>58</sup> And we can conclude that the women’s bodily behavior, which was mentioned in the beginning of this article, had among other things a strategic meaning.

<sup>56</sup> Zoya Gorokhova, Interview, available at <http://wmw.gender-ehu.org/docs/interviews/4.doc> (last visited 13 July 2011).

<sup>57</sup> Sofia K-vich is quoted in Alexijewitsch, *Weibliches Gesicht*, 254-5. For another testimony on sexual harassment see an anonymous testimony in Peter Jahn, ed., *Mascha + Nina + Katjuscha. Frauen in der Roten Armee 1941-1945* [*Mascha + Nina + Katjuscha. Women in the Red Army 1941-1945*] (Berlin: Museum Berlin Karlshorst, 2002), 160; as well Malakhova, ‘Four Years’, 187.

<sup>58</sup> The abbreviation is in analogy to a gun. Kopelev, *Khranit*, 81. We lack research on official regulations concerning relationships between men and women at the front. Kopelev argues that they were forbidden but then rumors occurred that Stalin himself had declared them ‘normal’. Gorokhova states that officers were punished for having liaisons by being demoted. Zoya Gorokhova, Interview, available at <http://wmw.gender-ehu.org/docs/interviews/4.doc> (last visited 13 July 2011).

Sofia K-vich is convinced that most of the women at the front did what she did, but have not dared to speak about it. Probably it was good they did not, because there was a lot of disgust for the PPZh, who could be considered as whores.<sup>59</sup> But a closer look onto the sources, especially the ones by women, their positions and personalities suggests that there was a wide range of possible encounters between men and women at the front. A young medical orderly like Sofia K-vich, who was maybe the only female person in the whole regiment, had probably less possibilities to deal with this pressure than a well-trained female sniper in a unit of female snipers for instance. There were also women who had formal power or were bold enough to keep the men away by swearing at them or telling lies.<sup>60</sup> Of course, it is possible that there were women who just reacted to the power and sexual desires of the men and commanders.<sup>61</sup> But maybe it was also possible that some women used their bodies as a resource among others in order to survive and to have an advantage the male soldiers did not have.<sup>62</sup> And we know, that several women married their field-husbands afterwards; there was, maybe, mutual love.<sup>63</sup>

Instead of this historical complexity, something else counted among the men – and this is described by Andrey Kovalevskiy as analytical as it is cynical:

“I think that the front soldiers will agree with me if I say, in order to simplify the wording: ‘The regiment’s doctor, if it’s a woman of course, lives with the regiment’s commander; the battalion’s doctor with the battalion’s commander [...] and so on.’ [T]his kind of ‘organizational structure’ is extremely characteristic in that matter. The thing is that in the army the statutory habits are so strong, which means that in all things, preference is to be given to the elders by rank, and these ‘elders’ always have a position twice as favorable in matters of love. First, women prefer people of higher rank, and [...] the lower ranked men leave all opportunities to their senior officer. If a senior officer [...] wants to approach a woman that has just come under his command, he is, first, in most cases not going to face any particular resistance from the selected object, and, second, he won’t have any competitors. But [...] if it becomes obvious after the

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<sup>59</sup> Beevor and Vinogradova, *Writer*, 121; Malakhova, ‘Four Years’, 215.

<sup>60</sup> Anne Noggle, *A dance with death. Soviet airwomen in World War II* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2001), 242; Malakhova, ‘Four Years’, 187, 196.

<sup>61</sup> Alexijewitsch, *Weibliches Gesicht*, 23; Rubinshteyn, ‘Ispoved’, 24; Boris Tartakovskiy, *Iz dnevnikov voennykh let [From Wartime Diaries]* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2005), 131. Thereafter Tartakovskiy, *Iz dnevnikov*.

<sup>62</sup> Kopelev, *Khranit*, 82; and Beevor and Vinogradova, *Writer*, 105.

<sup>63</sup> Evgeniy Bessonov, *Tank rider. Into the Reich with the Red Army* (Philadelphia: Casemat, 2005), 242-3; for an explicit story of mutual love see Alexijewitsch, *Weibliches Gesicht*, 253.

first days, or sometimes even hours, that the senior does not intend to deal with the newcomer, then one of the other, the lower senior officers, will take the initiative into his hands. Notwithstanding, we are much less demanding here than we would be behind the lines. [...] Generally speaking, even if a poor soldier manages to have love relationships at the front, then he'll only get the last sort. By the way, using the word 'love' in these thoughts of mine is a blasphemy, because even if love exists somewhere in the world, it clearly does not at the front. Here, it's just f..."<sup>64</sup>

This quotation in short says that PPZh represented the commanders' power, because it was their privilege to choose a woman as PPZh.<sup>65</sup> It was for them that the women were available, and, as we can take the hint from the opening quotation, for whom they decorated their bodies and glowed.

The opportunities of the rank and file to get in sexual contact with women were very few; either they had to be brave or bold. Such is at least the message of stories the soldiers told among comrades or present as war-time episodes in their memories. In these, the commanders' alleged power over their field-wives could go so far that they ordered them to behave like prostitutes when brave soldiers were offered the chance to spend 30 minutes with them or were visited by them when lying wounded in the hospital.<sup>66</sup> When the women were not sent as rewards to the soldiers, they had to take the initiative themselves. Levka Rubinshteyn remembers a comrade who went to the commander's PPZh, said 'Come with me' and left with her. After half an hour he returned and told everybody 'What a girl!' making a gesture with his finger.<sup>67</sup>

But even more enlightening is how this episode, the story told by Rubinshteyn continues: After the comrade's return and praise of the girl and, by that, of oneself, "the account on [it] was quickly spread in the whole squadron, and there emerged a majority that didn't believe, but wished to".<sup>68</sup> We can assume that, as a consequence, the soldiers, who wished to believe, who shared the story and retold it again and again, took this incident and the comrade as a role model in order to get what he got. By that, they became bolder to get their way with women, something

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<sup>64</sup> Kovalevskiy, 'Nynche', 86-87.

<sup>65</sup> Stezhenskiy also states that the officers organized themselves a brothel at New Year's Eve. Stezhenskiy, *Soldatskiy devnik*, 99. How it looked like he tells not in detail. Actually, there was no organized brothel-system in the Red Army as in the Wehrmacht or the Japanese Army. Boguslav Shnajder, 'Neizvestnaya voyna' ['The unknown war'], *Voprosy Istorii*, 1 (1995), 109.

<sup>66</sup> Rubinshteyn, 'Ispoved', 24; Tartakovskiy, *Iz dnevnikov*, 131.

<sup>67</sup> Rubinshteyn, 'Ispoved', 25.

<sup>68</sup> Rubinshteyn, 'Ispoved', 25.

Nikolay Inozemtsev even admits in his diary,<sup>69</sup> and this increased the amount of sexual harassment in the army, which also meant increasing the female soldiers' need to be protected by a high ranked field husband. To sum my thesis up, a chauvinistic masculinity evolved and the gender-relationships within the army radicalized.

The reasons for this increased story-telling on women's availability, which made their situation so precarious, can be located in the social structures of the Red Army in wartime. When sitting together in unnerving boredom, the soldiers needed a common topic with the unfamiliar comrades with whom it was better not to tell about feelings and politics and who were likely to have a conflict with that. Talking about women was probably such a topic. By showing around letters and photographs from their wives or girlfriends back home, the soldiers could also present themselves as heroic as those who had wives and girlfriends at the front.<sup>70</sup> But their women at home were far away, their letters seldom. In the everyday-life of the Red Army it was the female soldiers who were next to the men and made up a better point of interest. By focusing on their availability for the commanders with formal power, for brave soldiers or for bold ones, they reduced them more and more to sexuality, as sexual potential became a feature of the real soldier.

### Telling stories afterwards?

In the everyday-life of the Red Army and its shaken social structures, it was the institution of the PPZh which protected the women and restricted the men's sexual aspirations (mostly) to their talking. But there, as I would argue, these aspirations and demands grew: Women, especially the PPZh, were more and more reduced to the opportunities their sexualized bodies offered and became an attribute of power and braveness; and brave soldiers were perceived to have a right to sexual intercourse. This radicalization of the gender-relationships became obvious, when the Red Army soldiers won the war, threw out the Wehrmacht from Eastern Europe and marched as heroes to Berlin: On this way, in the liberated and occupied territories of Eastern Europe and especially in Germany the men got more and more in contact with civilian women without protection. Their sexual aspirations and chauvinistic masculinity were no longer restricted to their talking. As

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<sup>69</sup> Inozemtsev, *Frontovoy devnik*, 189.

<sup>70</sup> Dimitry Loza, *Fighting for the Soviet motherland. Recollections from the Eastern Front, hero of the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 146; Abdulin, *Stranitsy*, 56.

a consequence – and a further thesis – the unprotected civilian women had not only to deal with sexual harassment but with rape.<sup>71</sup>

What this war-time experience of radicalized masculinity meant for the Soviet population, which consisted to a high number of men who had served in the Red Army, is still unknown. Literature on behalf of the post-war gender-relationships in the Soviet Union is rare. In one of the few books, the German historian Anna Köbberling, argues that it was the women's very hard experience of war, their deprivations there, that resulted in lasting conservative gender-relationships in the post-war Soviet Union.<sup>72</sup> But maybe it was rather the men's experience of radicalized masculinity and their ways to deal with the army's behavior in the last weeks of the war that shaped the post-war gender-relationships in the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, we lack research on masculinity, men and their stories at that time as we also lack analysis of how the men met their wives after being demobilized. Even well-known phenomena concerning the reunion have not received detailed research yet, as for example, the wide spread of sexually transmitted diseases among Soviet soldiers in the last months of the war and afterwards; the lack of an official pension or compensation for the soldiers; the consequences of the state-sponsored permission to loot and send the booty home; or the fact that a lot of soldiers had to pass through filtration camps and arrived home after long delay, as the government distrusted them after having stepped onto 'bourgeois territory'.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> See footnote 12.

<sup>72</sup> Anna Köbberling, *Das Klischee der Sowjetfrau. Stereotyp und Selbstverständnis Moskauer Frauen zwischen Stalin Ära und Perestroika* [The Cliche of Soviet Women. Stereotype and Self-image of Muscovite Women between the Age of Stalin and Perestroika] (Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag 1997), 122.

<sup>73</sup> These phenomena are at least mentioned in Merridale, *Ivan's war*, 319-22, 351; Beevor, *Berlin*, 412; Werth, *Russland im Krieg*, 658.



MAREN RÖGER

## SEXUAL CONTACT BETWEEN GERMAN OCCUPIERS AND POLISH OCCUPIED IN WORLD WAR II POLAND

The invasion of Poland in September 1939 was the beginning of a brutal occupation during which millions of Poles died and millions were physically and psychologically harmed. Further, the country's economy and infrastructure were heavily damaged. All this has already been researched from multiple perspectives.<sup>1</sup>

This paper, however, deals with an aspect of the German occupation in Poland that has rarely been covered by the extensive research up to this point: Sexual contact between Germans and Poles in the extreme situation

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<sup>1</sup> The state of research for the German occupation of Poland is extensive and cannot be cited here. The greater part of the relevant literature is in German and Polish. For an English language introduction about one part of occupied Poland, see Jan Tomasz Gross, *Polish Society Under German Occupation: The General Government, 1939-1944* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1979). For a broader, but disputed, picture of the region see Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). The military and administrative perspectives have been joined by experiential history and everyday life history to explore the life-world of the occupied and the occupier. In doing so, the efforts are directed to either one or the other group and to a large extent track the real-life separation of the German occupiers and the Polish occupied during the period of occupation. For the history of everyday life, concentrated rather on the occupied, see Tomasz Szarota, *Okupowanej Warszawy dzień powszedni [The Everyday Life of Occupied Warsaw]*, 2nd edn Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1978); Anna Czocher, *W okupowanym Krakowie: Codzienność polskich mieszkańców miasta 1939-1945 [In Occupied Cracow: Everyday life of the Polish Inhabitants 1939-1945]* (Gdańsk: Oskar, 2011). Thereafter Czocher, *W okupowanym Krakowie*. Concerning the occupiers, see Stephan Lehnstaedt, *Okkupation im Osten: Besatzeralltag in Warschau und Minsk 1939-1944 [Occupation in the East: The Everyday Life of Occupiers in Warsaw and Minsk 1939-1944]* (München: Oldenbourg, 2010). Thereafter Lehnstaedt, *Okkupation*. Initial works took into account as well the gender history aspects and inquired (for example) into the understanding of roles among the female occupiers in the annexed regions of Poland. See Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).



of the occupation.<sup>2</sup> The invasion of Poland meant not only the invasion by abstract occupiers, but an invasion of 1.5 million German men<sup>3</sup>, who brought along their gendered identities and their emotional and sexual needs. It is the consensual sexual contact between occupiers and occupied that will be in the forefront of this paper, even though other forms of sexual encounters such as violence and sex-work inside and outside the occupiers' organized bordello system also existed in the occupied Polish territories.<sup>4</sup> By focusing on these encounters, the paper can shed some light on three aspects of the occupation. Firstly, it examines the ideology and everyday practice of the racially motivated prohibition on contact (*Umgangsverbot*).<sup>5</sup> This has to be seen as being at the heart of our understanding of National Socialist racist policies.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Earlier studies referred peripherally to sexual contacts in Poland. Nevertheless it is just within more recent times that the first articles and book chapters have appeared addressing the dealings in the relationships between Germans and Poles. See Birthe Kundrus, 'Regime der Differenz: Volkstumspolitische Inklusionen und Exklusionen im Warthegau und im Generalgouvernement 1939-1944' ['Regimes of Difference: *Volkstum* Policies of Inclusion and Exclusion in Warthegau and in the Generalgouvernement 1939-1944'], in Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt, eds., *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* [*Volksgemeinschaft: New Research on the Society of National Socialism*] (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2009), 105-23. Examples for Warsaw are also in Lehnstaedt, *Okkupation*. Social contacts between occupiers and occupied seemed more so of interest to commentators and journalists. Especially in the 1980s when parts of the Polish society were seeking interaction with western neighbors, there were attempts in a popular science way to find "good Germans" in uniform. See e.g. Jan Turnau, ed., *Zehn Gerechte: Erinnerungen aus Polen an der deutschen Besatzungszeit 1939-1945* [*Ten Righteous Ones: Memories from Poland of the German Occupation Period 1939-1945*] (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> See Jochen Böhrer, *Auftakt zum Vernichtungskrieg: Die Wehrmacht in Polen 1939* [*Prelude to the War of Extermination: The Wehrmacht in Poland 1939*] (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2006), 33.

<sup>4</sup> This article summarizes some results from my research project (located at the GHI Warsaw) about *The History of Sexual Contacts during the German Occupation of Poland and its Aftermath: Sexual Violence, (Forced) Prostitution, Love Affairs and German-Polish 'Children Born of War'*.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview about the juridical system, compare Martin Broszat, *Nationalsozialistische Polenpolitik 1939-1945* [*National Socialist Polish Policies 1939-1945*] (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1961), ch. 'Strafjustiz und Polensonderstrafrecht' ['Criminal Law and Special Polish Criminal Law']; and Andrzej Wrzyszczy, *Okupacyjne sądownictwo niemieckie w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie 1939-1945. Organizacja i funkcjonowanie* [*Occupiers German Judiciary in the General Government*] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Gabriele Czarnowski, 'Zwischen Germanisierung und Vernichtung: Verbotene polnisch-deutsche Liebesbeziehungen und die Rekonstruktion des Volkskörpers im Zweiten Weltkrieg' ['Between Germanization and Annihilation: Forbidden Polish-German Love Relationships and the Reconstruction of the *Volkskörper* in the Second World War'], in

How did it show itself in everyday life? How were offenses punished? Secondly, it identifies the gendered hierarchies under the racist occupation system. And thirdly, the paper adds new insights to our knowledge of Polish society under the occupation by focusing on the actions taken against such liaisons.

### The Invasion of German *Men*

A first question would be: What conceptions of Polish women did the 1.5 million occupiers bring with them? Most of the one and a half million German men came equipped with cultural conceptions of Poland and Polish men and women. A special element was the anti-Slavic attitude of the Germans. The neighboring country was considered uncivilized, backwards, and dirty – this was the image that had a cultural tradition in Germany. Back in 1855, for example, Gustav Freytag's best seller "Soll und Haben" spread this image quite broadly.<sup>7</sup> In the National Socialist period, the propaganda clearly sought to strengthen this idea as the outbreak of the war neared.<sup>8</sup> Yet there were also positive stereotypes, above all about Polish women. One could think, for example, about Heinrich Heine's extolling of the "*Weichsel-Aphrodite*" ("Vistula Aphrodite"), or how an occupier remembers his meeting with his first Polish girlfriend by referring to another cultural asset: "Automatically I thought of the hymn praising the beauty of Polish women from Carl Millöckers operetta *Der Bettelstudent* – and I agreed with the composer."<sup>9</sup>

So, the 1.5 million German men marched in with images of Polish women which oscillated between anti-Slavic racism and a stereotype of

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Helgard Kramer, ed., *Die Gegenwart der NS-Vergangenheit [The Presence of the NS- Past]* (Berlin: Philo, 2000), 295–303, here 296. Thereafter Czarnowski, 'Germanisierung'.

<sup>7</sup> See for the German image of Poland among others Hubert Orłowski, "*Polnische Wirtschaft*": *Zum deutschen Polendiskurs der Neuzeit [“Polish Economy”: The German Discourse about Poland in Modern Times]* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> For the nuances of the German image of Poland, see Karina Pryt, *Befohlene Freundschaft. Die deutsch-polnischen Kulturbeziehungen 1934-1939 [Commanded Friendship: The German-Polish Cultural Relationships 1934-1939]* (Osnabrück: Fibre 2010), ch. I.1.

<sup>9</sup> See Adolf "Karl" Landl, *Mein polnisches Tagebuch [My Polish Diary]*, Österreich, n.d. (probably 1963), 5, in: Muzeum Narodowe w Kielcach, księga materiałów pomocniczych i edukacyjnych Działu Historii, no 74, spuścizna po red. Jerzym Butwiłło dot. K. A. Landla, Bd. 8. This deals with the unpublished memoirs of an Austrian gendarme. Dr. Jochen Böhrer (Imre-Kertesz-Kolleg Jena) and I are currently working on an edition of this.

Polish women in the cities as “French ladies of the east”.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the image of the beautiful Polish woman showed up again and again in official occupation documents – despite the strict prohibition on contact with them. In the *Silesian Sunday Post*, a National Socialist weekly newspaper, the German reporter on 3. November 1941 really raved about the elegant women in Warsaw:

“The women without exception are meticulously dressed up to the extent that they perceive themselves belonging among ‘the elegant ones’. You can notice on their lips that they carry some lipstick in their purse, the eyebrows are trimmed and carefully made up, the finger nails glisten rosy or dark red, probably depending on the color the druggist had in stock. Almost all are well-dressed, much more so (by the way) than the men who are walking with them, and even before noon their high-heels click on the asphalt. Of course, if one looks closely enough, one sees that the ultra-thin silk stockings are darned and often in fact are being faked using brown shadow on their legs.”<sup>11</sup>

Studies about intimate fraternization in other countries in Europe emphasize a curiosity about the strangers as one motive of the local women, which would include interest in the visually different physical appearances of the soldiers. At the beginning of the period of occupation, these were always the strongest motives.<sup>12</sup>

Although in fact the occupation began much more brutally in Poland than in other countries,<sup>13</sup> in the early stages one could still observe a continuing increase in intimate contacts. Above all, early witnesses of the first weeks and months talk about a phenomenon that was not particularly infrequent. The German soldier Konrad Jarausch observed the initiation of contacts in Krośniewice near Łódź on the market day in early October 1939. Soldiers shouted out funny comments to the women, who (according to Jarausch) “did not take the racial contrasting so seriously and smiled

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<sup>10</sup> During the German occupation in the First World War, such voices could already be heard. See among others ‘Warsaw Street Life on Sunday’, *Deutsche Warschauer Zeitung*, 13, 22. August 1915. I thank Dr. Pawel Brudek for having pointed this out.

<sup>11</sup> See Jochen Wilike, ‘Wiedersehen mit Warschau’ [‘Reunion with Warsaw’], *Schlesische Sonntagspost*, 3 November 1941, in: Institut für Zeitgeschichte München, Das Generalgouvernement im Spiegel der Reichspresse/1, 11/Dd 056.013-1, 92.

<sup>12</sup> For an overview see Anette Warring, ‘Intimate and Sexual Relations’, in Robert Gildea, Olivier Wieviorka, and Anette Warring, eds., *Surviving Hitler and Mussolini: Daily Life in Occupied Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 88-128.

<sup>13</sup> Bombings also hit civilians and the *Einsatzgruppen* wreaked havoc on the *intelligentsia* and the Jewish population. See Klaus-Michael Mallmann, Jochen Böhrer, and Jürgen Matthäus, *Einsatzgruppen in Polen: Darstellung und Dokumentation [Einsatzgruppen in Poland: An Account and Documentation]* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2008).

back happily".<sup>14</sup> In another place he describes the Polish girls as not very reserved, or talks about the Polish women as girlfriends of the comrades, which bothered him since next to being drunk he took such things as a sign of moral decay.<sup>15</sup> The Wehrmacht officer Wilm Hosenfeld wrote his wife in October from Pabianice near Łódź:

"You know me and how much I am at the mercy of the eternal feminine, how my insides are in a knot in the presence of a woman. There sure would be plenty of chances to start philandering here, but I won't betray my sweet, faithful darling."<sup>16</sup>

Other men in that setting were not so steadfast.<sup>17</sup> There were loads of examples in the first weeks of the occupation. In the winter of 1939, a waitress in Gnesen got to know a German soldier. She had sexual intercourse with him several times; at a later point she provided his first and last name when there was an interrogation into the killing of the child they had conceived together.<sup>18</sup> Around Christmas 1939, so also shortly after the invasion, a member of the *Sicherheitsdienst* (Security Service) Georg D. along with his comrades got to know several Polish women in a Café by the name of "FF" in Warsaw. After that they went to the room of one of the women where they spent the night together. D. and one of the women got together several times afterwards until the occupier began a relationship with a supposedly ethnic German woman (who was in fact Polish).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Letter of Konrad Jarausch to his wife [probably 3 October 1939], in Konrad H. Jarausch and Klaus J. Arnold, eds., *"Das stille Sterben...": Feldpostbriefe von Konrad Jarausch aus Polen und Russland 1939-1942* [*The Quiet Dying...": War Letters of Konrad Jarausch from Poland and Russia 1939-1942*] (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2008), 112. Thereafter Jarausch and Arnold, *Sterben*.

<sup>15</sup> Letter of Konrad Jarausch to his wife, 29 November 1939, in Jarausch and Arnold, *Sterben*, 142.

<sup>16</sup> Letter of Wilm Hosenfeld to his wife, 23 October 1939, in Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, ed., *Hosenfeld, Wilm "Ich versuche jeden zu retten": Das Leben eines deutschen Offiziers in Briefen und Tagebüchern* [Hosenfeld, Wilm *"I am trying to save everyone." The Life of a German Officer in Letters and Diaries*] (München: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2004), 276. Thereafter Forschungsamt, *Hosenfeld*.

<sup>17</sup> Forschungsamt, *Hosenfeld*, 289.

<sup>18</sup> See Archiwum Państwowe [State Archive], hereafter abbreviated AP, AP Bydgoszcz 90/1214, Verdict of Criminal Division I of the District Court in Gnesen from 16. June 1941.

<sup>19</sup> See Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej [Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance], hereafter abbreviated AIPN: GK 106/81, diverse interrogation protocols.

In Debica and Cracow, German members of the military were carousing with Polish women,<sup>20</sup> and in other cities they danced with one another or talked openly on the street. For this reason, the commander of the police in Warthegau warned in November 1939 for the n<sup>th</sup> time:

“It is once again called to your attention that an obligatory distance is to be maintained to the Polish population. Conversations with Polish women on the street and in locales are to be refrained from.”<sup>21</sup>

With the increasing length of the occupation such reports did not disappear, but no longer came at the rate of the first weeks of the occupation. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, the number of German men in the country was decreasing. It is indeed difficult to be precise about the total number, yet it is estimated that there were around 400.000 soldiers deployed in the annexed territories in the west and there were about a half a million in the *Generalgouvernement*. In addition, the Generalgouvernement had nearly 60.000 police and SS personnel, while the annexed territories had around 30.000 policemen. Half of these soldiers were stationed for longer periods of time in Poland, writes the Polish historian Czesław Madajczyk.<sup>22</sup> In general, the rank and file stayed for shorter terms, while functionaries often spent years in Poland. Besides the military personnel, civilian occupiers also came into the divided country, filling positions in public administration and business life.

A second reason for the reduction was the increased pressure put on the occupiers and occupied by the German occupation authorities. The prohibition on contact was indeed formally in force from the beginning of the occupation, but the military and civilian occupation officials had different priorities in the first months other than regulating sex lives. Moreover, the pressure on Polish women from the Polish society increased, accompanied as it was with an expanding awareness of the brutality of the Germans.

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<sup>20</sup> See Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv [Federal Archive, Department Military Archive], hereafter abbreviated BArch MA: RH 53-23/15, Report of the *Grenzabschnittkommando* South to the *Oberkommando Ost* from 5.12.1939.

<sup>21</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, hereafter abbreviated USHMM: RG-15.012M/r.01, p. 22-23, Commander of the Order Police to the Governor of Posen, Daily Directive from 10.11.1939.

<sup>22</sup> See Czesław Madajczyk, *Die Okkupationspolitik Nazideutschlands in Polen 1939-1945* [*The Occupation Policies of Nazi Germany in Poland 1939-1945*] (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1987), 239-40. Because of the continuous fluctuations, the given numbers are to be understood as approximations.

### Intimate Relations or Patriotism: The Reaction of the Polish Society

The files of the post-war trials show quite clearly that during the occupation, people in the neighborhoods attentively observed many Polish women with German friends or lovers. Some witnesses could report exactly how often and how long the woman in question had visits from men or when and with which men she was supposed to have gone for a walk on the streets of each place.<sup>23</sup> Besides the social condemnation from the neighbors, the women had to fear public defamation and dangerous denunciations to the police. One witness reported (who was being questioned about something else, an economic offense), that an employee at the Wollstein district administration office had been visiting her neighbor. “Just yesterday I saw him coming out of there around 10 o’clock in the evening”, recounted the incensed woman, doubting the alleged ethnic German status of the neighbor since her father had been a “spiteful Pole”. The woman thereby brought her neighbor quite purposefully under suspicion of racial defilement.<sup>24</sup> Defamations could consist of a leaflet being hung in public places with accusations against certain persons. In extreme situations the punishments even reached the point of an *honor punishment* by the cutting off of the person’s hair. Once again in Wollstein, anonymous informers put up such a piece of paper in February 1940 – not the first such case of this type in the town.<sup>25</sup> Five women were named and berated under the heading “The ones who hang around with German soldiers”. The document ended with the performative speech act “We spit in your faces.”<sup>26</sup> In Kamienna in December 1939 anti-German posters were hung on a public advertizing pillar, one of them warning Polish women. In the rather skewed transfer of it into German (done by an occupier), the posting of the anonymous writer runs as follows:

“Polish women! The pride of Polish women has to be the holiest and must defend your honor. A terrible scandal comes on us by women who act with no

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<sup>23</sup> See for the juristic basis of the collaboration trials Andrzej Pasek, *Przestępstwa okupacyjne w polskim prawie karnym z lat 1944 -1956* [Occupation Crimes in Polish Penal Law 1944-1956] (Wrocław: Wydawn. Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2002). An overview study, similar to Frommer’s about the Czech Republic, is still lacking for Poland. Benjamin Frommer, *National cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Post-war Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> See AP Poznań: 39-34/27, p. 259, Statement of Josefa B. from 23.05.1941.

<sup>25</sup> See AP Poznań: 39-45/27, p. 22, Landrat Wollstein to Gestapo Kosten from 21.02.1940.

<sup>26</sup> See AP Poznań: 39-45/27, p. 23, Anonymous (German translation) undated.

shame with the murderers of our sons, fathers, and brothers. Think about it! The eyes of the whole world look at us and the ambition of Polish women should not bring disgrace. Stay in the company of the Germans and illegal pursuits will bring direct shame on the ones who did it.”<sup>27</sup>

Such leaflets were evidently widespread in the whole Generalgouvernement:

“The negative attitude of the Polish population has gotten worse. At different places smear leaflets have been found in Polish. All Polish women and girls who get involved with the Germans are threatened with severe punishment, even death.”<sup>28</sup>

From the beginning of the occupation, male and female persons (as private individuals) and organized underground groups put pressure on Polish women. Members of the Organization PLAN passed out posters in December 1939 in Warsaw whose text read: “Women who are having intimate relations with Germans are hereby informed that there are still some free places at the bordellos.”<sup>29</sup> There were other brochures and posters circulating in the city that vilified as “bitches” or “pigs” women who were intimately fraternizing.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to this, one finds moral appeals during the whole period of the occupation – taken together they create a mirror which reflects that there were continuing intimate relationships between Polish women and the occupiers. In February 1943, the central organ of the most important Polish underground organization, *Armia Krajowa*, published in the *Biuletyn Informacyjny* a hymn to Polish women who were sacrificing themselves for their nation and families. And at the end of this praising of good Polish women stands a damning of bad Polish women.

“Yet in honoring the noble posture of the Polish woman who conducts herself so virtuously and in such a dignified way toward the enemy, that fact does not allow us to close our eyes to another spectacle that casts a shadow over the uplifting image of Polish women. We see among us disgusting, despicable

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<sup>27</sup> BArch MA: RH 53-23/15, p. 58, Exhibit for the Report of the *Grenzabschnitts-kommando* to the Commander in Chief East from 14.12.1939.

<sup>28</sup> BArch B: R 19/334, p. 17, Chief of the Order Police Status Report 25.1.1940.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted from Tomasz Szarota, *Okupowanej Warszawy Dzień Powszedni: Studium Historyczne* [*The Everyday Life of Occupied Warsaw*], 4th edn (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2010), 428.

<sup>30</sup> See leaflets in Muzeum Karikatury w Warszawie, ed., *Warszawa 1939-1944. Satyra konspiracyjna oraz okupacyjna rzeczywistość w rysunkach polskich grafików* [*Warsaw 1939-1944. Underground Satires and Reality of Occupation in the Drawings of Polish Graphic Artists*] (Warszawa: Muzeum Karikatury, 2012), 61.



amphibians; we see mistresses and tarts of the German robbers and murderers of the Polish nation. And not infrequently it is women from what were previously upright families who now flirt and flash a toothy smile in the direction of a soldier with the hope of a piece of sausage or a mug of beer. The reverence for Polish women demands from us at the same time the contempt and persecution of these traitorous women – shameless women who have entered into the service of the deadly enemy of the Fatherland.”<sup>31</sup>

Included explicitly were the women who prostituted themselves for food-stuffs – a phenomenon that generated sympathy from other observers. Konrad Jarausch recounted to his wife the story of a shaken comrade who had been in Warsaw in late autumn 1939. Women who had nothing to eat offered themselves right to the soldiers.<sup>32</sup> The Swiss Franz Blättler described with obvious disgust a scene from the year 1942 in which German soldiers examined the women as if they were merchandise and insulted one who was a bit older, but who continued to beg the men for at least some bread. His clear estimation of the dilemma of the women runs: “For many there was no other choice except either to die of hunger or be a prostitute.”<sup>33</sup>

But the *Armia Krajowa* did not stop simply with patriotic appeals. Women who had German friends were spied upon. The simple admonition was published once in the *Biuletyn Informacyjny* as: “We know and we write everything down.”<sup>34</sup> In the large city of Warsaw, there existed whole lists of names of women from all social levels. In Łuszczyca, a small community northeast of Warsaw, informants also made a list of nine women who had gotten involved with Germans. Many of them worked for the railroad

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<sup>31</sup> Dodatek do Biuletyn Informacyjny, 2.07.1943, in *Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy*, Rok IV (LV), Nr specjalny 3 (200), Warszawa 2003, Przedruk Biuletyn Informacyjny, 1654. In the original: “Ale ta część dla szlachetnej postaci zacnej, pełnej godności wobec wroga, Polki, nie pozwala nam zamykać oczu na inny obraz, plamiący i rzucający cień na jasną i wzniosłą jej postać. Widzimy wśród nas wstrętne, obrzydliwe plaży, widzimy nalożnice i kochanice szwabskich opryszków i morderców narodu polskiego. Spotykamy nieraz kobiety z porządných dawniej rodzin, które się mizdrzą i szczerzą żeby do byle żołdaka, licząc na kawałek kielbasy czy kufelek piwa. Część dla kobiety Polki nakazuje nam jednoczesną pogardę i czynne piętnowanie kobiet zdrajczyń, kobiet bezwstydných, które przeszli na służbę śmiertelnego wroga naszej Ojczyzny.”

<sup>32</sup> Konrad Jarausch to his wife, 1.12.1939, in Jarausch and Arnold, *Sterben*, 143.

<sup>33</sup> See Franz Blättler, *Warschau 1942. Tatsachenbericht eines Motorfahrers der zweiten schweizerischen Aerztemission 1942 in Polen* [Report of a Driver of the Second Swiss Doctor's Mission 1942 in Poland] (Zürich: Micha, 1945), 42.

<sup>34</sup> Dodatek do Biuletyn Informacyjny, 28.10.1943, in *Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy*, Rok IV (LV), Nr specjalny 3 (200), Warszawa 2003. Przedruk Biuletyn Informacyjny, 1705-1706.



and obviously had made closer contacts with their German co-workers.<sup>35</sup> The spying was followed by an urgent warning and when there were new breaches of the regulations, the Polish executive of the underground used the cutting of the offender's hair as the tool of honor punishment. The short hair stigmatized the women for months and was feared by Polish women. Zofia Grodecka, who was active in the Warsaw uprising, fought vigorously against having to have her hair cut in preparation for a medical operation.<sup>36</sup>

The Polish underground had other severe punishments. It seems that in the countryside, sometimes beatings replaced the shaving, the latter being a practice that was either not known or used everywhere.<sup>37</sup> To be executed was the ultimate punishment. Leszek Gondek estimates that the courts of the underground movement imposed 3.000-3.500 death sentences during the whole period of the occupation, of which 2.500 were carried out.<sup>38</sup> It seems, however, that the women who were suspected of only intimacy with Germans were not executed. For that, there would have to have also been the factual finding of political collaboration. There is not much known about partners of German occupiers that were actually killed. In the daily reports of the gendarmes in 1944, one can find repeated mentions of the murder of women which the German occupiers classified as political acts of revenge. But it is not possible to gather from the files what political offense or what form of fraternizing had made the women guilty in the eyes of those who killed them.<sup>39</sup> One of the people I interviewed was witness to such an act. This is what Stefan Oszymowski says about the brutal killing of a woman (as he remembers her as a prostitute in Warsaw) who was collaborating:

"I remember in fact an event (which later proved to be true) [...] that a prostitute was turning Jews over to the Germans; that our [underground group] carried out a sentence, sticking a bottle in her vagina and then throwing her into

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<sup>35</sup> See AIPN: BU 1558/45, p. 2, Wykaz kobiet lekkiego prowadzenia, utrzymując stosunki z Niemcami (The files concern November 1943).

<sup>36</sup> See Interview with Zofia Grodecka conducted by Małgorzata Brama (part of the interview project of the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising), Poznań, 17 May 2007, available at [http://ahm.1944.pl/Zofia\\_Grodecka/](http://ahm.1944.pl/Zofia_Grodecka/) (last visited 12 June 2012).

<sup>37</sup> See Tomasz Szarota, *Karuzela na placu Krasińskich. Studia i szkice z lat wojny i okupacji* [Merry-go-round at Krasiński Place. Research and Drafts from War and Occupation Period] (Warszawa: Rytm 2007), 93-106, here 96, which refers to *Ruch Ludowy*. Thereafter Szarota, *Karuzela*. First printed in Tomasz Szarota, 'Kolaboranci pod preżerzem' ['Pilloried Collaborateurs'], *Magazyn Gazety Wyborczej*, 7 July 1995, 6-11.

<sup>38</sup> See Leszek Gondek, *Polska karząca 1939-1945: Polski podziemny wymiar sprawiedliwości w okresie okupacji niemieckiej* [Punishing Poland 1939-1945: Polish Underground Justice During German Occupation] (Warszawa: Pax, 1988), 114.

<sup>39</sup> See AP Warsaw: 486/1123, p. 95, 128, 143, diverse daily reports.

Czerniakowski Lake, you know. On the sign was written: 'Do not touch. Do not pull this body out.'"<sup>40</sup>

Cecylia C. remembers a case from Nowy Korczyn near Cracow. She told this to a German journalist decades after the war:

"If a Polish woman fell in love with a German and the underground found out about it, the partisans shaved the woman right away. The sister of my best friend, a wonderful girl, had a relationship with a German. The underground condemned her to death."<sup>41</sup>

What we know about actual executions of women who were fraternizing remains fragmentary. Two things, however, are sure. For one thing, what was true for the killed Polish women who had socialized with Germans, was similar to what Tomasz Szarota has established for other executed persons (in France as well): "Naturally it was true in both countries that there were also errors, cases of personal revenge and getting even, unjust incriminations, and severe sentences."<sup>42</sup> The other thing that is culturally and historically interesting is that the first Polish movie of the post-war period depicts a case of such a killing of a woman. In "Zakazany piosenki" ("Forbidden Songs") (1946), the main figure is a maid in Warsaw who maintained close contacts with a German member of the Gestapo and had herself registered as an ethnic German. For betraying Polish citizens to the Germans, the underground executed her.<sup>43</sup> This can be interpreted as a collective transference of guilt onto women and ethnic Germans after the war.

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<sup>40</sup> See interview with Stefan Oszymowski conducted by Maren Röger, Warsaw, 28.07.2010, MP 3. The whole quote in the original: "Ja na kolejce, która chodziła spod ambasady sowieckiej, kolejka wilanowska, która chodziła na Grójec aż do Konstancina to na Sadybie bywałem tam dosyć często i nawet pamiętam takie wydarzenie, które zresztą się potwierdziło później, że prostytutka, która wydawała Żydów w ręce niemieckie to wykonali nasi wyrok tak że słukli butelkę wbił w pochwę i wrzucili do jeziora Czerniakowskiego, wie Pani. Kartka była: 'nie wolno ruszać, nie wylawiać'."

<sup>41</sup> See Bruni Adler, *Geteilte Erinnerung: Polen, Deutsche und der Krieg* [Divided Memory: Poles, Germans, and the War] (Tübingen: Klöpfer und Meyer, 2006), 134-35. For the reference to this book I thank Prof. Bianka Pietrow-Ennker.

<sup>42</sup> See Szarota, *Karuzela*, 94.

<sup>43</sup> See Eugeniusz Cezary Król, 'Das Bild des ethnischen Deutschen im polnischen Film nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg' ['The Image of Ethnic Germans in Polish Films After the Second World War'], in Jerzy Kochanowski and Maike Sach, eds., *Die "Volksdeutschen" in Polen, Frankreich, Ungarn und der Tschechoslowakei. Mythos und Realität* [The "Ethnic Germans" in Poland, France, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. Myth and Reality] (Osnabrück: fibre-Verlag, 2006), 367-89.

(Sexual) Bartering with the ‘*Herrenmenschen*’

For the Poles as the majority in the society, the motives of the women who associated with the German occupiers were clear. They women wanted to move up socially. Women who socialized with Germans were the favorite targets of jokes.<sup>44</sup> A well-known joke was: Two men meet, and one asks the other:

“Waclaw, do you know what you call a woman who goes out with a German?  
No, what? –

A *Philatelistin* (i. e., a woman who collects postage stamps).  
-- ? –

She is collecting *Reichsmark*.”<sup>45</sup>

The harshest formulation of this was to accuse the fraternizing woman of prostitution. Surely many of the relationships during the occupation must be judged as survival prostitution or sexual bartering.<sup>46</sup> The bartered goods for the German-Polish couple could be different: possibly for the occupier it was not always the physical, but also the human warmth or the social net behind the woman (in those cases where the occupier had become integrated into her family), giving him indeed a slice of normalcy in wartime. Then on the other hand, for the occupied it might be luxury items, money, foodstuffs, and protection. In addition, occupiers who were known more closely got the women better jobs or got them included on the *Deutsche Volksliste* (German Ethnic Classification List, or DVL), which handed them privileges on a silver platter.

The local leader of the ethnic German community in Pruszkow was upset about the ‘short paths through proper channels’ that a woman in the town had been able to go to get on the DVL:

“She got to know a German sergeant who arranged for her to receive an identification card without our knowledge. She had gotten the identification card 3

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<sup>44</sup> See Czocher, *W Okupowanym Krakowie*, 229.

<sup>45</sup> Grzegorz Załęski, *Satyra w konspiracji, 1939-1944* [*Satire in the Underground, 1939-1944*], 3rd edn (Warszawa: LTW, 2010), 246. Thereafter Załęski, *Satyra w konspiracji*. I thank Prof. Tomasz Szarota for pointing to this book.

<sup>46</sup> See my argumentation and examples in Maren Röger, ‘(Nie-)codzienność podczas niemieckiej okupacji we Francji, w Belgii i w Polsce. Prostytucja, stosunki intymne i “dzieci wojny”’ [‘The (Un-)Usual during German Occupation in France, Belgium and Poland: Prostitution, Intimate Relations and “War Children”’], in Waldemar Grabowski, ed., *Okupowana Europa: Podobieństwa i różnice* [*Occupied Europe. Similarities and Differences*] (Warszawa: IPN, 2012 forthcoming).

months earlier. How, I do not know. I would have had to deny her because of her anti-German behavior.”<sup>47</sup>

One should also remember that in these matters, neither the occupier nor the occupied were the embodiment of a cool and calculating rationality with which they could screen their motivations at every stage of getting closer. Motives were mixed: personal affection and political affinity – which was at times also a reason for women who fraternized – went hand in hand as well with the women’s desire for power and the feeling of being in love. Monetary motives and affection could be mixed with each other, which is clear in some of the statements of couples who were discovered. Olympia G. lived in a marriage-like relationship with an *SS-Hauptsturmführer* in Warsaw (sharing an apartment with him, keeping house for him), and in response getting a nice lifestyle and luxury goods. She told the investigating authorities:

“It was not at that point clear to me that a German who had sexual relations with a Polish woman was liable to prosecution. It was not merely for material advantages that I lived with O. We had a deep affection for one another.”<sup>48</sup>

Material motives were present, but this German-Polish couple also wanted to marry and was obviously devoted to one another despite the language barrier. How closely a relationship could be tied up with material needs is clearly seen in the history of the Warsaw Jewess Emilia H. She rejected in early 1940 the advances of a corporal, but then later that year she ran into him again. In her interrogation she said:

“In the meantime, my furniture had been taken away and I was forced to sell my valuables. That was to say I had suddenly become poor. I told this to B. [...] and he had pity on me. [...] From then on, a love affair began and went on for 8 months. With B. we again and again had sexual intercourse. We had the intention when the war was over to get married. B. does not know that I am a Jewess.”<sup>49</sup>

The boundary lines between survival prostitution, consensual relationship, and sexual coercion were fluid. All barter exchanges took place in a clearly structured power setting which assured the male occupier of material superiority and juristic privileges.

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<sup>47</sup> See AP Warsaw: 486/211, vol. a., p. 388, Letter of the leader of the local Ethnic German community from 22.07.1941.

<sup>48</sup> See AIPN: GK 106/32, p. 27, Statement of Olympia G. from September 1940.

<sup>49</sup> AP Warsaw: 482/92, p. 4, Statement of Emilia H. from June 1940.

What one sees generally is that the longer relationships with Polish women are documented primarily in the ranks of the police and the SS. This has several reasons: firstly, these men stayed longer in the occupied Polish territories – a significant difference to the simple infantryman. Members of the army were by and large in the country for a short period, so for that reason violations of the prohibition on contact as a rule were briefer, became less well-known, and – since the men were by then already somewhere else – tracking them down was hardly worthwhile. Members of the police and the SS, in comparison, lived stable lives in occupied territories. In some cases, occupiers and Polish women lived in marriage-like relationships; the *Ostehe* (Eastern Marriage), as the *Reichssicherheits-hauptamt* called this type of relationship, was a frequent phenomenon.<sup>50</sup>

A second reason was that it was these men, above all, who could offer material advantages. In the occupied east, they were rich with booty that they could send back to their families in Germany,<sup>51</sup> or even give to the women around them. It was not always true that these local women already had to be their girlfriends; in some cases the men simply wanted to start by winning their favor. In Warsaw in 1940, there was some bad blood among the women in the camp followers of the police and SS because one of the women voiced a suspicion. It had to do with a large present of textiles to a Polish woman who worked there:

“But J. had not gotten the clothing material for nothing, since the police officer was in love with her. She said further that there were no officers and non-commissioned officers who did not spend time with their girls [meaning the maids assigned to their room].”<sup>52</sup>

German men could offer their Polish girlfriends luxury goods that had come from what had been confiscated from Jewish and non-Jewish Poles. Felix O. drove from Plöhnen to go “shopping” with his Polish girlfriend in Litzmannstadt, one of the Polish cities with the largest ghettos.<sup>53</sup> A resistance song that was widespread during the occupation mentions directly the

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<sup>50</sup> Concerning the *Ostehe*, see a report of the *RSHA* from occupied Poland, 1943, quoted by Markus Roth, *Herrenmenschen. Die deutschen Kreishauptleute im besetzten Polen – Karrierewege, Herrschaftspraxis und Nachgeschichte* [*Herrenmenschen: District Governors in Occupied Poland – Careers, Command Practices, and Afterwards*], 2nd edn (Göttingen: Wallstein 2009), 38.

<sup>51</sup> See the more pointed thesis about the connection in Götz Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005).

<sup>52</sup> AP Warsaw: 482/88, p. 6, Statement of Juliane G.

<sup>53</sup> AP Warsaw: 644/58, Statement of the Housekeeper from September 1941.

source of the luxury goods, namely, the ghetto. One of the verses (rhyming in the original Polish) says:

“There goes a proud young girl, hand in hand with the occupier, with her dress from the ghetto. Aren’t you ashamed, father, for having such a daughter? No, you do nothing, for the daughter is just like the father. You became an ethnic German...”<sup>54</sup>

Witness statements from the post-war period say that other women went to Vienna with their partners (members of the SS) and each returned from there with luxury items.<sup>55</sup>

In a few cases, the partners cooperated criminally, with each one contributing their particular ability. Men from the ranks of the police used their positions to go beyond the law to expropriate and utilize confiscated goods for themselves privately. Women used their language abilities and their local contacts to hide the goods. Olympia G. (who has been mentioned already) consorted with Walter O. not just privately but also in a business sense. She was the middle person in the selling of confiscated goods and putting the money he embezzled into circulation. Her comments at the interrogation are revealing:

“I was not aware that I was liable to prosecution by being the middle person in the sale of the unstamped Zloty bills. I believed that the Germans were permitted to do anything, especially the officials of the Security Police.”<sup>56</sup>

In addition, her actual husband was also involved in the scheming although she was separated from him. He too received presents from the occupier O. as a reward for his fencing services.

Thirdly, it seems obvious that the more prevalent presence in the documentation of liaisons of SS men and police with Polish women can be attributed to the harsher prosecution of such relationships than those had by soldiers. Clearly, if regular German soldiers were under the racist regulations of the NS time period, including the prohibition on contact with Slavs (referred to as sub-humans), it was indeed the members of the SS who were supposed to represent the racial elite of the new Germany, which is why another level of zeal for persecuting non-Germans and keeping one’s distance from them was expected to prevail.

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<sup>54</sup> See Załęski, *Satyra w Konspiracji*, 332. In the original, the text says: “Idzie sobie panna. Ze szwabem pod rękę. Bardzo z tego dumna, Z ‘getta’ ma sulkienkę. Za taką córeczkę. Jak ci nie wstyd, ojczu? Nie wstyd, bo jak córka, Stałeś się folksdojczem...”

<sup>55</sup> AIPN: GK 453/1052, Statement of Maria S. from 27.05.1946.

<sup>56</sup> See AIPN: GK 106/32, p. 27, Statement of Olympia G. from September 1940.

### Ambivalent Attitudes in the SS

But there is a contradictory image here, since on the other hand, attitudes opposing this strict view were apparent within the SS apparatus itself, where there were repeated attempts to overturn the prohibition on contact with Polish women. The clearest example of this came to light at a meeting of judges on 7. May 1943. Both the chief judge of the SS and police court and the central office saw it as ‘pressing’ to make a change since the reports sounded so bad. In the report about the *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler* it said:

“Sexual intercourse with women of other races is very, very common. This results from the fact that supply units and similar formations have many female helpers of other races. In many cases it has almost developed into the arrangement of a concubine.”<sup>57</sup>

In Kiev, half of all the SS and police detachments violated the prohibition on contact, such that the commander lifted it. In the Russian interior, the commander there closed both eyes because he was opposed by all means to bordellos. In Cracow the situation was untenable.

“A few clumsy ones were caught and punished. For most, they were simpletons who violated the order for the first time simply out of sexual need, then were caught and punished. The smart ones who regularly violated the order or had steady relationships were not found out and as a result were not punished.”<sup>58</sup>

And the men in Warsaw were even told that the *Reichsführer-SS* had changed his mind. However, from the supposedly approved relationships, “no ramifications were allowed to ensue”. In Warsaw, “almost every leader [had] his Polish or non-German relationship”. And for those who stood higher in the hierarchy, hardly anything happened to them, which was why the understanding of the men with regard to the prohibition on contact was nominal. Günther Reinecke, chief judge of the superior court for the SS and police, summarized the statements pointedly as follows: it is “clear that the order is only on paper and must be dropped”.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See BArch B: NS 7/13, p. 7 and further. Files of the Judges’ Conference in Munich from 07.05.1943 Comment on Sexual Intercourse with Women of Other Races. Already previously quoted by Regina Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen: Sexuelle Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutscher Soldaten in der Sowjetunion, 1941-1945* [Conquests: Sexual Violence and Intimate Relations of German Soldiers in the Soviet Union, 1941-1945] (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2010), 268. Thereafter Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*.

<sup>58</sup> Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*, 268.

<sup>59</sup> Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*, 268.

In the temporary local communities of the occupiers, a permanent negotiation process was ongoing as to which behavior was acceptable. This was true not only for criminal offenses and for the ways of dealing with the Jewish and Polish civilian populations, but also for the arranging of intimate life. In the process a consensus could take shape in the office that lay crosswise to the ideological guidelines. What is striking is that after taking up an investigation against an occupier (a Reich German) for intimate relations with a Polish woman, these inquiries in most cases ended up being expanded to include more persons. If it was not all men, then at least many men in an SS or police office violated the prohibition on contact. Sexual relations with the local women were interpreted as a right of the occupiers in the sense of compensation for the hardships of being in the east. A view of sex with the occupied as being merely a minor crime gained acceptance. Apparently this was the case in the district of Lublin in early 1940:

“In spite of regular and repeated admonitions, more very unpleasant incidents of showing a lack of restraint in personal interactions with the non-German population have come about, which would lead to a severe punishing of the guilty ones. I expect from a comradeship properly understood that in such cases an intervention will be prompt or blunt reports will be given in order to protect the reputation of the gendarmerie.”<sup>60</sup>

In *Reichsgau Danzig-West Prussia*, the *SS- und Polizei-Führer* (SSPF) also issued a reminder in December 1941 on the duty to report on one another.<sup>61</sup> There were colleagues who were strictly against any kind of consorting with local women and so they made denunciations. Besides, now and then the German women in the retinue of the occupiers became aware of the fact that the occupiers were getting involved with local women. German female auxiliaries also denounced others, too.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> USHMM: RG-15.011M/r.01, p. 24, KdG, Lublin District: Commando Order 20/40, Lublin, the 14th. April 1940.

<sup>61</sup> AP Gdańsk: 265/4502, p. 183, HSSPF Danzig-West Prussia, Decree from 20.12. 1941 concerning “The General Behavior of the SS and Police (Inclusive: the SS, Order Police, the Security Police, and the SD)”.

<sup>62</sup> See for examples like this in France Franka Maubach, *Die Stellung halten. Kriegserfahrungen und Lebensgeschichten von Wehrmachtshelferinnen* [Hold the Line: War Experiences and Life Stories of Wehrmacht Auxiliaries] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), e.g. 160.



### Prosecution or Wedding: The Reaction of the NS-Authorities

There was a general prohibition on contact with Polish women for all of the occupation troops. Looked at logically, this should have first of all led to uniform punishments for non-compliance and, secondly, to the exclusion of any idea of marriage with local women. Yet neither one was the case. For the annexed regions, a firm directive was issued from the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, to let punishments remain variable. "If a disciplinary action is necessary in a case, the punishment must be quite differentiated."<sup>63</sup> So the punishment practices in the annexed regions were to be heterogeneous and in fact they were. Men who were in service to the German state were threatened with the loss of their jobs. Clerks should be dishonorably discharged, with loss of pension, and civil service employees should be summarily fired.<sup>64</sup> Horst R., who between 1941 and March 1942 had sexual contact with several Polish women, was fired (along with his co-worker) from state service pursuant to the quoted decree of the Reich Ministry of the Interior. Their release from duty was to be read in front of the whole entourage of the state police administration in Posen "so that this could serve as a warning to the collective retinue, since again and again complaints arise about interactions of Germans with Polish women".<sup>65</sup> This is only one example, but the palette of punishments for Reich German men ranged from reprimand, arrest, preventive custody, and designation for deployment to the front, up to being sent to a concentration camp.

For Reich German women who interacted with Polish men in the Altreich, the widespread punishment was imprisonment in a concentration camp.<sup>66</sup> Reich German men active in the east were much less frequently punished by the authorities with such means. This gender-specific punishment model has been thoroughly studied by the NS research as far as the Altreich is concerned. The physical body of the woman in the NS ideology was analogous to the body of the people and accordingly it could be defiled by foreign peoples.<sup>67</sup> Using this logic, German men did not defile anyone

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<sup>63</sup> BArch B: NS 47/30, RSHA to Gestapo main offices in Königsberg, Tilsit, Allenstein, Zichenau, Danzig, Graudenz, Bromberg, Posen, Litzmannstadt, Hohensalza, Kattowitz, Oppeln; Berlin, 20.05.1942.

<sup>64</sup> See BArch B: R 19/311, p. 248-49, Decree of the RMI 12.02.1941 concerning the interaction of Officials, Employess, and Workers of the Civil Servants with persons of the Polish *Volkstum* having previously had Polish citizenship.

<sup>65</sup> See BArch B: R 19/253, p. 317, The Government of Posen to RFSS 17.4.1942.

<sup>66</sup> See Czarnowski, 'Germanisierung', 295.

<sup>67</sup> See as to the premises behind this Silke Schneider, *Verbotener Umgang. Ausländer und Deutsche im Nationalsozialismus. Diskurse um Sexualität, Moral, Wissen und Strafe*

since the Polish women were considered inferior. The NS authorities threatened the Polish women with varying punishments as well; in the Warthegau this could range from a reprimand to forced prostitution.

So, intimate relations could have deadly consequences – or be legalized. Paradoxically, a wedding was an alternative that German-Polish couples were to have placed before them. And in fact occupiers made application for marriage to Polish women. They married ethnic Germans of varying categories: *deutschstämmig* (nationals of German descent), stateless, and Poles, whereby this listing already brings into view the complexity and the not-infrequent contradictoriness of the NS racial policies. To get to the actual forbidden wedding between a Reich German and a Polish woman, there were several indirect routes. The most common way to marriage went by means of the DVL. According to Herbert Strickner (who in Warthegau was involved in working on the DVL and who until the autumn of 1942 was the leader of the department of *Volkstum*), among the single women who applied to be put on the DVL “most certainly several hundred had come forward under the influence of their German acquaintance to apply for the DVL.”<sup>68</sup> Occasionally the occupiers would accompany the women right to the office.

“A special instance gave me occasion to strictly forbid in the future all members of the SS, the security police [*Sicherheits- und Schutzpolizei*] as well as the gendarmerie from personally championing supposedly ethnic Germans for inclusion on the *Deutsche Volksliste* by, for example, accompanying the female person to the central office of the *Deutsche Volksliste* at the governor’s and in that way supporting the woman making the application.”<sup>69</sup>

Just as there were differences in intensity, length of time, and sincerity in the intimate contacts between occupier and occupied, so varied the endings. Some couples applied for a marriage license. Others fled together back to the Reich. Most of all, at the end of the war, the occupiers took their local girlfriends with them as the army retreated. In resettlement matters, once again the men of the Gestapo and the police had the greatest power. They possessed the authority to issue orders; they could find a spot for the women in trains, automobiles, or boats.

Lucja F. from Tchew, who had cultivated contact with several members of the Gestapo, was picked up by her German friends. A high-ranking SS

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[*Forbidden Contact: Foreigners and Germans in National Socialism: Discourse about Sexuality, Morality, Knowledge, and Punishment*] (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010).

<sup>68</sup> See AIPN: Po 04/2840, p. 25, Statement of Herbert Strickner.

<sup>69</sup> USHMM: RG-15.012M/r.01, p. 42-3, Commandant of the Order Police at the Reich Governor Posen, 10.12.1939 Daily Directive from 10.12.1939, Point 12: DVL

functionary took her along to Danzig. After the liberation, she told her cousin that during the siege of Danzig-Heubude, she was in a bunker set aside for the German staff.<sup>70</sup> For his girlfriend and their common child born during the occupation, another SS functionary arranged a place for them on one of the last ships leaving out of Gotenhafen.<sup>71</sup> Other common soldiers disappeared without a word, while other men explained to their girlfriends about the redeployment and promised to write, but never kept their promise. Yet, on the other hand, some faithful hearts carried on writing for a long time.

### Conclusion

In the German controlled area of the occupation, sexual contacts between occupiers and occupied were not private. Neither the occupiers nor the patriotically active occupied considered such things as personal matter if a German occupier met up with a local woman. Polish underground groups watched, denounced, and punished women who got involved with Germans. Even women who engaged in bartering exchanges in order to quiet basic needs, such as hunger, were not exempt from observation and defamation. The sexual behavior of the women was coupled to a concept of national honor – in a certain way this was also reaching to an idea of “the people’s body” that had to be kept pure, symbolized in a special way through the woman.<sup>72</sup>

While in this context relatively traditional cultural models reveal themselves, the prohibition on sexual intercourse by the NS occupier was in addition racially motivated. Even for the Altreich, Gabriele Czarnowski argued that the prohibition on sexual intercourse was not a peripheral aspect of the NS policies, but instead belonged “to the core of the racial and cultural policies”.<sup>73</sup> Officially, the regulations in the Altreich and in

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<sup>70</sup> See AIPN: Gd 607/122 [before: GK 240/122], p. 32, Statement of Stefania P. from 18.05.1946

<sup>71</sup> See Interview with Inge Renata Latoszevska conducted by Maren Röger, 06.06.2011, Jantar, MP 3.

<sup>72</sup> See Ruth Seifert, ‘Der weibliche Körper als Symbol und Zeichen: Geschlechtsspezifische Gewalt und die kulturelle Konstruktion des Krieges’ [‘The Female Body as Symbol and Sign: Gender Specific Violence and the Cultural Construction of War’], in Andreas Gestrich, ed., *Gewalt im Krieg: Ausübung, Erfahrung und Verweigerung von Gewalt in Kriegen des 20. Jahrhunderts* [Violence in War: The Exercise, Experience, and the Refusal of Violence in the Wars of the 20th Century] (Münster: Lit Verlag, 1996), 13-33.

<sup>73</sup> Czarnowski, ‘Germanisierung’, 296.

occupied Poland were the same: even in Poland sexual contact was forbidden, except for the regulated contact in official bordellos. The policing and prosecution, however, were different in both territories since the offenders in occupied Poland often came from the ranks of the police and the SS. These men were on average far longer on site and were attractive to women as well for material benefits. The concept of the '*Herrenmenschen*', until now concentrated on the cultural-racist feeling of superiority among the occupiers, as well as their executive powers over life and death, should be expanded to include a gender identity dimension.



FRANKA MAUBACH

## LOVE, COMRADESHIP, AND POWER – GERMAN AUXILIARIES AND GENDER RELATIONS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES\*

Introduction: Isolde Springer and her boyfriend Willy:  
Between love and comradeship

After they had to part in the spring of 1943, army auxiliary Isolde Springer and her comrade and later boyfriend Willy, who had become acquainted during their military service in Agram (occupied Croatia), began to write letters to each other. Willy was stationed in Italy, where he invited his old war-comrade Isolde to come when she was going on vacation.<sup>1</sup> But all the plans were destroyed and nearly another year went by before Isolde and Willy met again and became a couple. The teasing tone of their Agram flirting changed into the longing sounds of separation. However, the perception that they were comrades to each other did not vanish at all; instead from time to time Isolde and Willy went on praising their comradeship. This model of male-female relationship had not only evolved during their military deployment in occupied Agram, but was also a part of the newly established social relationship model during National Socialism. Deeply rooted in the traditionally male military relationship, comradeship during Nazi times was transferred to society in general and designated to be the ground for the *Volksgemeinschaft*, a racist national society, encompassing all people with ‘aryan’ background: male and female, old and young. Strongly indoctrinated by racist ideology and as ‘believing’ Nazis, Isolde and Willy obviously knew that their relationship, initiated during the war and in the occupied territories, would differ from a ‘traditional’ love affair.

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\* I would like to thank Ruth Leiserowitz, Philip Jacobs, Christina Morina, Maren Röger, and Matthew Stibbe for reading this article and commenting on it in such inspiring ways; my argument was shaped by their remarks.

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Willy to Isolde, May 30, 1944; copied correspondence is in my possession.

In the following, often very long letters they seriously debated not only their male/female identities, thinking about how they were changed by their wartime experiences, but also dealt with the problem of how to live in a peacetime marriage. Was it possible to live a 'normal' life as a married couple after having experienced war together? Could Isolde change her uniform-wearing self into that of a housewife and mother – when she was not even able to cook a meal? Was Willy able to accept her deeply changed female self?

This well-documented relationship – nearly 300 letters written over a period of two years are preserved – is an outstanding source when we ask for long-term gender relations in the army, how they were possible, how they evolved, and how they changed over the war years.

### How to write and for what purpose a gender integrated history of occupation and warfare?

This short introduction to the very intense and, oscillating between comradeship and love, ambivalent relationship already reveals that the tableau of historical gender relations during the Second World War and in the occupied countries is richer and much more differentiated than older pictures suggest. While the (male and female) contemporaries stigmatized female auxiliaries as mere *Offiziersmatratzen* (officer's whores), who only were looking for adventure and sexual encounters with high-ranking officers, later (feminist) research often suggested that German women were only victims of male warfare or heroes of the battle against patriarchy. Nowadays, the focus lies mainly on the active participation of women in the Nazi racist politics and the war of annihilation, thus highlighting the excitement and empowerment those women experienced during the war. A growing stock of recently published literature on the history of German women during the war shows their (often willing) participation as anti-aircraft defense auxiliaries at the home front; as Red Cross nurses or *Bund Deutscher Mädel*-girls helping the *Volksdeutschen*, who were settled for example in the occupied Polish territories while Poles and Polish Jews were driven out, deported, and murdered; or as SS-auxiliaries or female guards working in the concentration camps.<sup>2</sup> Here, the analysis of relations be

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<sup>2</sup> See only some of the most recent works on women in Nazi Germany (chronologically classified): Gisela Bock, ed., *Genozid und Geschlecht: Jüdische Frauen im nationalsozialistischen Lagersystem* [*Genocide and Gender. Jewish Women in the Nazi Concentration Camp System*] (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus Verlag, 2005), including articles on female SS-guards; Sybille Steinbacher, ed., *Volksgeossinnen: Frauen in der NS-Volksgemeinschaft* [*Female Volksgeossinnen: Women in the National-Socialist Volksgemeinschaft*], (Göttingen:

tween the sexes was pushed into the background because the main focus lay on the history of women-perpetrators or more generally on the question of how women experienced the war.

Thus, our knowledge about the relationships between men and women during the Second World War, when several states employed women as military auxiliaries, is still rather limited. We do not know much about how those relations were established and developed during the war; how men and women worked and lived together; if male-female comradeship or other new gender models did evolve. Wider social science research on women in the military often argues that women were nearly always excluded from the male military society, because they were supposed to undermine the well-ordered structure of the military; a mighty sexualized discourse, in which female auxiliaries and women-soldiers figured as prostitutes, being turned into scapegoats for defeat.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless and beyond generalizations we always have to ask for the real relationship between men and women and to reconstruct the male-female interplays, interactions and interweaving perspectives in order to write a gender-integrated history of war. While this is a platitude in gender theory – to enclose both sexes equally in historical research was a major claim when women's history was on the brink of changing its focus at the beginning of the 1980s –, empirical research often falls behind those achievements and goes on writing gender history basically from a woman's

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Wallstein, 2007); as a more popular history: Kathrin Kompisch, *Täterinnen: Frauen im Nationalsozialismus* [Women-Perpetrators: Women in National Socialism] (Köln: Böhlau, 2008); Elissa Mailänder-Koslov, *Gewalt im Dienstalltag: die SS-Aufseherinnen des Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslagers Majdanek, 1942-1944* [Violence in Everyday Service: Female SS-Guards in the Concentration Camp Majdanek, 1942-1944] (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2009); Franka Maubach, *Die Stellung halten: Kriegserfahrungen und Lebensgeschichten von Wehrmachthelferinnen* [Holding Position: War Experiences and Life-Stories of Wehrmacht Auxiliaries] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009); thereafter Maubach, *Stellung halten*. Nicole Kramer, *Volksgenossinnen an der Heimatfront: Mobilisierung, Verhalten, Erinnerungen* [Volksgenossinnen at the Home Front: Mobilization, Behaviour, Memories] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011); Jutta Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps: Ausbildung, Einsatz und Entnazifizierung der weiblichen Angehörigen der Waffen-SS 1942-1949* [The Female SS-Auxiliary Corps: Training, Deployment, and Denazification of the Female Members of the Waffen-SS, 1942-1949] (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> See the reflections on that topic and the cited literature in Klaus Latzel, Franka Maubach and Silke Satjukow, 'Einleitung' ['Introduction'], in Klaus Latzel, Franka Maubach, and Silke Satjukow, ed., *Soldatinnen. Gewalt und Geschlecht im Krieg vom Mittelalter bis heute* [Women Soldiers. Violence and Gender during War from the Middle Ages up to Recent Days] (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2011), 11-49. Thereafter Latzel, Maubach, and Satjukow, *Soldatinnen*.



(or a man's) point of view.<sup>4</sup> Here I am critically referring to my own study on the women auxiliary forces in the German army, but also to other recently published works cited above.

One reason for that gap between theory and empirical research (at least with regards to studies on Nazi Germany) may be found in the fact that the Nazis established a gender-separated rather than a gender-integrated organizational system; people were organized along the line between the sexes. Most of the Nazi's organizations had a male and a female branch: there were girls in the Hitler Youth, young women in the State Labor Service for female youth (*Reicharbeitsdienst für die weibliche Jugend*, RADwJ), older women in the female branch of the Nazis' 'trade union', the German Labor Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, DAF), and so on. However, this gender division was blurred by the ideology of an all-national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*), which was to bridge the gaps within society.<sup>5</sup> The idea of gender-community was always vivid, the more so as the war forced the Nazis to call for a united battle of the whole nation; comradeship between the sexes became a major value. However, historical research often kept reproducing the "separate spheres", dividing men and women.<sup>6</sup>

Another reason could be seen in the search for women-perpetrators: since the 1990s historical research has intensely focused on the participation of women in the holocaust by revising early assumptions of a politically driven feminist research that saw women first and foremost as victims of patriarchy or as women-heroes rebelling against that sexist system. Women researchers of the more recent years have been eager to show that

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<sup>4</sup> See the two important critical interventions by Gisela Bock, 'Historische Frauenforschung: Fragestellungen und Perspektiven' ['Historical Women's Research: Questions and Perspectives'], in Karin Hausen, ed., *Frauen suchen ihre Geschichte: Historische Studien zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* [Women in Search for their History: Historical Studies on the 19. and 20. Century] (München: Beck, 1987, first 1983), 24-62; Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis', *The American Historical Review*, 9, 5 (1986), 1053-75; and the theoretical key text by Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Sybille Steinbacher, 'Differenz der Geschlechter? Chancen und Schranken für die Volksgenossinnen' ['Gender-Difference? Chances and Barriers for Volksgenossinnen'], in Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt, eds., *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* [Volksgemeinschaft: New Research on Nazi Society] (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009), 94-104, here 96. Thereafter Steinbacher, 'Differenz'.

<sup>6</sup> The now classical narrative was established by Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, Family Life, and Nazi Ideology, 1919-1945* (London: Cape, 1986), who saw the guilt of German women in the fact that they maintained a comfortable home for the male perpetrators, a room where they could relax; today research goes far beyond that argument, highlighting the participation of women beyond the private. Thereafter, *Mothers*.

and how (“normal”) women participated in the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the racist system of perpetration, and the holocaust.<sup>7</sup>

A pioneer study in this field was Elizabeth Harvey’s “Women in the Nazi East”, published in 2003, showing for the case of the occupied Polish territories that women played a crucial role in the Nazis’ politics of expulsion, deportation, and annihilation.<sup>8</sup> By now we have a plethora of studies highlighting striking findings about the mobilization and motives of (young, single) female auxiliaries during the war years of the ‘Third Reich’ – a knowledge that is beginning to make its way into general accounts of National Socialism and the Second World War.<sup>9</sup> A main assumption embracing these works implies that race – as the most important category – always was superior to gender: An ‘aryan’ woman had a higher standing than a ‘non-aryan’ man, a fact that blurred the traditional gender hierarchy – but beyond that women’s and men’s studies are rather separated<sup>10</sup> and the stock of studies that integrates both perspectives equally remains still quite small. The findings are pretty much the same when we take a closer look at the research concerning the various armies: though the totalized war forced the male military personnel to integrate more women than ever before and though that fact supposedly challenged the traditionally male structures of the military and blurred the clearly drawn line between the sexes, we do

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<sup>7</sup> Gisela Bock, ‘Ganz normale Frauen: Täter, Opfer, Mitläufer und Zuschauer im Nationalsozialismus’ [‘Ordinary Women. Perpetrators, Victims, Participants and Bystanders in Nazi Germany’], in Kirsten Heinsohn, Barbara Vogel, and Ulrike Weckel, eds., *Zwischen Karriere und Verfolgung. Handlungsräume von Frauen im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland* [Between Career and Persecution. Female Agency in Nazi Germany] (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1997), 245-77.

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Harvey, *Women in the Nazi East. Agents and Witnesses of Germanization*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). Thereafter Harvey, *Women*.

<sup>9</sup> This underlines Steinbacher, ‘Differenz’. See the works of Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Richard Evans cited there.

<sup>10</sup> In his most recent article Matthew Stibbe underlines that “the volume of literature on masculinities in the Third Reich is tiny compared to what we now have on the Kaiserreich, the Weimar era and the early Cold War period”. Matthew Stibbe, ‘In and Beyond the Racial State: Gender and National Socialism, 1933-1955’, *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 13, 2 (2012), 159-78. Thereafter Stibbe, ‘Racial State’. Important works, more or less explicitly labelled as men’s studies, are Thomas Kühne, *Kameradschaft: Die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert* [Comradeship. The Soldiers of the Nazi War and the 20th Century] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2006); thereafter Kühne, *Kameradschaft*. Klaus Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten – nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis – Kriegserfahrung 1939-1945* [German Soldiers – Nazi War? War Experiences 1939-1945] (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1997); Frank Werner, “Hart müssen wir hier draußen sein”. Soldatische Männlichkeit im Vernichtungskrieg 1941-1944’ [“We Have to be Harsh out Here”. Soldierly Masculinity in the War of Annihilation 1941-1944’], *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 34, 1 (2008), 5-40.

not have studies that systematically and from both points of view shift the focus on gender relations – most of the studies concentrate on the female (or male) areas and experiences in the military.<sup>11</sup>

An exception can be seen concerning studies on sexual encounters during the war: the history of rape and sexual violence is well-analyzed. Even if they are often written from a woman's point of view, the male-female relations are at the core of those studies. Regina Mühlhäuser's recently published and important book "Conquests" is a rare example for a study that systematically looks from a male *and* a female perspective – Mühlhäuser takes a close look at the sexual encounters of and love affairs between German soldiers and local women in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. She shows convincingly that this history of gender relations is not at all detached from the history of war and violence nor its sheer byproduct, but an intrinsic part of it.<sup>12</sup> Other studies address the problem of male-female encounters after the German defeat in 1945, when German women fell in love or had sexual encounters with American, English, French, or Russian soldiers, often giving birth to the so-called "children of occupation".<sup>13</sup> It is somehow weird that it seems to be easier to deal with the problem of male-female relations when men and women physically get to touch each other.

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<sup>11</sup> But see the evolving stock of works concerning women in the armies or partisan forces, where remarks on the gender-relationships can be found: M. Michaela Hampf, *Release a man for combat: the women's army corps during World War II* (Köln: Böhlau, 2010); Nicola Spakowski, "Mit Mut an die Front". *Die militärische Beteiligung von Frauen in der kommunistischen Revolution Chinas (1925-1949)* ["Courageously to the Front". *Military Participation of Women in the Communist Chinese Revolution (1925-1949)*] (Köln: Böhlau, 2009); Barbara N. Wiesinger, *Partisaninnen: Widerstand in Jugoslawien 1941-1945* [*Women-Partisans. Resistance in Yugoslavia 1941-1945*] (Wien: Böhlau, 2008); see the articles on different nations in Latzel, Maubach, and Satjukow, *Soldatinnen*; Franka Maubach and Silke Satjukow, 'Zwischen Emanzipation und Trauma: Soldatinnen im Zweiten Weltkrieg' ['Between Emancipation and Trauma: Women-Soldiers in the Second World War'], *Historische Zeitschrift*, 288, 2 (2009), 347-84, comparing Germany, the Soviet Union, and the United States.

<sup>12</sup> Regina Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen: Sexuelle Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutscher Soldaten in der Sowjetunion 1941-1945* [*Conquests. Sexual Violence and Intimate Relationships of German Soldiers in the Soviet Union 1941-1945*] (Hamburg, Hamburger Edition, 2010), 7-11. See also studies on other countries like for example Fabrice Virgili, *Shorn Women. Gender and Punishment in Liberation France* (Oxford: Berg, 2002); and for the Polish territories Maren Rögers' article in this volume.

<sup>13</sup> For an approach which especially focuses "encounters" in occupied Germany, see Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies. Close Encounters in Occupied Germany*, Princeton (New York: Princeton University Press, 2007), especially 48-87; Silke Satjukow, *Besatzer. "Die Russen" in Deutschland 1945-1994* [*Occupiers. "The Russians" in Germany 1945-1994*] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 284-98.

Maybe changing perspective within a scientifically constructed argumentation is a problem in itself – not only concerning the history of gender relations but also that of victims and perpetrators during the holocaust; of eastern and western Germans after 1945; of insiders and outsiders throughout history. That is also true for the occupiers and the occupied in what Shelley Baranowski had recently called the “Nazi Empire”.<sup>14</sup> Hence, one should keep in mind that Karen Hagemann called it “particularly promising” to shift the “focus on the interactions between occupied and occupiers”.<sup>15</sup> To integrate two different, contrasting, or even diametrically opposed and conflicting perspectives demands not only a special attentiveness for the subject and command of the historiographical narrative but also sources which are able to reflect both points of view equally. Thus, a gender integrated history of World War II and the German occupation must not only deconstruct official gender discourse but also needs to analyze the “relationship between real men and women as they struggled to survive the Third Reich”.<sup>16</sup> This quest for male and female experiences (and for the ways in which they were referring to each other) leads us into new directions. It is for example not only interesting that and how women were mobilized (and mobilized themselves) during World War II, but also how men reacted to that new mobilized female “self”.<sup>17</sup>

These questions can fruitfully be applied to the history of the German occupation in a twofold kind of way. First, concerning the relations of German men and women within the military, German men were confronted with a new type of single and therefore mobile young women. Hence, far from home, good-old gender stereotypes were far less effective and often became challenged. How did soldiers react when female auxiliaries came to “free them to fight” (as a euphemist propaganda term put it)? What relations between men and women within the military did evolve – beyond the sexualist stereotype that women only went into war for sexual encounters or to find an officer to marry? Could comradeship effectively work as a novel model of gender relations – or was it only a mere formula created by Nazi propagandists?

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<sup>14</sup> Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Karen Hagemann, ‘Military, War, and the Mainstream’, in Karen Hagemann and Jean H. Quataert, eds., *Gendering Modern German History. Rewriting Historiography* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 63 and further, 75.

<sup>16</sup> Stibbe, ‘Racial State’, 3.

<sup>17</sup> We do not know much yet, Sybille Steinbacher underlines, about the “reactions of men to the blurred gender borders” while the war went on. Steinbacher, ‘Differenz’, 101.

Beyond the relations between German soldiers and female auxiliaries developing within the military, we – secondly – have to pose questions concerning the relations of female auxiliaries and the local male population in the occupied (east European) territories. Is it true that race was always superior to gender? To look at the focal points where the traditional gender dichotomy was challenged allows us to characterize the power constellations of occupation. Did the local population accept the occupiers' rule, even if it was exercised by women? How did the German auxiliaries feel when confronted with the local (especially the male) population? How did this relationship change over the war years? Were the historically specific power constellations of occupation able to cut across the traditional *longue durée* structure of male superiority?

If applied to the history of German occupation gender has not an end in itself but helps to open up new insights into the history of Nazi power. Against this background it is astonishing that, for example, in Mark Mazower's doubtlessly impressive history of Hitler's "New European Order", gender does not play any (key) role.<sup>18</sup> Thus, gender as a category of interpretation tends to transcend itself and can – like a prism – help to illuminate power constellations during the war in a new way. It can be used as a means to shed light on the relationship between victors and victims, between those who exercised power and those who did not.

### Motives of German Women's Auxiliaries

Admittedly, I am myself not able to write a gender-integrated narrative of German occupation – my work on the Wehrmacht auxiliaries was not systematically focused on gender relations and my interview sources reflect above all the female perspective. Thus my interpretation is rather tentative, pointing to new directions of research. But I will meet the demand of taking up both perspectives by reading my sources anew with a special regard for the relationships between men and women as they are recounted in oral sources or autobiographical material.

Even if the focus of this volume lies especially on the occupied territories in the east, it is not possible to isolate that theater of war from the larger world war context. Only by a comparison to the situation in the western European occupied countries at the beginning of the war can we understand the nature of what may be called the occupation experience. Many soldiers and female auxiliaries came to the eastern occupied coun-

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<sup>18</sup> Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London: Allen Lane, 2008).

tries after having been on duty in France or the Netherlands – and had their ‘eastern’ experiences against this backdrop. The army began to send female auxiliary forces there after the defeat of France in June 1940. This staff consisted above all of Red Cross nurses, whose skills had not been needed much in the first period of war, when – from the viewpoint of military reasoning – not that many wounded had to be cared for. This is a paradox in the history of women’s deployment in the war: that the mass of nurses and auxiliary nurses trained after the (from Germany’s point of view) frustrating experience of WWI, were not needed, because the German army advanced astonishingly fast and nearly without casualties (the notorious and somewhat strange word for that was: ‘Blitzkrieg’). Some ten thousands of these auxiliary nurses were retrained as auxiliaries for the army.<sup>19</sup> These women worked in the telecommunication units or as secretaries (the so called *Nachrichten- and Stabsshelferinnen*). Others set up and ran homes for soldiers (*Soldatenheime*) in the occupied territories which served to prevent soldiers from coming into contact with the local population – mainly with the female population (a strategy that proved to be – as Regina Mühlhäuser shows – at best illusionary).<sup>20</sup> Even if the sheer numbers of female auxiliaries deployed in the occupied territories are rather few (the vast majority of the nearly 500.000 military auxiliaries served on the home front helping to fight the allied air raids), their deployment reveals something historically new: the *Wehrmacht* needed women not to help prevent defeat, but to organize the victory.

Indeed, the female personnel did not care for the wounded but helped to seize and sustain power in the vast occupied land. This service was attractive to young women for several, mostly individual, reasons: being freed from their parents’ rule; living an adventure; getting to know unknown countries. But one motivating moment was not merely individual but rather rooted in genuine historical reasons: the vast majority of those women-helpers was born between 1919 and 1926, thus representing a cohort influenced by the defeat of their fathers in World War I, by the crisis of the interwar period, and by the indoctrination in the youth organizations of the Nazi regime. Many of them were anxious to follow their male comrades into the war. This does not differ very much from the parallel male cohort, which historian Mary Fulbrook analyzed in her most recent book “Disso-

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<sup>19</sup> Maubach, *Stellung halten*.

<sup>20</sup> There exists only some research on the so-called *Betreuungshelferinnen*, but see the autobiography of the high-rank female leader Wilma Ruediger, *Frauen: Im Dienst der Menschlichkeit. Erlebtes im “Deutschen Roten Kreuz” von 1914 bis Friedland* [Women: In the Service of Humanity. Experiences in the “German Red Cross” from 1914 to Friedland] (München: Lehmann, 1962).

nant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships”. Being brought up in the “bad” Weimar years and coming to age in the “good years” of the Nazi period, not only the female auxiliaries but also the male soldiers were eager to fight in the front lines and were confident that they would win the war.<sup>21</sup> In diaries or subsequently written autobiographies we routinely find that wish to participate in conquest paired with an impatience with which young women were waiting to take up an appointment in the occupied territories. For example, a fourteen year old girl who heard about the annexation of Austria in 1938 sitting at home in front of the family’s radio wrote in her diary: “I’d like to be one of those soldiers marching in [she refers to Linz].”<sup>22</sup>

The traditionally male experience to be a soldier, a conqueror, which was transferred from one male generation to another, had to serve as the dominant archetype – because a similar female role model *cum grano salis* did not exist.<sup>23</sup> Women had basically to learn from their male comrades how to march through the streets wearing a uniform; already in the very first phase of national socialist movement in the Weimar years female activists adapted to the male style of political fight – and by no means simply were content to live their lives as mere mothers and housewives.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Mary Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives. Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 168-246. For the analysis of “good” and “bad” times in oral history testimony still see Ulrich Herbert, “Die guten und die schlechten Zeiten”: Überlegungen zur diachronen Analyse lebensgeschichtlicher Interviews’ [“The Good and the Bad Times.” Thoughts on the Diachronic Analysis of Oral History Interviews’], in Lutz Niethammer, ed., *“Die Jahre weiß man nicht, wo man die heute hinsetzen soll”: Faschismuserfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet* [“Not sure where to put those years today”: *Experiences of Fascism in the Ruhr Area*], 2nd edn (Berlin: Dietz, 1986), 67-96.

<sup>22</sup> Ingeborg Hölzer, Diary, entry from March 12th, 1938. Copied diary is in my possession.

<sup>23</sup> There was a thin line of tradition binding together the female employments with the classical role model of Jeanne d’Arc, the rare examples of women auxiliaries in the First World War, with the female pilots to whom attention was paid in the interwar period, and last but not least with the female activists of the early national socialist party in the Weimar years, who were organized in the DFO (*Deutscher Frauenorden*). Concerning women pilots see Evelyn Zegenhagen, *“Schneidige deutsche Mädel”. Fliegerinnen zwischen 1918 und 1945* [“*Dashing German Girls*”. *Women Pilots, 1918-1945*] (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> See for example how a female activist of the DFO described her fight shoulder to shoulder with her male comrades in the late 1920s/early 1930s: “The party struggles began! We marched! SA and SS units and comrades! Before us, behind us, all around us, a howling, brawling throng. Bystanders threw flowers. Defiantly our battle song rang from our lips: ‘We are the army of the red swastika’. How proud we were! Let them stone and curse us. [...] We had been there and would return again and again.” Quoted in Koonz, *Mothers*, 78. I’m indebted to Matthew Stibbe for pointing me to this quote.



I would argue that those male role models were useful for a first orientation – but then women appropriated those guiding patterns, and developed their own ‘female’ way of how to wear a uniform or to behave within the military system. Nevertheless many of the women saw their participation in the war as a sort of liberating and emancipating experience (which was a mere illusion, of course, because war and the racial system of power could not feed emancipation).<sup>25</sup>

This former feeling of excitement and enthusiasm paired with the feeling of empowerment can not only be found in contemporary sources (as letters or diaries) but also in oral history testimony – even if the expression of those feelings may not fit into the frame of possible and officially valid rules of how to remember Nazi Germany. Maybe it is much easier for women to articulate former excitement than it is for men of the same age who after the war more often were regarded as being responsible for what had happened. To bring those oppressed feelings up to the surface of the narrative often needs a kind of affirmative – and ethically rather problematic – interview method. However, self-confident as she was, Isolde Springer begins her interview with telling about how much she was filled with enthusiasm: “Well, that was ... In 33 Hitler was coming to power. And I was 12 years old. And we were so enthusiastic, I can’t tell you ... I say that to everybody, I don’t have any scruples about that.” She became the leader of a growing number of BDM-girls and, after the war had begun, eventually signed up voluntarily to become an army auxiliary: “And then I always read about the telecommunication auxiliaries of the army, how they got around in Europe. And I thought: ‘That would be something great.’ And then I signed up voluntarily.”<sup>26</sup> Since she was recruited just in April 41, Springer was not sent to the western occupied territories but to recently occupied Croatia and only two years later to Paris – by that turning the chronology of real war events into her special war-biography. However, in 1943/44 even Paris was not a place a German auxiliary wished to be anymore – the situation had begun to turn against the German occupational force, and Springer feared the hatred and revenge of the Parisians.

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<sup>25</sup> See my argument in Maubach, *Stellung halten*.

<sup>26</sup> Isolde Springer, Interview by Franka Maubach, October 2004, Germany. Interviews were recorded with mini-disc. Quite similarly the Red Cross nurse Ingeborg Ochsenknecht (b. 1920) describes her great wish to participate in the war adding that she wanted to take revenge for the lost First World War. See Ingeborg Ochsenknecht, “*Als ob der Schnee alles zudeckte*”. *Eine Krankenschwester erinnert sich. Kriegseinsatz an der Ostfront* [“*As if Snow Would Cover Everything*”. *A Nurse’s Memories. War Deployment at the Eastern Front*] (München: Econ, 2004), 29.



The idea of war which those young women had in their mind was not experience-based but inspired by propaganda and tales of heroism – and was attractive for the young women precisely because what war really meant was absent. While the occupation experience in the western territories and at the beginning of the war could reinforce and feed a priori expectations, the deployments in the east and at the end of war mostly destroyed them.

### Gender-Relationships in and beyond the Military

To the western occupied territories in France or in the Netherlands the auxiliaries came as women-occupiers, proud of representing victory and ready to execute the new power which they had obtained. The auxiliaries lived in extravagant accommodations: villas and even castles where sometimes Jews had lived before. For many women Paris was the place they wished to be stationed. The name of the French capital sounded like the right place to be for young women coming to take part in the German victory. Paris was not only thought of as the captured French capital but also as the ‘capital of love’. That motivated women to feel like tourists when they came to Paris: “I hope that one can enjoy oneself in the ‘capital of love’, that something is going on there. Paris exists only for amusement.”<sup>27</sup>

In her autobiography published in 1999, Ilse Schmidt tells the first part of her war story (the second part brought her to occupied Ukraine) like a love story: She flirted with German soldiers and officers and enjoyed from her viewpoint pleasant aspects of German occupation. When she noticed that German men were attracted by French women she kept track of their relations, watching closely how French women dressed and behaved, trying to imitate their style.<sup>28</sup> Schmidt was criticized for that naive and rather non-political narrative;<sup>29</sup> this recounted picture was supposedly fostered by the historical situation Schmidt experienced: military victory and the feeling of excitement and love were mixed together. Moreover she began to notice that German soldiers were not faithful to their German girlfriends or wives

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<sup>27</sup> Ilse Schmidt, *Die Mitläuferin. Erinnerungen einer Wehrmachtsangehörigen* [Fellow-Traveller. Memories of a Female Member of the Wehrmacht] (Berlin: Aufbau, 1999), 22. Thereafter Schmidt, *Mitläuferin*. For further evidence of this romantic image of Paris, see Maubach, *Stellung halten*, 111.

<sup>28</sup> Schmidt, *Mitläuferin*, 22-27.

<sup>29</sup> See the critical remarks by Gaby Zipfel, ‘Biographischer Revisionismus’ [‘Biographical Revisionism’], *Mittelweg* 36, 8, 5 (1999), 33-38.

at all. When she came to occupied Ukraine in 1942 she was confronted with the mass killing of Jews, who were shot dead in the nearby woods; this event changed her tourist-like perception of the war and made her realize in what crimes she was participating. Living (or at least telling) that time like a love story did not seem possible anymore.

In 1943 the women leader of the Nazi women's organization (*NS-Frauenschaft*), Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, commented on how badly soldiers would treat the female auxiliaries in front of commanders. She underlined that the male personnel within the military still had to be taught how to regard women in the army and how to behave in front of them. They would see female auxiliaries, Scholtz-Klink reports, either as elegant ladies, as women, or as mere recruits: "The ideals of many women, who are employed in the occupied territories, are shattered [*zerdeppert*] when German officers rise in the tramway to offer their place not to German auxiliaries but to French women who had put on make-up [...]." <sup>30</sup> This remark, which reminds one of what Ilse Schmidt observed in occupied Paris, reflects the female critique against the inability of the male military personnel to appreciate the female auxiliaries – moreover both were obviously jealous of the fashionable French women.

From the other direction, male commanders often were criticizing the behavior of the female auxiliaries in the occupied territories which sometimes was by no means military-like – instead of wearing their uniforms with pride and stern discipline, they seemed to forget about the institution they served in, sitting laid-back in cafés together with soldiers and officers. Commanders criticized the "loose manners" of women when being employed together with men. <sup>31</sup> In France "female army auxiliaries and soldiers were sitting together in cafés in very improper positions, men and women entangled with each other, without any sense of decency and morality". <sup>32</sup> In Rowno which was the administrative center of occupied Ukraine, a female auxiliary had to be dismissed because she "was so obviously interested in the soldiers, showing her intentions so clearly that the soldiers made a mockery of her" <sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, Befehlshabertagung in Bad Schachem, 14.10.1943, see the quote in Massimiliano Livi, *Gertrud Scholtz-Klink: die Reichsfrauenführerin. Politische Handlungsräume und Identitätsprobleme der Frauen im Nationalsozialismus am Beispiel der "Führerin aller deutschen Frauen"* [*Gertrud Scholtz-Klink: Reichsfrauenführerin. Political Scopes and Identity Problems of Women in Nationalsocialism: The Example of the "Leader of all German Women"*] (Münster: Lit, 2005), 99, 100.

<sup>31</sup> Luftwaffenbefehlshaber Mitte v. 2.6.1943: BArch MA: RL 13/330.1.

<sup>32</sup> Höherer Nachrichtenführer beim Befehlshaber in Frankreich v. 17.5.1943: BArch MA: RW 35/204.1.

<sup>33</sup> Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Ukraine Abt. IVz vom 7.3.42: BArch MA: RW 41/30.1.

Such gender troubles were rooted in the uncertainties caused by the coexistence of males and females in the military – male commanders often had no idea how to deal with the women because they lacked experience with females in uniform. This uncertainty moreover was arose from the fact that traditional gender hierarchies and behavior patterns were challenged or even blurred when women joined the army. Another good example is the greeting rituals within the military. For example, if male courtesy required that a man would greet a woman first, the military rules of saluting, however, demanded that the lower rank would greet the higher one. In the everyday experience this instruction supposedly caused a feeling of uncertainty – military and traditional gender rules clashed.

In 1955 H. H. Mühlenberger, a today not well known writer of popular fiction, published a novel about a young army auxiliary called „Girls in Blue-Grey” (alluding to the colors of the uniform) which was inspired, according to the foreword, by the experiences and recollections of a ‘real’ former auxiliary. He suggested that many young women joining the army were not pleased with their duty to salute in front of high-ranking officers; but often, Mühlenberger has a captain say that officers nevertheless would take the chance to greet the female personnel first – by that fulfilling their duty as polite men.<sup>34</sup> Official army regulations also address this issue by pointing to the duty of every female auxiliary to salute in front of officers. For example, air-force auxiliaries in occupied France were obliged to greet not only generals but also their superiors.<sup>35</sup>

We can follow the reverberations of those military rules (which were unfamiliar considering the traditional model of gender-relations) in the correspondence of Isolde Springer with her fiancé. The quick-witted woman soon became the secretary of the general of military occupation. In this function everybody knew her and even high-ranking officers saluted in front of her. Willy, on the contrary, had to salute the officers, standing at attention. As Isolde suggests, Willy felt humiliated and neglected by that. Soon he preferred not to join her, saying that he was no “jumping jack”; in the interview Isolde remembers him having said: “I’m no jumping jack. You are greeted by all the officers, and I’m standing there jumping smartly to attention”.<sup>36</sup> I will argue that comradeship could show a way out of those feelings of uncertainty. It was a means to distance oneself from the other

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<sup>34</sup> H. H. Mühlenberger, *Mädchen in Blau-Grau* [Girl in Blue-Grey] (Wuppertal, 1955), 36.

<sup>35</sup> Merkblatt für Luftnachrichten-Betriebsshelferinnen: BArch MA: RL 14/7.1.

<sup>36</sup> Isolde Springer, Interview.

sex by making possible a new kind of gender-relation beyond sexual encounters and love-stories.<sup>37</sup>

At the same time comradeship was, of course, a highly propagandistic, ideologically fuelled term, which the regime used as a means to create the *Volksgemeinschaft* and to make it work effectively. Like *Volksgemeinschaft*, comradeship drew its strength far more from its excluding than including function. Pointing to the fact that they were comrades to the soldiers could for example protect the auxiliaries against any sexual invectives the soldiers or German women at the home front were directing at them. Being comrades was the best proof of their decent motives. At least the correspondence of Isolde and Willy shows that the new wartime gender-model influenced even love-affairs. Hence, it is far too easy to remain on the surface of sexualized stereotypes, assuming that women auxiliaries were seen not much better than prostitutes who only joined the army to cajole an officer into marriage.

As mentioned above, Isolde and Willy accepted the gender-model of male-female comradeship and tried to translate that ideal into their private sphere: “[...] [I]n the end I will be your comrade in every respect,” Isolde wrote in February 1944. And four weeks later, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1944, Willy put it this way: “You’d like to be more than my housewife; you’d like to be my lifelong supporting and stimulating comrade.”<sup>38</sup> It is interesting that Willy interpreted comradeship as something more precious than fulfilling ‘only’ what was to be seen as the wife’s duties: looking out for the household and caring for the children. By this he seems to underline that the intense war experience they had in common bound them together much more than the everyday life of an ordinary marriage. Being immersed in the preparations for their wedding since spring 1944, an important question arose: Should they marry wearing their uniforms or not? On the 21<sup>st</sup> of February Isolde wrote: “I actually would like to marry in uniform, because my grey gear is a garment of honor [*Ehrenkleid*] for me, even if some girls don’t behave themselves that way, but in the end it depends on the one who is wearing the uniform.” And Willy answered (1.4.1944): “As a genuine, real soldier I’m happy that you are respecting your uniform. We will both go wearing our uniform.”<sup>39</sup> Trying to take up and to reconstruct the male perspective this could mean that women were not to be despised

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<sup>37</sup> Comradeship between the sexes plays almost no role in the work of Thomas Kühne, *Kameradschaft*. He points above all to the fact that comradeship could cause a feeling of warm, motherly relations between soldiers during war.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Isolde to Willy, February 28, 1944; letter from Willy to Isolde, April 1, 1944; copied correspondence is in my possession.

<sup>39</sup> Letter from Isolde to Willy, February 21, 1944; letter from Willy, March 1, 1944.

for entering the army but on the contrary could be highly esteemed for fighting side by side with the soldiers and for knowing what war did really mean (including the knowledge about the inhuman warfare of the Wehrmacht).

On the contrary no evidence could be found for love affairs or sexual relationships of auxiliaries with the male occupied population. Given some of their autobiographical narratives they even seemed to avoid coming into close contact.<sup>40</sup> Supposedly they were aware that their status was rooted in the special military situation of German victory and thus always precarious. However, female auxiliaries enjoyed the new power when they came to the occupied territories – on the one hand their status was much higher in the eastern than in the western territories but on the other hand they enjoyed a greater luxury in the western territories like, first and foremost, in France. For example, Ilse Majonek, a telecommunication auxiliary stationed in the Netherlands, felt really important as a woman occupier and enjoyed the special treatment. In the big villa she lived in with her female comrades there were servants from amidst the local population who cleaned up the rooms and did the cooking. As a member of the occupation force she moreover was allowed to use public transport for free. Once when she wanted to use the tramway the conductor demanded that she should pay. But she refused to do this, explaining that she belonged to the German army and therefore had the right to take the tramway for free. (In the interview she explained that to me in the following way: “We were the boss, ah, I mean, the Germans were the occupiers.”) But the conductor refused to drive without her having paid. Up to that point the scene shows a persisting gender hierarchy; though Majonek as a member of the occupation force was over the local population, she as a woman was supposed to be inferior to the man. Majonek decided to call for a man to help: “Is an officer here somewhere?” It is not important if the German officer did come or not; the sentence forced the conductor to let Majonek ride for free. So the recalled story is very ambivalent: firstly, we can find a persistent system of gender hierarchy, which contradicts the rules of occupation. Secondly, this supposedly predominant system was successfully challenged. After all, Majonek forced the tramway to depart.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> An exception is the autobiography of Elisabeth Himmelstoß, who was stationed in occupied Wilna, Minsk, France and Denmark. She was critical of the Nazi regime and during her French stay came into contact with the resistance. Elisabeth Himmelstoß, ... *und ich konnte nichts ändern! Odyssee einer Nachrichtenhelferin* [... *I Could Not Change Anything! Odyssey of a Telecommunication Auxiliary*] (Berlin: Mittler, 1994). Thereafter Himmelstoß, *Odyssee*.

<sup>41</sup> Ilse Majonek, Interview by Franka Maubach, October 2003, Germany.

One can hardly imagine a man of the local population in the eastern European occupied countries who would have been as courageous as the Amsterdam tramway conductor in obviously challenging the occupiers rule. In the East, the Nazi racial system presumably had more impact on the relationships of men and women so that the line between occupiers and occupied was more clearly drawn. In that situation it could have been dangerous even to speak out, so a (local) man supposedly would have obeyed a (German) woman's order without even raising his voice. For that reason the women auxiliaries in the eastern territories could feel even more superior to the local population even if their situation was, from their point of view, less "advantageous" than in the western European countries. They lived not in villas but in barracks and amidst a violent atmosphere. From the Nazis' racist point of view it was beyond all doubt that the German women were superior to local men.

#### Helping hands? Relations of the male and female military service

In examining the occupied Polish territories Elizabeth Harvey has pointed out that the status of German women there was also higher than in the Reich.<sup>42</sup> In the remote outposts of the Reich, gender hierarchy was – because of the ongoing war and the yet unfinished establishment of Nazi rule – less fixed and more flexible. This situation and the fact that manpower was needed at the front, allowed women to get hold of important positions and to feel more self-confident and powerful. Not least the widely used term auxiliaries has hitherto hindered a deeper understanding of women's real relevance for warfare and occupation. The female auxiliary forces of the army, for example, replaced regular soldiers (who were even frightened when female auxiliaries came to "free them to fight", because they knew what this could eventually mean for them<sup>43</sup>). Although they were less skilled and for that reason deployed as *auxiliaries*, they in fact did the same work. Much of the archival material we are using to reconstruct the war and the holocaust was produced by telecommunication and staff auxiliaries, who thus knew about the ongoing events – even if they were lacking knowledge about the greater context in which those events took place.

Beyond our everyday or moral understanding of help we have to carve out the *historical* meaning of the term, which developed during the Second

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<sup>42</sup> Harvey, *Women*.

<sup>43</sup> See for an example Himmelstoß, *Odyssee*, 64, 65, where Himmelstoß made friends with the young soldier she had to replace and who was very afraid of dying at the front.

World War.<sup>44</sup> As auxiliaries the women were said to be merely ‘helping hands’, but by looking more precisely at what they actually did and experienced, this description of women auxiliaries seems to be euphemistic. The term covers the real relevance of female auxiliaries in the context of total war, where unskilled or less skilled but flexible personnel were required to be installed wherever needed. In the end the female auxiliaries were as skilled at war and as experienced as their male comrades – and that sometimes helped the German soldiers to accept women as comrades. The term auxiliaries moreover hides the fact that those women often were to ‘help’ in warlike situations: in the violent atmosphere of the occupied eastern territories; during the retreat of the German army; as auxiliaries serving in flak units to protect the German population against the allied air raids. Many of the situations they were involved in were genuine war situations at the front. So the German auxiliaries – though mostly unarmed – were really participating in war (and some groups consequently were defined as combatants in September 1944).<sup>45</sup> Female auxiliaries were close to the soldiers also in this respect.

What does all that mean with regard to female violence? We have only rare evidence that women actually exercised violence against the local population. 1943 the former BDM leader Renate Finckh, born in 1926, was sent to the Warthegau to ‘help’ the Germans “settle down” there (in a context impressively described by Elizabeth Harvey). She remembers a farmer’s wife demanding that she should hit the polish shepherd boy who allegedly let the cows run away. Although she felt ashamed she hit him – in an, as she describes it, only “symbolic” way: “But I hit him.”<sup>46</sup>

Women often seem to feel ashamed of being superior to local men. This is further evidence that a conventional gender hierarchy persisted through the war as a *longue durée* structure. For example the staff auxiliary Ilse Schmidt, who at first worked in Paris, was then sent to occupied Yugo-

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<sup>44</sup> See in detail for that argument Franka Maubach, ‘Die “Macht weiblicher Hilfe” im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Methodische Überlegungen zu einem frauengeschichtlichen Phänomen der Militärgeschichte’ [‘The “Power of Female Help”. Methodological Thoughts on a Women’s History Phenomenon in Military History’], in Jörg Echternkamp, Wolfgang Schmidt, and Thomas Vogel, eds, *Perspektiven der Militärgeschichte: Raum, Gewalt und Repräsentation in historischer Forschung und Bildung* [Perspectives of Military History: Space, Violence, and Representation in Historical Research and Education] (München: Oldenbourg, 2010), 187-204.

<sup>45</sup> OKW vom 5.9.1944; 1. See Ursula von Gersdorff, *Frauen im Kriegsdienst 1914-1945* [Women in Military Service] (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1969), Dok. 218.

<sup>46</sup> Renate Finckh, *Sie versprachen uns eine Zukunft: Eine Jugend im Nationalsozialismus* [They Promised Us a Future. A Youth in Nazi Germany] (Tübingen: Silberburg, 2000), 209.



slavia and then to the Ukraine in 1942. In her autobiography she remembers that she was “deeply ashamed” when seeing a Jewish man ironing the bra of a female comrade. She felt terrible not only because this was a situation of female intimacy, from which a foreign man should have stayed away, but also because Schmidt knew that this man was a university professor. She was embarrassed about the old authorities – male gender, high education and socio-economical status – becoming worthless due to the governing racist system and the victor’s law. One could say that in a very subtle kind of way she tended to obey those old authorities – but the new power constellations prevented her from doing so. This highlights the fundamental confusion of values and social norms arising from the war.

### Losing superiority and becoming scapegoats

But the situation changed. At the latest, soon after the battle of Stalingrad in 1943, the occupied German forces found themselves in a less advantageous position and found it difficult to sustain their authority. What impact did that changed situation have on the relationship of military women and civilian men? I would argue that the war-related and short-term authority of women was challenged by the pre-war gender relations. Women quickly lost their status and became the first target of the population’s fury and hate. The more the Nazi authorities were in danger of losing power, the more the local population regained confidence in the possibility of a reversed situation. Men became a potential threat to the female auxiliaries, who were, for example, only allowed to go outside when accompanied by armed soldiers. Isolde Springer being posted in Paris in 1944 recalled that the German women were driven to work in an armor-cased bus.<sup>47</sup> The local male population more and more posed a permanent threat to women.

At the end of the war hundreds of thousands of young German women knew what the word war really meant, they knew – to a lesser or greater extent – about the violence German troops and civilian authorities exercised against the local population especially in the eastern European occupied territories – and they were part of that system. It is striking how deeply they were involved. The relationship between local men and German women gives us some evidence about women exercising power. At the same time, however, we have to be aware of the long-term relations between the sexes, which persisted during the war and were reinforced during defeat. German men, too, despised the female auxiliaries because of their participation in the war – once again the sexualized stigma of those danger-

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<sup>47</sup> Isolde Springer, Interview.



ous women who had left their traditional private space to enter the male public sphere gained a lot of social significance. Female auxiliaries lost their ‘good reputation’; men doubted that they went into war for better reasons than to find a boyfriend. So they were called *Blitzmädchen* or *Offiziersmatratze* not only by veterans or older women who had stayed home, but also by their own comrades, being sexualized by those invectives. By this a traditional line of sexualized discourse was taken up, denouncing women as responsible for defeat. However, while those accusations after the First World War were publicly articulated for example against leftist women activists like Rosa Luxemburg, they were not more than part of private talk after 1945 – what was needed much more was the image of an innocent woman to establish a space allegedly untouched by the Nazi politics of persecution, deportation, and murder.<sup>48</sup>

But it would be too easy to argue that the pre-war gender ratio could simply be re-established after the war. The new female experiences of being powerful and part of warfare did not cease to exist. After reading my presentation a friend of mine told me an American proverb: “How are you gonna keep them down on a farm after they’ve seen Paris?” That describes quite well what many female auxiliaries must have felt after the war. But at the same time they were happy that their agency sank into oblivion, as the whole extent of what they were part of became more and more obvious. They had participated in the Nazi war of annihilation. That they allegedly rather ‘helped’ than really participated in the war, had relieving implications; that they had been only *auxiliaries* helped them in coping with their past. Interestingly their need to express what war had meant to them breaks through in their memories. As mentioned above, many of the former auxiliaries explicitly told me that the wartime had been the best of their life.

Even if many women auxiliaries after the war avoided talking about their war-biographies trying to hide behind the picture of female innocence, female veteran groups (female comradeship was at least as important as male-female comradeship) made it, for example, possible to remember the “good times” of the war and the former position of power. And the male-female comradeship was vivid within marriages which were arranged during the war. Men who became acquainted with their later wife in military service supposedly after 1945 went on accepting their wife’s past. However, for women who were unmarried at the end of the war, it sometimes became difficult to find a man – their bad reputation was a major obstacle.

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<sup>48</sup> For the First World War, still see Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien* [*Male Fantasies*], 2 vols. (Basel: Roter Stern, 1986).

The long-lasting and intense conversations of Isolde and her boyfriend and later husband came to an end when Willy died in April 1945 leaving Isolde pregnant with twins. Obviously comradeship had disburdened them from living a traditional love-affair and marriage with clearly determined roles – which anyway was not possible during the war. Feelings of love and comradeship were mingled with each other showing how complex the relationship between soldiers and female auxiliaries really was. We only can guess about what the couple and former believing Nazis would have said and how they would have remembered the war and their place within it they were to be interviewed together.



GEORGETA NAZARSKA / SEVO YAVASHCHEV

## CHANGE IN GENDER ROLES

### THE PARTICIPATION OF BULGARIAN WOMEN IN WORLD WAR II

#### Introduction

The paper discusses a topic, unstudied in Bulgarian historiography until now from the perspective both of military history and the history of women. We intend to use as a framework formal documents (statistics and archival documents) and press materials, but will mainly base our discussion on alternative sources such as published and unpublished memoirs of women veterans, private correspondence and photographs.

The first objective of the paper is to highlight the role of the ideological motivation of women volunteers (most of them were followers of the Communist ideology) in the final stage of World War II (September 1944 - May 1945). We will do that with an overview of the place of women in the Bulgarian Resistance movement (1941-1944): as guerilla fighters, participants in battle groups in the cities, supporters of guerilla fighters (*yataks*), propaganda workers, and high ranking Communist figures. Second, the paper will study women's activity at the fronts (their participation in military compounds and service as nurses and orderlies) and in back areas (as activists of the ruling coalition, the Fatherland Front, in collecting food and clothing for soldiers at the front). In all these activities a substantial change in female gender roles can be observed.

#### State of Research

The current state of research regarding women and war consists of publications of sources (documents, memoirs, visual evidence), and of research on women's participation in military actions. These studies are mostly from the period 1944-1989. They are written primarily by military historians who observe women's participation in World War II in terms of the acqui-

sition of the army, military operations, and the state of logistics units.<sup>1</sup> A few of the publications aimed particularly at women.<sup>2</sup> During that period and in the 1990s some memories of women veterans were also published.<sup>3</sup> But they were written by women with communist beliefs, which focused mainly on their motivation and on heroism (their own and their female fellows). We should not ignore the fact that the published memoirs are the product of self-censorship and have gone through state censorship. Therefore they cannot be used (with some exceptions) as ego-documents: hardly any descriptions of emotions and gender experiences, or expressions of their own sexuality could be found. Unfortunately, even after 1989 in Bulgaria no memories were collected and published like the best experience in Russia (for example, Svetlana Alekseevich's book "The War's Unwomanly Face"). In this context, existing publications, though politically unsuitable, can be used for their data and major conclusions.

On the other hand, women's and gender studies in Bulgaria have a very short history. In the 1970s some surveys on the women's communist movement were issued. They are conducted after the mid-1990s and have so far focused on several research areas: feminism and feminist organizations; education, cultural activities and associations; charity and social work. Until now the participation of Bulgarian women in the war has not been the subject of special studies from the perspective of women's history. In 2011, long after our conference, a publication of Nikolai Vukov was issued.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ivan Tucheв, *Istoriya na Otechestvenata vojna na Balgaria, 1944-1945* [*History of the Patriotic War, 1944-1945*], vol. 1-2 (Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 1982); thereafter Tucheв, *Istoriya*; Boris Nikolov, *Istoriya na Otechestvenata vojna na Balgaria, 1944-1945* [*History of the Patriotic War, 1944-1945*], vol. 3 (Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 1983); thereafter Nikolov, *Istoriya*; Boris Stojnov, 'Bojnite grupi – edna ot formite na vaoryzhenata borba na balgarskii narod protiv fashizma, 1941-1944' ['Battle Groups - a Form of Armed Struggle of Bulgarian People against Fascism, 1941-1944'], *Istoricheski pregled* [*Historical Review*], 4 (1959), 132-56. Thereafter Stojnov, 'Bojnite'.

<sup>2</sup> Dimitrina Stereva, *Balgarkata v Otechestvenata vojna* [*Bulgarian Women in World War II*] (Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 1975). Thereafter Stereva, *Balgarkata*. Mehmedsaid Saidov, 'Uchastieto na zhenite ot Shumenski okrag v antifashistkata borba' ['Participation of Women from Shumen County in the Antifascist Struggle'], *Godishnik na muzeite v Severna Balgaria* [*Anniversary of Museums in Northern Bulgaria*], 6 (1981), 165-71. Thereafter Saidov, 'Uchastieto'.

<sup>3</sup> Evgenieva Tsvetana, *Na vojna bez povikvatelna* [*Volunteers on the Front*] (Sofia: Profizdat, 1985); Genka Zidarova, *Shogom, frontova mladost* [*Goodbye, Our Front Youth*] (Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 1990); Petko Radoev, *Zheni v shineli* [*Women in Military Coats*] (Sofia: P. Radoev, 1993). Thereafter Radoev, *Zheni*.

<sup>4</sup> See Nikolay Vukov, 'The Aftermaths of Defeat: The Fallen, the Catastrophe, and the Public Response of Women to the End of the First World War in Bulgaria', in Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *Women's Movements and Female Activists in the Aftermath of War: International Perspectives 1918-1923* (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2011), 29-47.

There he analyzes the role of women and women's movements in Bulgarian public life between World War I and World War II. It focuses on public commemorations and discourses related to deaths in the war.

### Bulgarian Women in the Interwar Period (1919 – 1939)

A radical change in the social status and activities of Bulgarian women took place after World War I. First, their educational opportunities were expanded. In the 1920-1930s many rural elementary schools and mixed schools in small towns were founded, and the number of professional female schools increased. At the same time, new female high schools opened their doors and new faculties at the Sofia University were founded.<sup>5</sup>

Bulgarian women had been entering the labor market en masse. The very first steps were in 1915-1919 when women substituted for mobilized men. The postwar situation forced many widows, female orphans, and unmarried women to start supporting themselves. They organized an Open doors movement, aiming to ensure unrestricted access to employment. The rationalization of industrial labor after 1926 facilitated the penetration of women in the labor market and for the feminization of certain enterprises in light industry. Despite the special protections of women's labor rights, women continued to be lower paid and unskilled.<sup>6</sup>

During the interwar period Bulgarian women achieved notable professional mobility, vertically and horizontally. They were appointed to high positions in ministries, hospitals, and schools. Women entered previously inaccessible institutions and male professions (e. g. engineering and architecture).<sup>7</sup>

The Bulgarian feminist movement made progress, too. Female associations were created based on common occupations and common interests. Some of these associations became members of international alliances. The

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<sup>5</sup> Georgeta Nazarska, *Universitetskoto obrazovanie i balgarskite zheni, 1879-1944* [University Education and Bulgarian Women, 1879-1944] (Sofia: IMIR, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Dimitar Nikolov, 'Zhenskijat naemen trud sled Parvata svetovna vojna' ['Female Wage Labor after World War I'], *Mlada balgarka* [Young Bulgarian Woman], 9-10 (1943), 39-40. Journal *Mlada balgarka* (1940-1943), editors in chief Milka Kodjabasheva and Dimitrana Ivanova), was issued by the Bulgarian female intellectuals involved in the boards of the Bulgarian Women's Union and the Bulgarian Association of University Women. Its objectives were to publish materials for "education, public life and home culture" of young women.

<sup>7</sup> Georgeta Nazarska, 'Dostapat na zhenite do balgarskata universitetska nauka, 1918-1944' ['Women's Access to Bulgarian University Science, 1918-1944'], *Istoricheski pregled* [Historical Review], 5-6 (2005), 116-47.

left wing of the Bulgarian feminist movement became more active. It was led by the illegal Bulgarian Communist Party. In 1937-1938 Bulgarian women obtained suffrage. Although it was a passive right to vote and restricted by the marital status of women, it was a great success of the Bulgarian Women's Union.<sup>8</sup>

### Bulgarian Women and Bulgaria's Participation in World War II (May 1940 – September 1944)

As World War II began, the Bulgarian government took steps to prepare the population. In May 1940 the Civil Mobilization Act was passed. It obliged all citizens aged 16-70, irrespective of their gender, to serve the state. With the assistance of the Directorate for Civil Mobilization Bulgarian women were appointed to positions typically reserved for men: in trade, industry, agriculture, health care, transport, air defense, and education. Women were affiliated with economic committees in the villages and participated in the management of agricultural cooperatives. In the 1940s a number of military training camps for civilians were created.<sup>9</sup> Feminist organizations also played a role in activating women. They proposed to the government to establish a Central Women's Committee affiliated to the Directorate for Civil Mobilization. According to the draft of the proposal, the Committee's local branches had to assist families of mobilized men, collect benefits and set up public kitchens for the poor.<sup>10</sup> Women's organizations activities were still in the field of traditional feminism and charity.

On March 1, 1941 Bulgaria became a formal ally of the Tripartite Pact but the government refused to submit Bulgarian Jews to German concentration camps (1943). Bulgarian troops did not fight on the Eastern Front against the USSR. To fulfill its obligations as an ally, the Bulgarian government and the Bulgarian Red Cross set up a sanitary train and a field

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<sup>8</sup> Krasimira Daskalova, 'Balgarskata nacionalna darzhava, modernizacijata i politicheskoto grazhdanstvo na zhenite, 1878-1944/1947' ['Bulgarian Nation State and Political Citizenship of Women, 1878-1944/1947'], *Kritika i humanizam* [Critics and Humanism], 30 (2009), 179-200; Tsveta Todorova, *BKP i zhenskoto komunisticheskoto dvizhenie v Balgaria, 1919-1944* [Bulgarian Communist Party and the Female Communist Movement in Bulgaria, 1919-1944] (Sofia: Partizdat, 1982), 31-33.

<sup>9</sup> Bosilka Simeonova, 'Zhenata vav voenno vreme' ['The Woman in Wartime'], *Mlada balgarka* [Young Bulgarian Woman], 2 (1940), 9; Milka Kodzhabasheva, 'Kooperativnata mobilizacija na zhenat' ['Cooperative Mobilization of Woman'], *Mlada balgarka* [Young Bulgarian Woman], 6-7 (1940), 29.

<sup>10</sup> Milka Kodzhabasheva, 'Zhenata pri grazhdanskata mobilizacija' ['The Woman in Civil Mobilization'], *Mlada balgarka* [Young Bulgarian Woman], 2 (1940), 2.

surgical hospital for humanitarian assistance to the wounded German and Allied soldiers.<sup>11</sup> All nurses in the train and the hospital were alumni from the Female Nursing School, but hospital attendants were run by the Bulgarian Red Cross.<sup>12</sup>

The Bulgarian field hospital (*Raserve Kriegslazarett*) was located in Jablonna, Legionowo County, near Warsaw. The staff of the hospital consisted of 96 people, 14 of them were women (nurses and hospital attendants).<sup>13</sup> Over time, the Bulgarian hospital in Jablonna treated hundreds of wounded and sick soldiers.

The Bulgarian sanitary train was composed of 16-17 cars. It was equipped with specialized equipment and its route was Warsaw – Riga – Leningrad – Sevastopol – Kiev. Over 30 Bulgarian doctors, including 6 nurses and hospital attendants cared for Germans, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Romanians, and Italians, military men and civilians, wounded and sick.<sup>14</sup> Patients were treated not only when the train stopped at a station, but often when the train was in motion. Along the route the train came under fire or crossed land mines placed by Polish partisans. In these difficult conditions nurses showed remarkable professionalism and took care of sick and wounded men.<sup>15</sup>

#### Participation of Bulgarian Women in the Communist Resistance Movement (June 1941 – September 1944)

During World War II Bulgaria was an ally of the Tripartite Pact but was not occupied by the Nazi troops. However, after June 1941 the Communist Party, acting on demands of the Soviet Union, organized a Resistance movement. It consisted of followers and members of the Communist Party and its subsidiaries from different social strata – peasants, workers, and intellectuals. The movement was led by the Communist International and

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<sup>11</sup> Bogdan Filov, *Dnevnik [Diary]* (Sofia: OF, 1990), 403-4.

<sup>12</sup> Nurses were recruited after completion of one of the 4 Nursing Schools of the Bulgarian Red Cross. The first one was founded in 1900 in Sofia with the participation of Russian specialists, but in the 1930s it was reformed by the Americans. The training course was 3 years. See Miladin Apostolov and Penka Ivanova, *Istoria na meditsinata I sestrunstvo [History of Medicine and Nursing]* (Sofia: Gorex Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Spas Razbojnikov, *Balgarskijat cherven krast na Istochnija front, 1941-1945 [Bulgarian Red Cross on the Eastern Front, 1941-1945]* (Sofia: Literaturno forum, 1996), 29-31, 64. Thereafter Razbojnikov, *Balgarskijat*.

<sup>14</sup> Razbojnikov, *Balgarskijat*, 9, 98, 106.

<sup>15</sup> Razbojnikov, *Balgarskijat*, 144.



its President Georgi Dimitrov, and by the Military Committee affiliated to the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

Many Bulgarian women participated actively in the Resistance movement.<sup>16</sup> Bulgarian women were driven by different motives: their own belonging to the working class, their participation in trade unions, in student or youth Communist societies, their membership in the Communist Party and their training in Communist schools in the Soviet Union. Some Jewish women were inspired by repressions against the Jewish minority in the early 1940s. In the 1930s most Bulgarian women were attracted to the Communist women's movement. Communist women's groups covered industry, students' associations, tourist circles, temperance societies, choirs, etc.<sup>17</sup> The Resistance movement consisted of women with different social backgrounds, education, occupation, marital status, and nationality (Bulgarian, Jewish, and Armenian).

Bulgarian women participated in the armed Resistance in various ways: they worked in leading positions in the Communist underground structures, participated in battle sabotage and diversionary groups; supported partisans; entered guerrilla detachments, squads and brigades; and were politically imprisoned.

Many women were elected to leadership roles in the illegal Communist Party, and were tasked with organizing and managing the Resistance movement. Such participation of women in the leadership of Bulgarian political parties was happening for the first time. It can be explained by the Communist ideology that promoted gender equality and wider participation of women in the Resistance movement. Until World War II women could establish their own groups within the right-wing parties and participated equally in the left-wing parties but had never incorporated their own governing bodies. In 1941-1944, Tsola Dragoycheva (1898-1993) was elected

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<sup>16</sup> It was quite different from its analogues in the Balkans, and in central and western Europe: Bulgaria was not occupied by the Nazi troops; the Resistance was led by the Communist Party and in the early 1940s consisted of a small number of followers; Bulgaria had some anti-Semitic restrictions, but Bulgarian Jews were not sent to concentration camps. For an overview compare Richard J. Crampton, *A Concise History of Bulgaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Fred B. Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution, 1940-1944* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972); Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975); Michael Bar-Zohar, *Beyond Hitler's Grasp: The Heroic Rescue of Bulgaria's Jews* (Holbrook: Adams Media Corporation, 1998); Evguenia Kalinova and Iskra Baeva, *La Bulgarie contemporaine entre l'Est et l'Ouest [Contemporary Bulgaria between the East and the West]* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Zdravka Vodenicharova and Nevena Popova, *Revoljutsionното zhensko dvizhenie v Balgaria [Revolutionary Women's Movement in Bulgaria]* (Sofia: OF, 1972), 177-88. Thereafter Vodenicharova and Popova, *Revoljutsionното*.

to the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Both she and Yordanka Chankova (1911-1944) were elected members of the Central Committee. Yordanka Chankova and Liliana Dimitrova (1918-1944) led the Communist youth organization, called RMS, and several women were appointed leaders of the Communist Party district committees. Additionally, they were all involved in establishing local Resistance committees, in organizing strikes, and in coordinating sabotage actions. As a result, they were prosecuted by police and gendarmes, arrested, sentenced to prison, and sent to internment camps. Some of them were killed in shootouts with police.<sup>18</sup>

In 1941 the Communist Party set up its own battle groups (i.e. sabotage or diversionary groups) in the cities where German military units had passed. These battle groups consisted of legal and illegal citizen who were tasked with burning and blowing up military targets and infrastructure sites (warehouses, tanks, trains, bridges etc.), killing politicians and military representatives with pro-Nazi views, and providing intelligence on Bulgarian and German military troops. In 1941-1942 about 358 actions were carried out.<sup>19</sup>

From the very beginning of the Resistance, women were involved in battle groups. At first they went with their male counterparts in a group to disguise the intentions, but later used knives and firearms and sometimes even led such groups. If they survived police prosecution, they were usually sent to join the guerrilla squads; others were caught by police and sent to prison. After the war ended many of the women who had died during the Resistance were pronounced “heroes” and became “icons” of the new regime (e.g. Anna Ventura, Violeta Yakova, etc.).<sup>20</sup>

In 1941-1944 the Communist Resistance established a network of supporters. Among the 2.000 members women, played a key role and a special Women’s Division of the Support Organization was established. Its objectives were: assisting political prisoners (with food, clothes and money), providing guerrilla units with food and weapons, and battle groups with flammable substances.<sup>21</sup> Assisting with arms supplies and the relationships with illegal and prosecuted persons brought women closer to the ‘male roles’, but other tasks they were performing (laundry, cooking, and sew-

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<sup>18</sup> Vodenicharova and Popova, *Revoljutsionnoto*, 192-93.

<sup>19</sup> Vodenicharova and Popova, *Revoljutsionnoto*, 197-98.

<sup>20</sup> Stojnov, ‘Bojnite’, passim; After 1944, some of these women posthumously were awarded with orders. Various industrial enterprises, schools, kindergartens, pioneering units, streets, squares etc., were named after them. Memories and books were written about them, and short films were made about them.

<sup>21</sup> Vodenicharova and Popova, *Revoljutsionnoto*, 196, 213-18.

ing) indicated that even the extreme leftist ideology was looking at women in the traditional way and was attributing to them their 'natural' obligations.

Women supporters (*yataks*) in the villages, who rarely belonged to the Communist Party but sympathized with the cause, supported the Resistance too. Their homes were designed to hide partisans and illegal Communist functionaries. They hid illegal printing presses. Women *yataks* were described by the partisans as "their mothers", i. e. women who fed them, washed and patched their clothes up.<sup>22</sup> Because of these traditional and nontraditional roles they were performing, women supporters were arrested, convicted and killed; their homes were burned. Women accused of illegal Communist activities or in supporting the Communist party were punished by the government in various ways: sent to camps and sentenced to prison.

According to published data in 1942, women accounted for 11.9 % (total 887) of all arrested people, in 1943 their rate was 12 % (total 16 489). These proportions are the reciprocal of their participation in the Resistance movement, but also evidence of increased women's political activity, unknown in the 1920-1930s. In April 1944 women represented 4.4 % (total 585) of Bulgarian political prisoners. Women prisoners were sent to women's prisons, sometimes staying there with their baby children.<sup>23</sup>

In the 1940s three internment camps for political opponents operated in the country. One of them, "St. Nicholas" nearby Asenovgrad, was female. During 1941-1944, 148 women passed through it. Some of them were high ranking figures of the Communist Party, others were partisan's supporters.<sup>24</sup>

In 1941 partisan detachments, squads and brigades were successively formed. They involved about 18.000 people with very diverse backgrounds, professions and motivations. By September 1944 women were participating in all guerrilla units. For example, only 9.2 % of the members of "Anton Ivanov" Guerilla Detachment which was active in the Rhodope Mountains were women; 89 women were fighting in the 2nd armed zone,

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<sup>22</sup> Vodenicharova and Popova, *Revoljutsionnoto*, 216.

<sup>23</sup> Vodenicharova and Popova, *Revoljutsionnoto*, 218-20.

<sup>24</sup> Vodenicharova and Popova, *Revoljutsionnoto*, 220-21; Penka Damianova, 'Kraj Rozoviia paraklis' ['Belong the Pink Chapel'], in *Spomeni za razni mesta i godini* [Memoirs from Various Places and Years], available at [http://www.omda.bg/bulg/slovo/memoirs/rozoviya\\_paraklis\\_1.htm](http://www.omda.bg/bulg/slovo/memoirs/rozoviya_paraklis_1.htm) (last visited 6 September 2011).

23 in the 9th armed zone.<sup>25</sup> This proves that there were some changes in gender roles, but they did not complete.

Women became partisans motivated not only by their communist beliefs but also after being ordered to do so by political structures. They joined partisan detachments together with their family members (fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, and sisters). The fact that they sometimes took their young children is indicative of the preservation of their traditional gender roles. In the squads women were principally engaged in logistics (cooking, sewing, washing, and bandaged the wounded) but also took some 'male' roles, e. g., appointed as political commissioners (the second most important position after the commander); skirmished with the police and gendarmes like men; sacrificed themselves for the team. Such examples can be found in the biographies of women partisans Kalina Veskova ("Chavdar" Brigade), Vela Peeva ("Anton Ivanov" Guerilla Detachment), Zhechka Karamfilova (Guerilla Detachment of Varna) and others.<sup>26</sup>

#### Participation of Bulgarian Women at the Front in the War against Nazi Germany (September 1944 – May 1945)

After the political change in Bulgaria in September 1944 the new government decided that Bulgaria should participate in the final stage of the war in Europe and raised the slogan: "Everything for the front, everything for victory!"

Bulgarian participation in the war against Nazi Germany had two phases. Initially, the Bulgarian army conducted campaigns in Macedonia and Serbia, later it liberated part of northern Yugoslavia, Hungary and reached the foot of the Alps. During the first phase the Bulgarian army launched four offensive operations against the Nazis under the command of the Third Ukrainian Front. During the second phase, as part of the Red Army, Bulgarian troops participated in a defensive and an offensive operation.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Doncho Donchev, 'Niakoi sociologicheski nabliudenija varhu sastava na partizanskija otriad "Anton Ivanov" ot II VOZ' ['Some Sociological Observations on Membership of "Anton Ivanov" Guerilla Detachment from 2<sup>nd</sup> Military Zone'], *Izvestia na Instituta po istoria na BKP [Proceedings of the Institute of History of the Bulgarian Communist Party]*, 21 (1969), 211. Thereafter Donchev, 'Niakoi'.

<sup>26</sup> Donchev, 'Niakoi', 197-215; Vodenicharova and Popova, *Revoljutsionnoto*, 198-213; Saidov, 'Uchastieto', passim.

<sup>27</sup> See Tuchevev, *Istoriija*; and Nikolov, *Istoriija*. Although published 30 years ago, these titles are still valid in Bulgarian historiography, because of the facts they consist of. Since 1989, the Bulgarian military historians have revised their theses on the participation of

According to the Bulgarian Military Service Act women could not serve in the army. Therefore, Bulgarian military authorities were surprised by the large number of women volunteers. Commanders received instructions to reject minor age volunteers. However, women who wished to participate in the war circumvented the restrictions of the military authorities and submitted false documents. The gender ratio in the divisions was not regulated, but women had to be aged 18-45 years. Younger girls were accepted with the permission of their parents. Everyone had to prove that they had not participated in the so-called fascist organizations.<sup>28</sup>

Bulgarian military authorities placed women in the guard divisions of the infantry. All women underwent a 30-day preliminary military training. Those who were assigned to military hospitals completed special training courses for nurses and hospital attendants as well. Women volunteers who had participated in the armed Resistance movement as partisans were sent straight to the front. The new government trusted them, and they used guerilla experience as its own symbolic capital.

4.218 Bulgarian women participated in the War against Nazi Germany. The largest number of them (about 17 %) were part of the guard and volunteer units. These units were made up of former partisans, members of battle groups, and political prisoners. During the first phase of the war about 3.700 women participated in the three Bulgarian armies totaling 450.000 people. Among them were: 720 women in combat units, 930 in front hospitals and 2.050 in the divisional and district hospitals. Women in combat units served as archers, scouts, gunners, machine gunners, actresses in front theaters, hospital attendants in logistics, etc.<sup>29</sup> During the second phase of the war, 518 Bulgarian women served in the army: 95 were in combat units, 395 were doctors, nurses and hospital attendants, and 28 were actresses and war correspondents in the Cultural Department of the General Staff of the Army.<sup>30</sup> During the two phases of the war against Nazi

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Bulgaria in the final phase of World War II. They affirmed the view that the war was not 'patriotic' but aimed to gain a better political status for the country (as an ally of the Atlantic coalition). Unfortunately, these ideas are still not reflected in the general collection; they are published in various books and articles.

<sup>28</sup> Tsentralen voenen arhiv [Central Military Archive], coll. 49, op. 11, a.e. 126, 105.

<sup>29</sup> Stereva, *Balgarkata*, 29.

<sup>30</sup> Dimitrina Stereva, 'Uchastieto na zhenite v Otechestvenata vojna, 1944-1945 g.' ['Women's Participation in World War II, 1944-1945'], *Izvestija na Voennoistoricheskoto nauchno druzhestvo* [Proceedings of the Military Historical Scientific Society], 13 (1972), 152. Thereafter Stereva, 'Uchastieto'.

Germany, 6 women were killed and 2 others died of their wounds before the war was over.<sup>31</sup>

In the autumn of 1944 women participated in all four offensive operations of the Bulgarian army, storming bunkers, trenches and hideouts of the Nazi troops. Women also participated as hospital attendants caring for the wounded soldiers. In some cases, women provided water to cool overheated barrels of machine guns or brought ammunition to the soldiers during battles.<sup>32</sup>

Commanders often sent women soldiers behind frontlines to reconnoitre the location, size and armament of enemy troops. Sometimes women captured enemy soldiers and officers. A few women were elected to be standard-bearers; as usual, these were former partisans and members of battle groups.<sup>33</sup>

During the first phase of the war a squad existed formed entirely of women and commanded by a woman and former partisan, Valka Tashevska. She died on the battlefield after being lethally wounded when trying to destroy a Nazi tank. Tashevska was promoted to lieutenant, awarded a gold "For Courage" Order, first class, and became the first woman raised to officer's rank in the Bulgarian Army.<sup>34</sup> Definitely her image was exploited by the communist propaganda after the war, but it is an indisputable fact that she made a breakthrough in the understanding of the army as a 'male space' and of the war as a 'male work'.

Bulgarian Army women became role models for the strength and determination to win. For the bravery they demonstrated some were awarded orders and medals, others were promoted to higher military ranks.

About 518 women from the 1<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian Army participated in the Battle of Drava (March 6-22, 1945). Some of them had participated in the first phase of the war. In those defensive operations, women were usually in the most dangerous positions and fully performed 'male' gender roles. For example, Tinka Grabcheva of the 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment did not leave the fortified positions until the end of the battle. In ten months she took off her boots only three times. The memoirs of her mates described her as brave and someone capable of calming down her male colleagues. She provided first aid to them while saying: "Behave like a man, what is this whining!"

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<sup>31</sup> Tosko Hristozov, *Imena, izsecheni v stomana* [Names Carved in Steel] (Sofia: Voenna izdatelstvo, 1983).

<sup>32</sup> Tsvetana Evgenieva, *Na vojna bez povikvatelna* [Volunteers on the Front] (Sofia: Profizdat, 1985).

<sup>33</sup> Stereva, 'Uchastieto', 144.

<sup>34</sup> Stereva, 'Uchastieto', 147.

Shame on you!”<sup>35</sup> Women from the General Staff and from the divisions’ headquarters helped officers but during battles they were at the front lines where they worked as hospital attendants.<sup>36</sup>

About 930 women were involved as nurses, hospital attendants, administrative staff in hospitals, etc., during the first phase of the war. Severely injured patients that required long term treatment were sent to military hospitals in Bulgaria. For example, all 16 military hospitals that existed in Sofia were staffed by female volunteers.<sup>37</sup>

During the second phase of the war about 81 of 95 women soldiers (84.3 %) were hospital attendants. Most of them served in hospitals and dressing stations where they assisted doctors. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Military Surgical Hospital 12 women worked. 2.599 sick and injured soldiers and soldiers with frostbite injuries passed through the hospital from September 1944 to May 1945. As a result of the care provided by the nurses the mortality rate was reduced to 1.6 %.<sup>38</sup>

On April 5, 1945, when the new alumni of the Female Nursing School graduated, a group of 32 hospital attendants were immediately sent to the front.<sup>39</sup> Thanks to the care and blood transfusions they provided, hundreds of wounded soldiers were saved.<sup>40</sup>

During the second phase of the war a number of female war correspondents and actresses were part of the Cultural Department of the General Staff. Five war correspondents were involved in the issue of the *Frontovak* newspaper, a publication of the First Bulgarian Army, and of the comic *Chasovoj* newspaper. They also worked on some divisional and regimental newspapers and promotional boards.<sup>41</sup>

Three theater companies were sent to the front in Hungary. Out of the total staff of 74, 21 (28 %) were women.<sup>42</sup> Actors performed during breaks between battles and in hospitals in front of wounded soldiers.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Stereva, ‘Uchastieto’, 154; Radoev, *Zheni*.

<sup>36</sup> Tsentralen darzhaven arhiv [Central State Archives, hereafter abbreviated CSA], coll. 763, op. 2, a.e. 88, 132.

<sup>37</sup> CSA, coll. 7, op. 1, a.e. 141, 208; Genka Zidarova, *Shogom, frontova mladost* [Goodbye, Our Front Youth] (Sofia: Voenno izdatelstvo, 1990).

<sup>38</sup> Narodna vojska [National Army Newspaper], no. 279, 26 June 1945.

<sup>39</sup> Central Military Archive, coll. 3, op. 3, a.e. 58, 17-18.

<sup>40</sup> Central Military Archive, coll. 3, op. 3, a.e. 58, 157.

<sup>41</sup> Frontovak [Soldier Newspaper], no. 104, 29 May 1945.

<sup>42</sup> Georgi Stamatov, ‘Teatarat na vojna’ [‘Theatre of War’], *Balgarski voin* [Bulgarian Soldier Magazine], 4 (1955), 18.

<sup>43</sup> Otechestven front [Fraternal Front Newspaper], no. 23, 26 November 1944; Otechestven front, no. 1184, 3 June 1945.



### Activity of Bulgarian Women in the Back Areas during the War against Nazi Germany (September 1944 – May 1945)

After the military *coup d'état* on September 9, 1944 and the invasion of the Red Army Fatherland Front (FF), the center-left coalition dominated by the Communist Party came to power in Bulgaria. In October 1944 the Government issued a Gender Equality Decree, according to which Bulgarian women received full civil and political rights.<sup>44</sup> This was the result of not only the longstanding efforts of the Bulgarian feminist movement and the leftist ideology of the ruling parties, but a strategic step by the government to constitute women as an important factor in the proposed political and social changes. Indeed, the acquisition of full civil rights motivated many women to support the initiatives of the new government, including the participation of Bulgaria in the final phase of World War II. Understandably the press wrote: "The activity of women is extraordinary. [...] Never before has there been such a widespread [...] movement on their part."<sup>45</sup>

At the same time a radical change began in the Bulgarian feminist movement. The Board of the Bulgarian Women's Union (the main feminist organization founded in 1901 and a member of the International Council of Women) was removed and put in jail. It was replaced with representatives of the ruling coalition and became a mass state-controlled association. Lots of rural branches were established: there were 980 branches with 94.200 members (1944); and 2.373 branches (65 % in villages) with 200.000 members (1945).<sup>46</sup> The Bulgarian Women's Union was already setting further political tasks, including the work by women in support of the fronts. Just a year later, in June 1945, the Bulgarian Women's Union transformed into the Bulgarian National Women's Union (BNWU), a mass organization of a totalitarian type placed completely under the control of the Communist Party.

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<sup>44</sup> Ivajlo Bojanov Znepolski, *Istoriya na NRB. Rezhimat i obshtestvoto [History of People's Republic of Bulgaria. The Regime and the Society]* (Sofia: IIBM, 2009), 99; Vodenicharova and Popova, *Revoljutsionnoto*, 234.

<sup>45</sup> Vodenicharova and Popova, *Revoljutsionnoto*, 237.

<sup>46</sup> Krasimira Trifonova, 'Harakter i organizacionno razvitie na BNZhS, 1944-1950' ['Characteristics and Organizational Development of Bulgarian National Women's Movement, 1944-1950'], *Izvestia na Instituta po istoria na BKP [Proceedings of the Institute of History of the Bulgarian Communist Party]*, 47 (1982), 282; Iliyana Marcheva, 'Zhenskoto dvizhenie v Balgaria i negovata sadba prez perioda septemvri 1944 – juni 1945 g.' ['Women's Movement in Bulgaria and its Fate during September 1944 – June 1945'], *Minalo [Past]*, 1 (1995), 73; thereafter Marcheva, 'Zhenskoto'. Asen Kalinkov, *Pomoshtnoto dvizhenie v Balgaria, 1944-1945 [Support Movement in Bulgaria]* (Sofia: OF, 1969), 51. Thereafter Kalinkov, *Pomoshtnoto*.



The FF coalition focused its propaganda on those Bulgarian women who did not belong to the Bulgarian National Women's Union. A Supreme Women's Committee was established with the National Committee of the FF. Shortly afterwards its local branches were formed (September 1944), and female functionaries began spreading propaganda among rural and urban women by carrying the slogan "Everything for the front, everything for victory!"<sup>47</sup> During the war period (September 1944 – May 1945) the majority of Bulgarian women were under the influence of women's organizations and government propaganda.

At the initiative of and under the control of the BNWU and the female committees of the FF, Bulgarian women were engaged in diverse activities. Those who worked in industrial enterprises attended to the movement to increase productivity by at least 20 % in support of the fronts.<sup>48</sup>

As soldiers were being sent to the front, women organized refreshment points at railway stations and in the cities. Subsequently, they were extremely committed to helping soldiers' families. They provided produce and money, helped with sowing crops and raising children and with applications for state subsidies. At work and at home women played a key role in the preparation of parcels for the front. They visited their neighbors and friends, collected money, sewed clothes and underwear, knitted socks, gloves and sweaters, and cooked.<sup>49</sup> In her letter to the front Yordanka Gerdeva, a pupil, wrote: "We unravel our blouses to knit sweaters for you".<sup>50</sup> The prepared packages were usually mailed but in the spring of 1945 female delegations carried them to the frontline, demonstrating the solidarity of the back areas.<sup>51</sup> At the initiative of the BNWU during the first phase of the war four trains with parcels were sent; more than 105.000 parcels were sent during the war.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Kalinkov, *Pomoshtnoto*.

<sup>48</sup> Stoyan Tanev, 'Prinosat na Pomoshtnata organizaciia za materialnoto osiguruvane na BNA po vreme na Otechestvenata vojna, 1944-1945' ['The Contribution of Auxiliary Organization for Providing Bulgarian Army during World War II, 1944-1945'], *Voennoistoricheski sbornik [Military Historical Review]*, 1 (1967), 62-75.

<sup>49</sup> Vodenicharova and Popova, *Revoljutsionnoto*, 233; Kalinkov, *Pomoshtnoto*, 51-69.

<sup>50</sup> Stereva, *Balgarkata*, 35.

<sup>51</sup> During the Balkan Wars just so-called Samaritan woman (nurses) had travelled to the front. During World War II female delegations going to the front were driven not by women. This practice was introduced by the Soviet pattern and under the leadership of the Communist Party, the Fatherland Front and the Bulgarian People's Women's Union. Traveling was not an intimate act (e.g., an expression of loyalty and love), but a political demonstration of the unity of the nation.

<sup>52</sup> Dimitar Stoianov, 'Iz dejnostta na Partiiata i masovite organizacii v Plovdivski okrag v pomosht na fronta prez Otechestvenata vojna' ['From the Work of the Party and Mass Organizations in the Plovdiv Region to Support the Front during World War II'], *Izvestia*

Women in the cities initially visited military hospitals to bring food and furniture for the wounded soldiers but later some of them started working as hospital attendants. In their memories soldiers describe these women as “their mothers” who cared for their hygiene and health.<sup>53</sup>

Women’s committees with the FF and the Support Organization played an important role in the adoption of about 14.000 children from Yugoslavia in late 1944. As they suffered from a rare skin disease, they were treated in Bulgaria at the expense of the government. Their hospital attendants and governesses until 1948 were mainly Bulgarian women<sup>54</sup>

This background information seems to show the preservation of female gender roles in the back areas. However, we should not overlook the political activity of another group of Bulgarian women. In the spring of 1945, under the influence of the new opposition’s propaganda, women organized protest meetings in villages demanding the end of the war and the return of the army from Hungary.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusions

During World War II, similarly to women in central, eastern and southeastern Europe, Bulgarian women radically changed the traditionally established pattern of gender hierarchy and acquired new gender roles. This was observed both in the back areas and in the front.

Bulgaria participated in World War II as a non-belligerent ally of the Tripartite Pact (1941-1944). In the back areas Bulgarian women replaced mobilized men in the work place and entered the labor market practicing professions formerly dominated by men. They actually expanded the public sphere, a process that had begun during World War I and was developed during the interwar period.

During World War II an armed Resistance movement emerged in the country led by the Communist Party and its leftist political formations. A lot of young women motivated by their political views and social affiliations were involved in its various forms (military groups in the cities and

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na Instituta po istoria na BKP [Proceedings of the Institute of History of the Bulgarian Communist Party], 22 (1969), 269-88. Thereafter Stoianov, ‘Iz dejnostta’.

<sup>53</sup> Stoianov, ‘Iz dejnostta’.

<sup>54</sup> Penka Damianova, ‘Za edna izcheznala snimka i za oshte neshto...’ [‘For One Disappeared Photo and Else’], in *Spomeni za razni mesta i godini* [Memoirs from Various Places and Years], available at [http://www.omda.bg/bulg/slovo/memoirs/izcheznala\\_snimka\\_1.htm](http://www.omda.bg/bulg/slovo/memoirs/izcheznala_snimka_1.htm) (last visited 6 September 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Marchecheva, ‘Zhenskoto’, 71-72.

guerrilla forces). Some of them were killed, others landed in prisons or internment camps and others remained outlaws until political change. The participation in the Resistance became for many of them a decisive factor in their appointments as high ranking officials and political functionaries after 1944. For others it resulted in a higher social status. Women who died as partisans, supporters or members of military groups were canonized by the Communist propaganda and proclaimed as national heroines. They entered the national pantheon already equal to men.

By 1944 Bulgarian women had participated in the national liberation movement and in the wars in their 'traditional' gender roles. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century they had been included in paramilitary formations, preparing ammunition, sewing flags and clothes for the rebels. During the four wars that Bulgaria led after the Liberation (1878) – the Serbo-Bulgarian War (1885), the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and World War I (1915-1919) – hundreds of women became nurses and hospital attendants in the back areas. Many of them were awarded military orders and medals, some were elevated in rank.<sup>56</sup> These 'traditional' roles continued to exist in 1944-1945: the majority of female volunteers were employed as hospital attendants, cooks, actresses, correspondents, and managers, i. e., away from danger and death. Women from the back areas also preserved their 'traditional' functions.

A significant change of gender roles can be seen in two aspects. The first aspect is the participation of women as soldiers at the front. Ever since entering the army, women made efforts to make up for the lack of military skills and experience, to gain physical strength and to catch up with their male colleagues. Some of them did this with courage and perseverance: they made long trips, participated in fights, bore difficult terrain and weather conditions, slept in the open trenches, carried stretchers with wounded soldiers and died like male soldiers. They compensated for their weaker physique with their will and spirit. That is why memories of female war survivors paint two main perceptions of the war – the horror of death and the smell of blood.

If during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) only 4 women volunteers fought at the front, by May 1945 about 815 women participated in military operations equally with men, and some of them were killed or died of their wounds. About 33 of them were awarded the highest military honor, the "For Courage" Order.

The second aspect of the significant change was the increasing political activity of Bulgarian women. It was not comparable to the feminist move-

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<sup>56</sup> Ivan Stoychev, 'Zheni, kavaleri na ordena "Za hrabrost"' ['Women Chevaliers of "For Courage" Order'], *Izrev [Sunrise]*, 6 May 1948.

ment in the previous period and brought civil and political benefits for women, i. e., equalization of genders and participation in government.

However the policy of equality, which guided the Communist government in 1944-1989, was not argued with the participation of Bulgarian women in World War II. This policy was inspired mainly by the Soviet model and the program of the Communist Party. As a result, it creates the image of woman as worker, social activist and mother. Bulgarian women received full suffrage (1944); by the 1980s almost all women worked outside the home, their educational status increased, they had access to all political and other state organizations.<sup>57</sup>

Postwar biographies and careers of women who had participated in World War II were different. Many used this symbolic capital to continue their education and carve successful political and professional careers for themselves. However, almost none of them remained in the Bulgarian army as officers and were not appointed to higher ranks. Until 1989, the command staff was composed entirely of men. An interesting fact is also that women were allowed a minimal involvement in the so-called Union of Fighters Against Fascism and Capitalism. They were displaced by men, some of whom did not even participate in the Resistance movement.<sup>58</sup>

The fate of women who worked in the field hospital and in the sanitary train of the Bulgarian Red Cross in Poland and Ukraine was dramatic. Doctors and nurses were accused of “fascist action” and were discharged from Bulgarian hospitals.<sup>59</sup>

Future studies on this issue are needed. They should attract new sources and consider the war and women’s participation in it from the gender perspective, namely: to explore changes in the construction and expression of female identity in wartime and the front line; to study issues of sexuality and marital relations; to focus on the impact of war on the power positions of women.

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<sup>57</sup> See Johanna Deimel, ‘Bewegte Zeiten – Frauen in Bulgarien gestern und heute’ [‘Moving Times – Women in Bulgaria Yesterday and Today’], *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft in Südosteuropa*, 13, 1 (1998), 71-85; Ulf Brunnbauer, “Die sozialistische Lebensweise”: *Ideologie, Gesellschaft, Familie und Politik in Bulgarien (1944-1989)* [‘Socialist mode of living’: *Ideology, Society, Family and Politics in Bulgaria (1944-1989)*] (Wien: Böhlau, 2007); Karin Taylor, ‘Our Own Rhythm of Life – Young People and Marriage in Bulgaria in the 1960s and 70s’, in Klaus Roth, ed., *Sozialismus: Realitäten und Illusionen* [Socialism: Realities and Illusions] (Vienna: Institute of European Ethnology, 2005), 155-68.

<sup>58</sup> See Milena Angelova, *(Ne) spodelenata pamet na kasnia sotsializam. Dvizhenieto “Narodnata pamet razkazva”, 1983-1989* [(Not) shared Memory of Late Socialism. The “People’s Memory Says” Movement, 1983-1989] (Sofia: Semarch, 2010), 86-90.

<sup>59</sup> Razbojnikov, *Balgarskijat*, 11, 89.



### III GENDER ROLES AND GENDERED IDENTITIES IN PARTISAN MOVEMENTS



RUTH LEISEROWITZ

## IN THE LITHUANIAN WOODS

### JEWISH AND LITHUANIAN FEMALE PARTISANS

#### The research subject and the issues

The thick Lithuanian forests provided in the 1940s a stage for a divided history. During rather short periods of time, women and men fought here as members of different underground formations and with different goals. It was here that women for the first time were seen in uniforms and with machine guns – sights that prior to 1941 would have been inconceivable and hard to imagine for the society in Lithuania. The events of the war led to radical social changes that to a large extent, especially with regard to social and gender-historical consequences, have not yet been studied adequately. That permits the question: To what extent were women in Lithuania involved in military action during the Second World War and in the post-war era? What long-term consequences arose from that?

I will look at women from different ethnic backgrounds and at their activities in a relatively small territory measuring just over 65.000 m<sup>2</sup>, an area known as Lithuania or – as it was formerly known – the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic.<sup>1</sup> The subject of my interest is women in two partisan movements. I will consider the Jewish female partisans who left the Kaunas und Vilnius ghettos in 1943 to fight the German occupying forces in the Lithuanian forests, and the Lithuanian female partisans who revolted against the Soviet occupation of their country between 1944 and 1953. The starting point and setting for the activities of these women were the dense Lithuanian woods, which in the 1940s served in quick succession

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<sup>1</sup> Antje Bruhns, Susanne Dähler and Konstantin Kreiser, 'Estland, Lettland, Litauen – drei Länder, eine Einheit' ['Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania – Three Countries, One Unit'], *Arbeitsberichte* 70, Geographisches Institut (2002), 21. Thereafter Bruhns, Dähler and Kreiser, 'Drei Länder'.



as a fighting base for very different political groups and interests.<sup>2</sup> I will deal with a time period that reaches beyond the general break point of the war's end in 1945. It is a special feature of the Eastern European history of the Second World War that its military operations did not end in the summer of 1945, but rather the armed struggle raged on in numerous regions.

This paper intends to point out that here on the periphery of Central Europe (as in many other areas of Europe), women got involved in the structures and mechanisms of power which (1) for the most part, lay outside of their usual lives and in which (2) they frequently took on new duties. So my effort will be to sketch out a spectrum of partisan activities participated in by women in Lithuania in the 1940s. That will involve asking several questions: 1) about the motives for the respective decisions to join up with these very diverse groups, 2) about the role which was assigned there to the women and young girls, or which they themselves carved out according to the gender relations in the respective groups, and 3) about the gender representations in the respective groups of partisans. Lastly, this perspectival view is supposed to help highlight how gender roles in the post-war society of the Lithuanian Soviet Republic were configured based on the military activities of women.

### Current State of the Research and the Sources

On the one hand, it makes sense to consider a summary of the movements that took place in rapid temporal and spatial succession. But on the other hand, Jewish history and Lithuanian national history form two entirely separate strands. In aiming for a summary of particular phenomena, I will attempt to use the prism of gender to analyze phases of radicalization. And then, the situation of women will be considered through the perspective of the Lithuanian and Jewish resistance. My aim is to demonstrate the general changes in gender roles that took place as a consequence of war, occupation, the extermination of the Jews, and the post-war situation in Lithuania.

The story of the armed Jewish resistance in Lithuania has been told and investigated many times since the end of the 1940s.<sup>3</sup> After the restoration

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<sup>2</sup> Forests cover 36 pct of Lithuanian land area. Bruhns, Dähner and Kreiser, 'Drei Länder', 21.

<sup>3</sup> Szmerke Kaczerginski, *Partizaner geyen! – (fartseykhenungen fun Vilner Geto)* [*Go to the Partisans! – (Notices from Vilna Ghetto)*] (Buenos Ayres: Tsentral farband fun Poylishe Yidn in Argentine, 1947); Meir Yelin, *Partizaner fun Kaunaser geto* [*Partisans from Ghetto Kaunas*] (Moskve: Emes, 1948); Moshe Kahanowitz, 'Why no Separate Jewish Partisan Movement was Established During World War II', *Yad Vashem Studies*, 1 (1957), 153-67; Mejeris Eglinis-Elinas and Dmitri Gelpernas, *Kauno getas ir jo kovotojai* [*Ghetto*

of Lithuanian independence in 1990, former male and female partisans who had remained in Lithuania then wrote their memoirs. These memory texts were published in Lithuanian, yet received little comment in the Lithuanian public arena. My sources for the Jewish group are the life stories and memoirs of three Jewish women: Fanya Brancovskaya (born 1922)<sup>4</sup>, Rachel Margolis (born 1921)<sup>5</sup> and Sarah Genaitė-Rubinsonienė (born 1924).<sup>6</sup> Up to now, there has been relatively little research on the Lithuanian image of women in the 1940s, since research on women has concentrated itself more so on sociological and political science themes than on gender history.<sup>7</sup> Two collections of women's biographies have appeared in recent years.<sup>8</sup>

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*Kaunas and his fighters*] (Vilnius: Mintis, 1969). Thereafter Eglinis-Elinas and Gelpernas, *Kauno*; Lester S. Eckman, *The Jewish Resistance: The History of the Jewish Partisans in Lithuania and White Russia During the Nazi Occupation, 1940-1945* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1977); Chaim E. Lazar Litai, *Destruction and Resistance* (New York: Shengold Publishers in cooperation with the Museum of Combatants and Partisans in Israel, 1985); Farband fun partizaner, untergrunt-kemfers un geto-oysfhtendlers in Yiśroel und Zunia Shtrom, *Hurbn un kamf: (fun Kovner geto tsu di Rudnitsker velder): zikhroynes [Destruction and Struggle: (From the Kovno Ghetto to Wood of Rudnickai): Memories]* (Tel-Aviv: Aroysgegebn fun "Farband fun partizaner untergrunt-kemfers un geto-oysfhtendlers in Yiśroel", 1990); Aleks Faitelson, *Heroism & Bravery in Lithuania, 1941-1945* (New York: Gefen Books, 1996); Moshe R. Shutan, *Ghetto and Forest* (Israel: Organization of Partisans Underground Fighters and Ghetto Rebels, 2005); Anita Walke, *Jüdische Partisaninnen: Der verschwiegene Widerstand in der Sowjetunion [Jewish Women Partisans. The Discreet Resistance in the Soviet Union]* (Berlin: Dietz, 2007); Dina Porat, *The Fall of a Sparrow: The Life and Times of Abba Kovner* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Fanya Brancovskaja-Jocheles, 'Fanya Brancovskaja-Jocheles', in Diana Bartkute-Barnard, ed., *Su adata sirdyje: Getu ir koncentracijos stovyklų kalinių atsiminimai [With a needle in the heart]* (Vilnius: Garnelis, 2003), 45-54; Fanya Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview by Zhanna Litinskaya 2002, available at [http://centropa.org/module/ebooks/files/LT\\_Brantomovskaya\\_A4.pdf](http://centropa.org/module/ebooks/files/LT_Brantomovskaya_A4.pdf) (last visited 25 March 2011). Thereafter Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview.

<sup>5</sup> Margolis, Rachel, Franziska Bruder, and Gudrun Schroeter, *Als Partisanin in Wilna: Erinnerungen an den jüdischen Widerstand in Litauen [As Partisan in Vilna. Remembering the Jewish Resistance in Lithuania]* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2008); thereafter Margolis, Bruder, and Schroeter, *Partisanin Wilna*. Rachel Margolis, *Partisan of Vilna* (Brighton: Academic Studies, 2010). Thereafter Margolis, *Partisan*.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo knyga: Kauno žydų bendruomenė 1941-1944 metais [Book of Memories. The Jewish Community of Kovno 1941-1944]* (Vilnius: Margi raštai, 1999). Thereafter Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*.

<sup>7</sup> Rūta G. Vėliūtė, *Partizanai [Partisans]* (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2009). Thereafter Vėliūtė, *Partizanai*.

<sup>8</sup> Dalia Leinarte, ed., *Adopting and Remembering Soviet Reality: Life Stories of Lithuanian Women, 1945-1970* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010); Dalia Marcinkevičienė, *Prijaukintos kasdienybės, 1945-1970 metai: Biografiniai Lietuvos moterų interviu [Accustomed Everyday*

There exists one article about female Lithuanian partisans.<sup>9</sup> However, in the last 20 years, numerous individual recollections from members of the armed resistance have appeared.<sup>10</sup> The subject of the armed resistance, utterly taboo in the Soviet era, has now become a hugely politicized tale of heroism. A recently published monograph by Mindaugas Pocius<sup>11</sup>, which views the resistance critically and analyzes as well its crimes and acts of terror, has been quite strongly criticized by the broader Lithuanian public.<sup>12</sup> The life stories of female Lithuanian partisans were put out in memory volumes and individual publications, as for example, the life stories of the currier Nina Nausėdaitė-Rasa (born 1924)<sup>13</sup> and Anelė Devyžytė-Marcinkevičienė-Klajūnė (born 1923)<sup>14</sup>.

There are more complete autobiographical accounts from female Jewish partisans in Lithuania than there are from female fighters in the Lithuanian partisan movements. After the war, the first group had the possibility to catch up on vocational training or university studies<sup>15</sup>, whereas the Lithuanians, after serving out their sentences were, as a rule, denied advanced training or university studies.<sup>16</sup> Many Lithuanian women had their life

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1945-1970: *Biographical interviews with Lithuanian women*] (Vilnius: Vilniaus Univ. Leidykla, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Žaneta Smolskutė, 'Moteryų dalyvavimo ginkluotame pasipriešinime 1944–1953 m. ypatumai' ['Special Aspects of Women Share in the Armed Resistance 1944–1953'], *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2, 20 (2006), available at <http://www.genocid.lt/centras/lt/449/a/> (last visited 25 March 2011). Thereafter Smolskutė, 'Moteryų'.

<sup>10</sup> Antanina Garmutė, *Motinėlė, auginai* [Mother, You have brought up] (Kaunas: Spindulys, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Mindaugas Pocius, *Kita Mėnulio Pusė: Lietuvos partizanų kova su kolaboravimu 1944-1953 metais* [The other Side of the Moon: The Struggle of Lithuanian Partisans with Collaboration in the years 1944-1953] (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Mindaugas Jackevičius interviews Liudas Truska, 'L.Truska: partizanavimui reikėjo drąsos, tačiau ką galėjo padaryti žalia kaimo berneliai', available at <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/ltruska-partizanavimui-reikejo-drastos-taciau-ka-galejo-padaryti-zalio-kaimo-berneliai.d?id=43058983> (last visited 25 March 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Nina Nausėdaitė-Rasa, 'Ne vien duona gyvi...' ['You live not only from bread...'], *Laisvės kovų archyvas*, 12 (1994), 147-63. Thereafter Nausėdaitė-Rasa, 'Ne vien duona gyvi...'.  
<sup>14</sup> Anelė Devyžytė-Marcinkevičienė-Klajūnė, 'Juodi debesys virš Dzūkijos' ['Dark clouds over Dzūkija'], *Laisvės kovų archyvas*, 22 (1997), 178-86. Thereafter Devyžytė-Marcinkevičienė-Klajūnė, 'Juodi'.

<sup>15</sup> Brancovskaya, Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė and Margolis pursued further studies, and the last two received their doctorates.

<sup>16</sup> Nina Nausėdaitė wanted to study after her return from the camp in Siberia, and even though she twice passed the entrance exam, she was turned down for admission by the party organization of the university. Nausėdaitė-Rasa, 'Ne vien duona gyvi...', 162.

stories written down by others since they did not have confidence in their own writing. These were, however, as a rule quite embellished by the actual writers and so do not really represent an autobiographical account.

### Partisan Groups in Lithuanian Territory since 1942

The Soviet Republic of Lithuania was occupied by the German army on 22. June 1941 without any great struggle. It was only later that a resistance took shape, directed initially from Moscow.<sup>17</sup> The central staff of the Soviet partisans, which was set up at the end of May 1942, instructed the leading members of the Lithuanian communist party in Soviet exile to organize under its leadership a resistance movement against the German occupation. Groups were formed in the woods, joined among others by escaped Soviet prisoners of war. The partisans were coordinated from Moscow. The Jewish resistance in the ghettos of Wilna and Kaunas got into contact with these groups. In just that first half year of the German occupation, 85 % of the Jewish population had been murdered and the liquidation was continuing. Jewish groups sought opportunities to fight against the occupation.<sup>18</sup> In Wilna, a joint resistance organization was formed with the merging of communist and Zionist groups under the name *Fareinigte Partisaner Organisatzije* (FPO). In Kaunas in 1942, the *Anti-Fascist Fighting Organization* (AKO) was formed. The members of the Wilna group left the ghetto in September 1943 heading toward Rūdninkai, and from Kaunas many more groups came in December and January into the forested mountains.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, units of the Polish *Armia Krajowa* began to operate in Lithuanian territory, especially active in the former Polish district of Wilna, seeing themselves as defenders of the Polish region. From the summer of 1944 on, as the German army was in retreat and the Red Army once again occupied Lithuania, Lithuanian men took to the woods because they wanted to avoid Soviet conscription. As long as the newly established power did not put any pressure on the family members of those who were to be mobilized, their wives remained at home.

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<sup>17</sup> Romuald J. Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of dependence, 1940-1990*, Expanded and updated ed. (London: Hurst, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> Arūnas Bubnys, *The Holocaust in Lithuania between 1941 and 1944* (Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Šarunas Liekis, 'Jewish Partisans and Soviet Resistance', in David Gaunt, ed., *Collaboration and Resistance During the Holocaust: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania* (Bern: Lang, 2004), 459-78. Thereafter Liekis, 'Partisans'.

In the middle of the 1940s, the Lithuanians had the idea that the allies would provide armed aid against the Soviet occupation of the Baltic region and that either in the short- or the long-term it would lead to an invasion. The Soviet Union in 1946 and the following years nurtured rumors of an imminent new war, since through that the flow of people into the forests grew larger and the Red Army could fight in a more focused way using armed forces against these enemies of sovietization. A Lithuanian partisan movement arose which operated primarily in the countryside, relying on either the voluntary or forced delivery of provisions from the farmers. In order to break the national resistance, in October 1946 twelve troop regiments of the Soviet Interior Ministry were deployed. In 1948, the forced collectivization of the famers began. Those who refused were sent in 1948 and 1949 by the tens of thousands to Siberia. In that way it was possible to weaken the partisan movement, which ended in 1953.

All partisan movements were based on the military structures of the various armies. Their commanders came from the Red Army, or had served in the Polish or Lithuanian forces. These armies were all designed as entirely male domains. This meant that the leading partisan groups also thought of the units as male domains, automatically affirming this gender construction and cultivating it along with all its associated characteristics.

### How Did Women Become Partisans

In the time period 1943-1944, there were about 2000 Jewish partisans in Lithuania<sup>20</sup>, and of them at most 15 % were women.<sup>21</sup> The Lithuanian resistance movement operated over a longer time period, specifically, from 1944 until 1953. If there were up to 30.000 partisans in 1945, their number was reduced to about 500 by 1953.<sup>22</sup> Of the total number of the whole period one can show after an initial analysis that there were around 250 active women.<sup>23</sup> One can assume that in the two groups of women, we are dealing with a small age-range. Those who joined the female partisans, regardless of whether they were Jewish or Lithuanian, were almost exclu-

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<sup>20</sup> Dov Levin and Adam Teller, *The Litvaks: A short history of the Jews in Lithuania* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2000), available at <http://www.gbv.de/dms/bowker/toc/9781571812643.pdf>, 230 (last visited 25 March 2011). Thereafter Levin and Teller, *Litvaks*.

<sup>21</sup> Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*, 162.

<sup>22</sup> Nijolė Gaškaitė, *Pasipriešinimo istorija: 1944-1953 metai* [The History of Resistance: 1944-1953] (Vilnius: Aidai, 1997), 134.

<sup>23</sup> Smolskutė, 'Motery'.

sively young adults, who upon entering were between the ages of 18 and 25. How did the Jewish women explain their motives? Rachel Margolis says in retrospect: “If we perished it would be with honour, having proved to humanity that we were not sheep going meekly to the slaughter.”<sup>24</sup>

This short statement makes it clear yet again that they really did not have a large number of options from which to choose. Whoever did not dare to find a way out of the ghetto to join the partisans, had to almost certainly reckon with death. The memory stayed in her mind of her friend Onia, who also wanted to go to the partisans, but was not allowed to by her mother.

“Her mother did not let her out. Onia thought it necessary to tell her about her intention of going into the forest. ‘This is the only path to salvation’, she assured her. ‘Otherwise we will all be killed in the ghetto or in the camp [...] I am young, I want to live, so let me go.’ Her mother was against it.”<sup>25</sup>

Fanya’s reception into a partisan unit had some difficulties associated with it.

“The partisan unit we met was the one named after Adam Mickiewicz. Its commanding officer met with us and asked us a few questions. A beautiful blonde woman, who looked like a Lithuanian woman, was sitting beside him during the interrogation. He suggested that we joined his unit, but the woman said: ‘I shall not let Jewish girls join your unit!’ I was shaking from such hurtful comments: did we escape from the ghetto just to get into the hands of an anti-Semitic woman? Later it turned out that this woman, whose last name was Glezer, was Jewish and just felt sorry for us, innocent Jewish girls. There were vague morals in the partisan unit and she was concerned about us. However, the partisans treated us like their sisters.”<sup>26</sup>

Joined by her companion Doba who had fled with her, she got in the group “For Victory” and fought then in the group “Revenger”.<sup>27</sup> An important ‘admission ticket’ for female Jews in the partisan groups in the woods was a rifle. You had to bring one along.<sup>28</sup> Sarah brought one. She described her

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<sup>24</sup> Gordon Brown, ‘Women of Courage: Rachel Margolis’, *Independent*, 9 March 2011, available at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/women-of-courage-rachel-margolis-2236081.html> (last visited 25 March 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Margolis, *Partisan*, 359.

<sup>26</sup> Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview, 32.

<sup>27</sup> In the unit “Adam Mickiewicz” the Jews represented a minority, while on the other hand, the partisan units “Victory” and “Revenger” were predominantly Jewish. Liekis, ‘Partisans’, 475.

<sup>28</sup> Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*, 158.

feelings upon arriving in the group of partisans called “Death to the Occupiers”<sup>29</sup>:

“It was then that I suddenly realized that I was not dreaming. I was really free and I was a partisan. I could barely control my joy and my pride. I had become a soldier, a fighter against our oppressors, our killers, the worst enemies of mankind: the German Nazis.”<sup>30</sup>

Were the motives of the Lithuanian women different? The decision to participate in the resistance was a gradual one. The first step was the fact that numerous men refused to join the Red Army in 1944 and the years that followed. Feelings of loyalty towards male family members and a strong sense of identification with the Lithuanian nation state were further prompts for action among women and girls.<sup>31</sup> The parents of these female activists were first-generation citizens of an independent Lithuania and had raised their children in an ardent spirit of patriotism.<sup>32</sup> The decision to head for the woods was an enthusiastic and highly emotional act of popular nationalism.<sup>33</sup> So now, how could the younger generation protect its national identity under the circumstances of the occupation? In the summer of 1944, the resistance was initially a form of the people’s nationalist enthusiasm. Anelė Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė, who as a currier called herself “Klajūnė”, remembered that:

“When Lithuania was occupied the second time, young men were conscripted. My husband and my brother refused to serve the enemy and headed for the woods at the end of 1944 to join the partisans. They said: ‘If we have to die, then we will die in our own country and for our own ideals.’”<sup>34</sup>

Anelė was a simple peasant girl with no professional training or job. Emotionally bound to the resistance through her husband and her brother, she

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<sup>29</sup> In the unit “Death to the Occupants”, Jews made up about a third of the members. Liekis, ‘Partisans’, 475.

<sup>30</sup> Sarah Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance and Survival: the Jewish Community in Kaunas, 1941-1944* (Oakville ON: Mosaic Press, 2005), 126. Thereafter Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance*.

<sup>31</sup> Petronėlė Pušinskaitė-Vėlyvienė, ‘Žalieji namai’ [‘The Green House’], *Laisvės kovų archyvas*, 2 (1991), 59-82, here 16.

<sup>32</sup> Mara Lazda describes the propagandized patriotism in Latvia in a similar way. Mara Lazda, ‘Family, Gender, and Ideology in World War II Latvia’, in Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur, eds., *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 133-53, here 133.

<sup>33</sup> See also Benedict Anderson, *The Invention of the Nation. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

<sup>34</sup> Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė-Klajūnė, ‘Juodi’, 178.



saw no alternative course of action. As it turned out, along with her small son, she was a chance witness to both men being killed in an armed engagement with Soviet soldiers. It was not for nothing that the partisans used code names because the NKVD had family members of resistance fighters arrested, deported to Siberia, and then burned their villages to the ground. In spite of all of this, Anelė says:

“I saw their horribly mutilated bodies and swore that I would remain faithful to my home country of Lithuania and her sons to the end of my days, and that I would sacrifice my freedom and my life for that purpose.”<sup>35</sup>

Nina Nausėdaitė came from a small town, and after her *Abitur* she studied airplane construction. In 1945 she came rather by chance into the sights of the NKVD and was in investigative custody for a month. After being let go, it became clear to her that she was still being followed. She got her mother settled in a different place and family members sought a new job for her. She herself began to act outside the law and became a woman courier for several partisan staffs.

### Female Partisans against Families

To what extent did the family play a role in the decisions of the women to go to the woods? The women who joined the active resistance did not yet have families and so did not bear the associated responsibilities of having their own children. Nevertheless, it was a difficult decision to leave family members. Sarah had scruples:

“I learned about our escape from the ghetto to Rudninkai Forest in early December and immediately told my mother about it. She wept with joy, thinking that this would save me. I, on the other hand, was very confused. I felt that I was being unfair to my closest family and that I had no moral right to leave them. In my soul, I struggled with two conflicting feelings. One whispered that I must go and fight the enemy, the other one urged me to remain with the family- either to perish with them or survive with them.”<sup>36</sup>

And Rachel was hesitant as well to separate herself from her family: “If only you knew how hard it is for me to leave you behind. How much I am afraid of everything that lies ahead of me, and how much I fear that I shall never see you again.”<sup>37</sup> Fanya, on the other hand was quite decisive: “I

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<sup>35</sup> Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė-Klajūnė, ‘Juodi’, 181.

<sup>36</sup> Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance*, 122.

<sup>37</sup> Margolis, *Partisan*, 361.



said ‘good bye’ to my family. My mother and sister were crying. I stayed strong. It never occurred to me that this could be the last time I saw them.”<sup>38</sup> The mother of Rachel’s friend Onia remained firm:

“Lala [Rachel Margolis] is deceiving you! I don’t want her to set foot here again! What kind of partisans, what kind of gunfire is she talking about? You are not going to go anywhere; you are staying here with me. Who has ever heard of a girl shooting and killing someone? And if you take it into your head to leave, I am going to throw myself down on the doorstep. You will have to step over my body if you want to leave.”<sup>39</sup>

Onia did not dare to rebel against her mother. Both women lost their lives in the liquidation of the Wilna ghetto.

Female Jews joined the partisans either as individuals or as couples. Sarah and Misha Robinson decided to get married in advance since they wanted to go into the woods to the partisans as a married couple.<sup>40</sup> Other female Jews also had a stable male partner, such as Rachel Margolis, who went along with Chaim Zaydelson into the woods<sup>41</sup>, or Vitka Kempner, the companion of Abba Kovner, or Ida Vilencik. Yet there were also women, such as Fanya who joined the partisans without a partner and only there did they meet their future husbands. Rachel remembers other fighting comrades who gravitated toward them:

“Marysia had recently come from the ghetto with her friend Mira Gonionska. They had given them the route, and they had found the way themselves to the partisans in the forest. [...] Many girls reached the partisans the same way. They were sent out of the ghetto alone, unarmed, disguised as Poles so as not to load the groups down with women. Everyone thought that the partisans needed bold young men who wanted to fight and were armed. It turned out later that the girls fought just as well as the men.”<sup>42</sup>

For the female Jew in the ghetto there were no other alternatives. Whoever did not flee had only a short life expectancy. The decision of the young women to leave proves above all their unbridled will to survive. The female Lithuanian partisans, that is, the active members of the underground, often acted in the context of their family story. In such cases, the women were often the ‘replacements’. The historian Žaneta Smolskutė has shown

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<sup>38</sup> Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview, 30-31.

<sup>39</sup> Margolis, *Partisan*, 359.

<sup>40</sup> Margolis, *Partisan*, 124.

<sup>41</sup> Margolis, Bruder and Schroeter, *Partisanin Wilna*, 81.

<sup>42</sup> Margolis, *Partisan*, 380.

that the majority of the active female partisans (about 72 %) were married.<sup>43</sup>

Anelė's life was radically changed by the death of her husband. She wanted to revenge him and began to work as a courier for the partisans using the name "Klajūnė". When she was arrested, her son was sent to a children's home.<sup>44</sup>

For completeness sake one must add that there were a large number of women and young girls whose lives came undone in the post-war period even if they themselves had not been actively involved in the resistance. On the one hand, it had to do with family members, especially widows of dead partisans, who went into hiding in other places under false names in order to avoid exile. In other cases, it concerned wives and children of fighting partisans who were living outside the law, but not in the woods.<sup>45</sup> In these cases attempts were made to at least keep some geographical distance from the resistance actions.

### In the Woods

What did the destination 'the woods' mean for the female Jews, and what did it mean for the female Lithuanians? For the female Lithuanian partisans, there really was not that kind of clear separation between the place where their family members lived and the partisan's front line. In this space, the woods to a certain extent were right in front of the house door; here the home and the partisan front were closely interlocked, which doubtlessly had consequences for all members of the partisans. On the one hand, the available network was significantly denser, which meant that there was a greater possibility to see the members of their families now and then and to get messages to them. Moreover, farmers near the forests also allowed them to use their wells or saunas. On the other hand, the visit of a partisan always presented for the family members the danger of discovery. The female Lithuanian partisans came as a rule from the countryside, where as farm girls since they were little they were used to gathering berries and mushrooms in the extensive forests and also to walk the long pathways

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<sup>43</sup> Smolskutė, 'Motery'.

<sup>44</sup> Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė-Klajūnė, 'Juodi', 184-6.

<sup>45</sup> So, for example, the wife and daughter of Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas. See Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas, *Daugel krito sunu [Many Sons Have Fallen...]* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1991), 442. Nina Nausėdaitė reported as well about the four year-old son of the partisan leader Jonas Žemaitis for whom she had to find a hiding place. Nausėdaitė-Rasa, 'Ne vien duona gyvi...', 157-8.

from village to village. In short, they had an ability to orient themselves, something which life in the country had taught them in a special way. Added to that was the fact that they were predominantly active in the resistance quite close to home, so it was an area that was very familiar to them, whereas the female Jews as a rule went into such large forests for the first time. The former partisan and contemporaneous witness, Dov Levin, wrote the following about the Jewish partisans:

“They generally had previously been residents of the local towns and knew the forest well and so were able to act as guides and scouts for the partisans, as well as liaison between them and the rural population.”<sup>46</sup>

But this statement does not correlate at all with the experiences before us. On the contrary, the forests presented an immense challenge for the female Jewish partisans. Sarah describes it this way:

“We were far from our families and would be living in the woods without toilets, water, baths, or electricity. Snow had begun falling, the wind was rustling in the trees, and it was white and beautiful all around us.”<sup>47</sup>

“For the first time, I found myself alone in the woods at night with a gun. Although I had been through some military training, I had no idea what I should do with the gun if anything happened.”<sup>48</sup>

The conditions were sometimes extreme, as Sarah portrays it:

“For a long time, we had neither a bathhouse nor an outhouse. We had to go far into the woods through deep snow in order simply to wash. The female partisans were often plagued by lice. [...] Our menstrual periods were as torturous as the assault of the parasites, particularly when we were on missions or on guard duty. Because we had no female hygiene products, we resorted to shredding sheets or buying rags from the local peasants which we washed in cold water in the woods.”<sup>49</sup>

For the Jewish women, there was a clear separation between where their family members lived and the partisan's front line. There were only a few isolated instances in which a female partisan was sent back again into the ghetto. Sarah Ginaitė made such a trip together with other female partisans for the purpose of getting additional fighters from the ghetto in Kaunas

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<sup>46</sup> Levin and Teller, *Litvaks*, 230.

<sup>47</sup> Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance*, 126.

<sup>48</sup> Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance*, 135.

<sup>49</sup> Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance*, 176.

(and she had a chance to see her mother again).<sup>50</sup> This situation was horribly ambivalent for her.

“Suddenly, I was overcome with horror. I had come from a life of freedom. Even though it was a dangerous and difficult one, and now I found myself once again on death row. [...] I wanted only to abandon the ghetto and walk by myself back into our Rudninkai Forest. I didn’t care if it meant four nights of walking to be next to Misha and among my ‘Death to the Occupiers’ detachment comrades.”<sup>51</sup>

She visited her family members and enjoyed for a few days the amenities (though quite limited) of the ghetto.

“But all I wanted now was to wash, to remove my lousy clothing and lie down in clean sheets. Mother soon turned the kitchen into a small bathhouse. She rinsed my head with kerosene to kill the lice, combed my hair, and then washed my hair and body.”<sup>52</sup>

Sarah said good-bye to her family once again, fulfilled her assignment, and then went back into the forest.

### Gender Roles and Relationships

Were there divisions of labor in the forest? Were there divisions of responsibilities in the indispensable network of partisans with the surrounding civilian world? From the reports of the Jewish partisans one can determine that for life in the base stations, there were typical divisions in the tasks for the men and women. For transactions, running of errands, and requisitions, the criterion was most often about the Jewish or not-Jewish appearance of the partisan. However, the men did not gladly take women along on missions. Rachel Margolis remembered a scene where it came to a difficult river crossing, at which the women hesitated. The men moaned. “There’s always confusion with women around. It makes you wonder why they let them go on missions.”<sup>53</sup> Fanya learned to shoot and to lay mines. Her first assignment consisted of destroying telephone lines.<sup>54</sup> She did not shirk from any assignments.

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<sup>50</sup> Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*, 152.

<sup>51</sup> Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance*, 151-2.

<sup>52</sup> Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance*, 152.

<sup>53</sup> Margolis, *Partisan*, 495.

<sup>54</sup> Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview, 32.

"I became a member of a group. I was given a rifle and then an automatic gun. I dragged it with me and took part in military missions. I rarely saw Doba. Since she looked like a Slavic girl, she joined an intelligence group. We blasted trains and placed explosives in the enemy's equipment. We shot and killed them. Yes, I did, I killed them and did so with ease. I knew that my dear ones were dead and I took my revenge for them and thousands others with each and every shot."<sup>55</sup>

In Sarah's group, the girls had to teach themselves about the weaponry.<sup>56</sup> Included among Sarah's assignments was the requisitioning of food provisions from the surroundings. In one case she went to a nearby farmhouse:

"The farmer's wife [...] looked me over carefully and told me that war was not for women to fight. I didn't wait for a reply as I asked her, 'And is the killing of women and children proper work for men?' and left the house."<sup>57</sup>

Rachel had a similar experience when a farmer woman criticized her saying that a decent young girl should not be going around with these Soviet bandits.

"'What would impel a decent young lady to hang around with these Soviet bandits? You should be staying home with your Mama and Father. You're just out for an adventure!' wondered the farmer's wife. Then she concluded. 'Fighting is not a womanly thing to do.'"<sup>58</sup>

As a rule, the women had to take care of a lot of 'women's work'. They peeled potatoes, kept the kitchen cleaned up and washed the dirty clothes for the men.<sup>59</sup> The requisitioned cows also had to be taken out to pasture by the women, which for them as women from towns was something they did not know how to do, so it presented a real challenge.<sup>60</sup> Taking care of the sick and surgeries also fell into the sphere of the women. In the group "Death to the Occupiers", there were two nurses, Ania and Zoya, and there was an experienced surgical nurse Riva Kaganiene who performed operations.<sup>61</sup> As already mentioned, whether one looked Arian or Jewish played a crucial role for those job assignments which would have contact with the outside world. Then it would make no difference whom the male

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<sup>55</sup> Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview, 33.

<sup>56</sup> Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*, 162.

<sup>57</sup> Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Resistance*, 135.

<sup>58</sup> Margolis, *Partisan*, 465.

<sup>59</sup> Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*, 163.

<sup>60</sup> Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*, 164.

<sup>61</sup> Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*, 163.

or female partisan met, whether German occupation forces or some person from the population who was anti-Jewish.

From the Soviet perspective, there was however a clear gender hierarchy: the men of the Lithuanian underground were considered to be significantly more dangerous than the women. Because of the severe torturing and punishments they would receive, they would have hardly any chance to survive. The women as a rule were sentenced to significantly lesser punishments. The differences between the tasks for the men and women in the Lithuanian underground were quite clear. The men fought with the weapons, the women took care of supplies and communication and bore as a result an essential responsibility for the functioning of the resistance. Moreover, they looked after the medical care.<sup>62</sup> While in 1944 there was no clear attitude to the role of women in the armed resistance, in 1949 a resolution of the presidium of the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters was formulated saying that women should no longer fight in the ranks of the partisans. The partisans should offer them opportunities (above all falsified documents), so that they would be able to return to civilian life.<sup>63</sup> In the reports about military confrontations with Soviet troops, there is mention of female victims, but not of armed women. That means that in actual Lithuanian historiography, there must have existed a directive in the documents of the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters to make no distinction between female and male partisans.<sup>64</sup> As far as the reaction of the Lithuanian population to the participation of women in the armed resistance is concerned, no contemporaneous sources can be found. If farm women could assert in 1943 that “Fighting is not a womanly thing to do”<sup>65</sup>, by 1945 because of their husbands and sons, women were involved in the struggle or in the widest sense in supporting the struggle. Or they had changed over to the other side and were defending the Soviet occupation forces. In 1944-1945 the attitudes of women to the armed struggle changed.

### The End of the Partisan Period

Fanya, Rachel and Sarah’s time as partisans ended around July 1944, and all three of them remained in the country. From their families (with the exception of Sarah’s sister), they were the only ones who had survived.

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<sup>62</sup> Laisvės kovų archyvas, 96 (former Archive of KGB, F 3.47/10.T.1. L.131-135).

<sup>63</sup> Laisvės kovų archyvas, 93.

<sup>64</sup> Laisvės kovų archyvas, 93.

<sup>65</sup> Margolis, *Partisan*, 465.

Nevertheless, Fanya, who immediately after the liberation married her companion from the partisan time, described the situation as follows: “We were intoxicated by the victory, our youth and love.”<sup>66</sup> The photograph of Sarah Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, taken by the war reporter Jakov Rumkin during the battle for the liberation of Vilnius, appeared on the front page of the *Ogonjok* in July 1944.<sup>67</sup> It bore the caption: “Lithuanian Partisan”. Rachel Rudinsky appeared as a laughing and armed “Lithuanian Partisan” on postcards.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, no photos exist of Rachel Margolis. She acknowledged later that

“[n]o one had the idea to have herself photographed with a rifle. [...] The weapons had been taken away from us; we were now civilians. I was afraid to walk on the street without a weapon. I had gotten used to holding the strap of the rifle with my right hand.”<sup>69</sup>

The former partisans could not so quickly get used to a life outside the forest. It took a long time for Fanya Brancovskaya to let go of her weapon and she even took it with her into the Ministerial Office where she worked after the liberation: “I used to take my rifle to work putting it in the corner. The minister joked: ‘One day you’ll shoot me!’ [...] Sometime later we were ordered to turn in our weapons.”<sup>70</sup> Fanya took part in the victory parade in Moscow on 9. May 1945.

“In summer 1945 Mikhail and I were in the Lithuanian delegation standing in Red Square [in Moscow] at the Victory Parade. These were unforgettable moments. My husband and five others were awarded the ‘Medal for Partisan of the Great Patriotic War’, Grade I, and they were some of the first awardees.”<sup>71</sup>

This public recognition did not last long, since the anti-Semitic campaigns at the end of the 1940s also caused problems for Fanya, Rachel, Sarah and their families even if they did escape the repressive measures.<sup>72</sup> For the Lithuanian population in the countryside, the partisan war (which lasted until 1953) became a traumatic event that far overshadowed those of the

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<sup>66</sup> Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview, 35.

<sup>67</sup> Ginaitė-Rubinsonienė, *Atminimo*, 175.

<sup>68</sup> See [http://www.lsa.umich.edu/judaic/html/admissions\\_2\\_1\\_5.htm](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/judaic/html/admissions_2_1_5.htm) (last visited 28 February 2012).

<sup>69</sup> Margolis, Bruder and Schroeter, *Partisan in Wilna*, 229. A whole chapter about Wilna after the War in 1944, including this passage, is only available in the German publication, but not included in the English version of the book.

<sup>70</sup> Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview, 35.

<sup>71</sup> Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview, 35.

<sup>72</sup> Brancovskaja-Jocheles, Interview, 38.

Second World War. Between the years 1949-1952, around 20.000 fighters (men and women) of the armed national underground lost their lives.<sup>73</sup>

Nina Nausėdaitė-Rasa was sentenced to ten years in Siberia and was able to return to Kaunas with the amnesty of 1956.<sup>74</sup> Since she was not allowed to study, she found employment as an unskilled worker.<sup>75</sup> Anelė Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė-Klajūnė was sentenced in 1951 to Moldavia and returned as well with the amnesty in 1956.<sup>76</sup> But she fared as so many others who were returning from exile: her attempts to find a place to live and to work were torpedoed by the authorities in the Lithuanian Soviet Republic and moreover she was ostracized by the society. So she went with her child for ten years to Krasnojarsk as an immigrant worker and did not come back to Lithuania until 1964.<sup>77</sup> At the end of the Stalin era, a period of adjustment began for the citizens of the Lithuanian Soviet Republic, a time when they wanted to be reminded as little as possible of the bloody events of the post-war years. In spite of this self-enforced amnesia, one can claim, the memory remained of those women who had taken over new areas for themselves in such extreme situations and had carried weapons and worn uniforms, and who, therefore, had expanded the sphere of action for women, something not only the women but also the men held in their memories.

### Photos

In the photos from the time period of the partisans, it is striking that in the Jewish groups, women and men are photographed together. Even the group portraits of veterans which were taken during the whole post-war period always show women and men. These pictures were always around, except that rather quickly the inscription “Jewish” was left off and the partisans were all labeled as “Heroes of the great war of the Fatherland”.<sup>78</sup> However, the photos in which young women could be seen with weapons, these disappeared; and those that appeared on the front page in the summer of 1944 on a soviet magazine, these later disappeared as well, only to be shown again after 1989. A lot of things were photographed during the

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<sup>73</sup> Jelena Zubkova, *Pabaltijys ir Kremlius, 1940-1953 m* [*The Baltic and the Kremlin, 1940-1953*] (Vilnius: Mintis, 2010).

<sup>74</sup> Nausėdaitė-Rasa, ‘Ne vien duona gyvi...’, 161.

<sup>75</sup> Nausėdaitė-Rasa, ‘Ne vien duona gyvi...’, 162.

<sup>76</sup> Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė-Klajūnė, ‘Juodi’, 184.

<sup>77</sup> Devyžytė-Marckinkevičienė-Klajūnė, ‘Juodi’, 186.

<sup>78</sup> Eglinis-Elinas and Gelpernas, *Kauno*, 195, 197, 211.



Lithuanian resistance. But the photographs of the Lithuanian resistance showed women only very rarely with the whole formation. If women were photographed, then it was most often exclusively with the appropriate male person (with the husband, the brother, the cousin). These photos from the resistance were forbidden in public; they emerged again in 1989 from many different hiding places. When looking at the photos, the eye catches the fact that the women present themselves with emphasis on their femininity, with carefully done hairstyles and womanly clothing accents, quite frequently with pleated skirts. In the numerous memoirs and histories of the Lithuanian resistance that have appeared in the last twenty years, no pictures of fighting women have been included.<sup>79</sup> What predominates is either the picture of the mother or the whole family of the partisans,<sup>80</sup> or pictures of a female friend who was visiting, wherein the conscious contrast between the uniforms of the men and the folk dresses of the women is so striking.<sup>81</sup> If a woman was in uniform in the picture, then one notices above all the long hair (also long braids) as well as that the women wore skirts.<sup>82</sup> Yet one finds a different perspective in the current permanent exhibition in the Vilnius Museum which exhibits a relatively large number of photos of Lithuanian partisans that include female fighters. There one sees pictures which show women in trousers and/or with machine guns.<sup>83</sup>

These are pictures which until now have been viewed as untypical. Presumably this stronger accent on female partisans is intended (after the fact) to correct the image for the female visitor. You can also trace this phenomenon clearly with the aid of the catalogue which reproduces a much greater number of group portraits of Lithuanian partisans in which women can be seen.<sup>84</sup> One can suspect that at the beginning of the 1990s, when the flood of pictures about the Lithuanian post-war period began, a clear line was being drawn to distinguish these re-emerging pictures from what (to that point) had been the usual depictions of the Soviet and pro-Soviet fe-

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<sup>79</sup> See Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur, who likewise highlight the poor integration of heroines in popular accounts of the war. Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur, 'Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe', in Nancy M. Wingfield and Maria Bucur, eds., *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1-20, here 7.

<sup>80</sup> Vėliūtė, *Partizanai*, 11.

<sup>81</sup> Vėliūtė, *Partizanai*, 49.

<sup>82</sup> Vėliūtė, *Partizanai*, 70.

<sup>83</sup> Rima Mekaitė, *Karas po karo: Ginkluotasis antisovietinis pasipriesinimas Lietuvoje 1944-1953 m. Parodos katalogas* [War After War: Armed Anti-Soviet Resistance in Lithuania 1944-1953. Exhibition catalogue] (Vilnius: LGGRTC, 2004), 8, 9. Thereafter Mekaitė, *Karas*.

<sup>84</sup> Mekaitė, *Karas*.

male fighters and their attempt to create a certain picture of women in the Lithuanian underground.

### Conclusion

The activities in the woods and the expansion of women's sphere of actions were things remembered not only by the women, but also by the men. However, this still represents a divided history even though it was within one geographical area and a short time period. The Jewish female partisans, in many cases, stayed together for their whole lives with their partners from the time of the campaign. The shared time in the ghetto and the woods had often 'welded them together' as equal partners. The group pictures of the veterans and their appearances at anniversary events were components of a collective memory in the LiSSR and were looked on by the Lithuanians as an expression of the Soviet culture of occupation.

During the time of the Soviet occupation, these Jewish women primarily pursued their professional lives and dedicated themselves to their families. Starting in 1987, when the Lithuanian Soviet Republic once again allowed a Jewish cultural association, women began to dedicate themselves to the memory of the Jewish extermination in Lithuania and to reflect on those memories. In that way they became important and notable bearers of the Jewish memory in what was once again an independent Lithuania.

The Lithuanian male role model of the pre-war period with its manly ideals was substantially destroyed with the defeat of the partisan movement. Only a few active fighters had survived, over whom numerous myths were quickly overlaid while being told secretly. Because strictly forbidden, there was no possibility for a pictorial or written passing on of tradition. There was here in the post-war years an empty gap, and bound up with it was a loss of orientation for the men. The women who had worked as curriers for the resistance were commonly punished with 5-10 years exile to Siberia and were able to return back to the LiSSR by circumventing diverse prohibitions.

The female veterans of the Lithuanian resistance were an important potent force in the movements leading to the restoration of Lithuanian independence in 1990. However, most people had only a local level of awareness and there still does not exist today a master narrative of female Lithuanian partisans. That is astounding since the role of Lithuanian women (through their activities in the resistance, through their resilience in exile, though their efforts to hold the remaining family together and as the bearers of a memories that were taboo) has in general in this time period

been strengthened enormously.<sup>85</sup> Because of this disproportionate development (my closing thesis) the gender relationship was burdened. This (which still needs to be proven), however, was reduced by the official propagandized Soviet gender order.

The stability of the gender differences in the society of pre-war Lithuania was clearly burst apart both by the war and the underground war of the post-war period. The women emancipated themselves through these events and endured in some cases a long phase of discrimination, from exile up until the restoration of independence. Subconsciously, the men knew this. Officially, the Soviet ideology dictated a complete equality of genders, such that every discussion about gender relationships had the rug pulled out from under it right from the start. Unofficially, however, the citizens, the men and women of Soviet Lithuania, knew that gender equality was only on a piece of paper and a subtle discrimination against women in many areas was commonplace. Knowledge of this led the men not to take too seriously the emancipatory successes of the women. In conclusion, I would mention that in the totalitarian society, no balanced evaluation and work on the war and post-war experiences could take place. It was only after the beginning of *Perestroika* that more comprehensive processes of perception and recognition have begun, and yet within them, gender relations and their change have still not been adequately studied.

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<sup>85</sup> See also Stanislovas Abromavičius, *Žalio velnio takais [On the Path of the Green Devil]* (Kaunas: Sąjūdis, 1999), 74.

BARBARA N. WIESINGER

## GENDERED RESISTANCE

### WOMEN PARTISANS IN YUGOSLAVIA (1941-45)

#### Introduction

The struggle against German occupation and the national myths into which its collective interpretations soon developed have decisively shaped post-war Europe's social and political order.<sup>1</sup> This holds true also of the second Yugoslavia, which emerged out of the liberation and civil war of 1941 to 1945 as a federal, socialist, one-party state. In the Tito era, the experience of resistance provided the basis for a founding narrative which accounted for the re-emergence of a common Yugoslav state and explained its sociopolitical system.<sup>2</sup> The fundamental importance of the National Liberation Struggle (*Narodnooslobodilačka borba*), however, also meant that critical research on the topic was difficult, especially in Yugoslavia itself, where many professional historians chose to focus on less potentially controversial issues.<sup>3</sup>

The Yugoslav "partisan myth"<sup>4</sup> was, of course, gendered. Socialist-period interpretations of the National Liberation Struggle usually claimed that women had participated in the resistance, including armed combat, on

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<sup>1</sup> See Tony Judt, 'The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe', in Tony Judt and Istvan Deak, eds., *The Politics of Retribution in Europe. World War II and Its Aftermath* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 298-300.

<sup>2</sup> See Wolfgang Höpken, 'Krieg und historische Erinnerung auf dem Balkan' ['War and Historical Memory in the Balkans'], in Eva Behring, Ludwig Richter, and Wolfgang F. Schwarz, eds., *Geschichtliche Mythen in den Literaturen und Kulturen Ostmittel- und Südosteuropas* [Historical Myths in the Literatures and Cultures of East Central and South Eastern Europe] (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1999), 371-78, here 375. Thereafter Höpken, 'Krieg'.

<sup>3</sup> See Heike Karge, *Steinerne Erinnerung – versteinerte Erinnerung? Kriegsgedenken im sozialistischen Jugoslawien* [Memory in Stone – Petrified Memory? Commemorating War in Socialist Yugoslavia], Ph.D. thesis, European University Institute Firenze, 2006, 65-67. Thereafter Karge, *Steinerne Erinnerung*.

<sup>4</sup> Höpken, 'Krieg', 375.

an equal basis with men, and that gender-based discrimination had never been an issue in the ‘progressive’ partisan movement. Historical works either ignored women’s (armed) resistance completely or presented it in accordance with the partisan myth:

“As an expression of the new revolutionary democracy which had developed under conditions of war, [...] the women of Yugoslavia participated on an equal basis in the [National Liberation] struggle.”<sup>5</sup>

The contribution of women to the Yugoslav resistance was not studied seriously until the 1980s, when Zagreb-based sociologist Lydia Sklevicky conducted research on the role of the Croatian “Antifascist Front of Women” in war and reconstruction. Until her premature death, Sklevicky authored several relevant papers in the field.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the US-American political scientist Barbara Jancar-Webster began her research on Yugoslav women’s armed resistance, which resulted in sundry articles and an important monograph.<sup>7</sup> Both authors showed convincingly that the “partisan myth of equality” was just that – a politically motivated founding narrative.<sup>8</sup>

Since then, international research into the gender history of war has raised new questions about women’s roles in and experiences of armed conflict.<sup>9</sup> Taking up some of these challenges, the following article will discuss the regional traditions, revolutionary aspirations, and practical

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<sup>5</sup> Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918-1978* [*History of Yugoslavia, 1918-1978*] (Belgrade: Nolit, 1981), 370.

<sup>6</sup> See Lydia Sklevicky, ‘Emancipated Integration or Integrated Emancipation: The Case of Post-revolutionary Yugoslavia’, in Arina Angermann, Geerte Binnema, Annemieke Keunen, Vefie Poels, and Jaqueline Zirkzee, eds., *Current Issues in Women’s History* (London/New York: Routledge, 1989); and relevant chapters in Lydia Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi* [*Horses, Women, and Wars*] (Zagreb: Ženska infoteka, 1996). Thereafter Sklevicky, *Konji*.

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Jancar, ‘Women in the Yugoslav National Liberation Movement: An Overview’, *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 14, 2-3 (1981); Barbara Jancar, ‘Yugoslavia: War of Liberation’, in Nancy Loring, ed., *Goldman Female Soldiers – Combatants or Noncombatants? Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Westport/London: Greenwood, 1982); Barbara Jancar-Webster, *Women & Revolution in Yugoslavia 1941-1945* (Denver: Arden Press, 1990). Thereafter Jancar-Webster, *Women*.

<sup>8</sup> Jancar-Webster, *Women*, 98; see also Sklevicky, *Konji*, 14-15.

<sup>9</sup> See Karen Hagemann, ‘Von Männern, Frauen und der Militärgeschichte’ [‘Of Men, Women, and Military History’], *L’Homme. Z. F. G.*, 12, 1 (2001), 144-153; Christa Hämmerle, ‘Von den Geschlechtern der Kriege und des Militärs. Forschungseinblicke und Bemerkungen zu einer neuen Debatte’ [‘Of the Genders of the Wars and the Military. Research Insights and Comments on a New Debate’], in Thomas Kühne and Benjamin Ziemann, eds., *Was ist Militärgeschichte? [What is Military History?]* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000).

considerations which together defined the possibilities and limits of women's military engagement in the Yugoslav resistance.<sup>10</sup> A second focus will be on the war experience of the historical actors – the women partisans – themselves.<sup>11</sup> This will not only highlight the political and practical significance of social gender concepts in the Yugoslav resistance, but also underline the personal perspectives of women veterans as subjects of history.

It may be useful to clarify two central terms in advance. In the following discussion, *armed resistance* stands for both direct support for and direct participation in assassinations, large-scale diversions, and combat.<sup>12</sup> *Women partisans*, again, refers to all female members of the Yugoslav National Liberation Army (*Narodnooslobodilačka vojska*, NLA) regardless of their specific function in the organization.

### The historical context

On March 27, 1941, a group of military men ousted the pro-Axis government of Yugoslavia. The coup, greeted enthusiastically by a large part of the country's population, infuriated Hitler, who immediately decided to 'crush' Yugoslavia. With Operation Barbarossa ahead, Germany needed the political and economic cooperation of the Balkan state to fuel its war machine and secure the hinterland south of the future Eastern Front.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> It would be extremely interesting to also consider men's resistance from a gender-informed perspective, but (at least to my knowledge) there are no detailed "gender histories" of men's experiences as partisans. For more general literature on "Balkan" masculinity, violence and warfare, see the articles and books quoted in footnote 27.

<sup>11</sup> See Nikolaus Buschmann and Horst Carl, 'Zugänge zur Erfahrungsgeschichte des Krieges. Forschung, Theorie, Fragestellung' ['Approaches to a History of the Experience of War. Research, Theory, Issues'], in Nikolaus Buschmann, ed., *Die Erfahrungsgeschichte des Krieges. Erfahrungsgeschichtliche Perspektiven von der Französischen Revolution bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg* [The History of the Experience of War. Perspectives of a History of Experience from the French Revolution to the Second World War] (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> This definition follows Werner Röhr, 'Forschungsprobleme zur deutschen Okkupationspolitik im Spiegel der Reihe Europa unterm Hakenkreuz' ['Research Problems on German Occupation Policy As Reflected in the Series Europe under the Swastika'], in Werner Röhr, ed., *Europa unterm Hakenkreuz. Analysen – Quellen – Register* [Europe under the Swastika. Analyses – Sources – Register], (Berlin/Heidelberg: Hühig, 1996), 25-343, here 183, 190.

<sup>13</sup> For a reliable overview in English, see John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History. Twice there was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chapter 7.

On April 6, 1941, the Wehrmacht and allied Italian and Hungarian troops attacked Yugoslavia without a prior declaration of war. Air raids on the capital Belgrade were intended to terrify the local population, whom Hitler perceived as hostile and rebellious, into submission.<sup>14</sup> After only eleven days, the ineffectively led, badly equipped, and demoralized Yugoslav army capitulated before the onslaught. King and government had already fled into exile.<sup>15</sup> Subsequently, the aggressors divided up the country and installed occupation regimes or collaborationist governments.

Yugoslavia's population was as divided as the country. Ideological differences and conflicting evaluations of the current situation were at least as important as ethnic and religious affiliation. While the *Ustaša*, who came to rule the so-called Independent State of Croatia<sup>16</sup>, and other (pro-)fascist organizations collaborated wholeheartedly with the initially victorious Axis powers, the Serbian royalist *Četnik* movement<sup>17</sup> originally opted for tentative resistance. The yet minuscule Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije*, CPY) under its leader Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980), again, saw the conflict as an opportunity to build patriotic credibility and gain political influence by resisting foreign rule at all costs.<sup>18</sup>

On July 4, 1941, the CPY called on the peoples of Yugoslavia to take up arms against the occupiers. The uprisings of summer 1941 were inspired

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<sup>14</sup> See Detlef Vogel, 'Operation "Strafgericht". Die rücksichtslose Bombardierung Belgrads durch die deutsche Luftwaffe am 6. April 1941' ['Operation "Strafgericht": The Relentless Bombing of Belgrade by the German Air Force on April 6, 1941'], in Wolfram Wette and Gerd Ueberschär, eds., *Kriegsverbrechen im 20. Jahrhundert* [War Crimes in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century] (Darmstadt: Primus, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> See Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945. The Chetniks* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 55-76. Thereafter Tomasevich, *Chetniks*.

<sup>16</sup> For details see Martin Broszat and Ladislaus Hory, *Der kroatische Ustascha-Staat 1941-1945* [The Croatian Ustasha-state 1941-1945] (Stuttgart: DVA, 1964); and Holm Sundhaussen, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte Kroatiens im nationalsozialistischen Großraum 1941-1945. Das Scheitern einer Ausbeutungsstrategie* [Croatia's Economic History in the Wider Region of National Socialism, 1941-1945. The Failure of an Exploitation Strategy] (Stuttgart: DVA, 1983). Thereafter Sundhaussen, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte*.

<sup>17</sup> The standard work is still Tomasevich, *Chetniks*. See also Matteo J. Milazzo, *The Chetnik Movement & the Yugoslav Resistance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

<sup>18</sup> For details see Holm Sundhaussen, 'Okkupation, Kollaboration und Widerstand in den Ländern Jugoslawiens, 1941-1945' ['Occupation, Collaboration and Resistance in the Countries of Yugoslavia, 1941-1945'], in Werner Röhr, ed., *Europa unterm Hakenkreuz. Okkupation und Kollaboration (1938-1945). Beiträge zu Konzepten und Praxis der Kollaboration in der deutschen Okkupationspolitik* [Europe under the Swastika. Occupation and Collaboration (1938-1945). Contributions on the Concepts and Practice of Collaboration in German Occupation Policy] (Berlin/Heidelberg: Hühig, 1994), 347-65.

by regional traditions of anti-Ottoman rebellions and the experience of World War I. Ethnic persecution provided their most important motive: In the 'Independent State of Croatia', ethnic Serbs were brutally victimized by the Ustaša regime. In German-occupied Slovenia, the Slavic population was subjected to a severe denationalization policy, which included measures ranging from the prohibition of use of the Slovenian language in public life to forced resettlements. Yugoslavia's Jews, again, faced persecution and genocide at the hands of the Germans and their local collaborators. Communist convictions, on the other hand, motivated only a small (but eventually decisive) number of activists.

By and by, the National Liberation Movement (*Narodnooslobodilački pokret*) and its armed wing, the NLA, managed to unite members of all of Yugoslavia's many ethnic and religious groups in a common struggle against foreign occupation. As a result of its ethnic (and to a large extent also political) inclusiveness, combined with the ruthless determination of its leaders, the communist resistance succeeded, over the years, in effectively undermining the occupation regimes. But its guerilla war also contributed to the escalation of anti-civilian violence in the Yugoslav theatre. In retaliation for diversion and partisan assaults, the Wehrmacht committed cruel massacres with thousands of victims.<sup>19</sup> Anti-partisan measures also provided a pretext for the genocide of Yugoslavia's Jews.<sup>20</sup> Local armed groups, especially the Ustaša and the Četniks, also perpetrated horrendous crimes against civilians they suspected of aiding the partisans. Of course,

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<sup>19</sup> One memorable example is the Kragujevac massacre of October 21, 1941, which took 2.796 lives. See Staniša Brkić, *Ime i broj. Kragujevačka tragedija 1941* [Name and Number. The Kragujevac Tragedy, 1941] (Kragujevac: Spomen-park Kragujevački oktobar, 2007); Walter Manoschek, 'Kraljevo – Kragujevac – Kalavryta. Die Massaker der 717. Infanteriedivision bzw. 117. Jägerdivision am Balkan' ['Kraljevo – Kragujevac – Kalavryta. The Massacres of the 717. Infantry Division, resp. the 117. Rifle Division in the Balkans'], in Loukia Droulia and Hagen Fleischer, eds., *Von Lidice bis Kalavryta. Widerstand und Besatzungsterror. Studien zur Repressalienpraxis im Zweiten Weltkrieg* [From Lidice to Kalavryta. Resistance and Occupation Terror. Studies on the Practice of Repression in the Second World War], (Berlin: Metropol, 1999), 93-104.

<sup>20</sup> See Christopher Browning, *Fateful Months. Essays on the Emergence of the Final Solution* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), chapters 2 and 4; Walter Manoschek, 'Serbien ist judenfrei.' *Militärische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941/42* ['Serbia is Free of Jews.' *Military Occupation Policy and the Destruction of the Jews in Serbia 1941/42*] (München: Oldenbourg, 1993); Jaša Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije 1941-1945: Žrtve genocida i učesnici NOR-a* [The Jews of Yugoslavia 1941-1945: Victims of Genocide and Participants in the National Liberation War] (Belgrade: Savez jevrejskih opština, 1980). Thereafter Romano, *Jevreji*.



the NLA also did not refrain from violence and terror if this seemed to serve its political ends, especially towards the end of the war.<sup>21</sup>

In Yugoslavia, brutal occupation policies, collaborationist repression, and ethnically or ideologically motivated violence converged to create a complex and extremely bloody conflict which affected everyone. Together with a major refugee crisis, massive deportations for forced labor<sup>22</sup> and severe supply difficulties, the war of all against all in Yugoslavia caused a breakdown of the old social order.<sup>23</sup> The ensuing vacuum enabled – or compelled – many women to chose sides and become politically active.

### The mobilization of women for armed resistance

The Tito-era claim that 100.000 women served in the NLA cannot be verified, but reliable evidence enables us to estimate the percentage of women in the partisan ranks.<sup>24</sup> NLA units listed male and female members separately and thus document a share of up to 15 percent women. Usually, female representation in the partisan army reached between eight and ten percent.<sup>25</sup> These data gained by random sampling are corroborated by the gender ratio of fallen partisans. Among the dead of the Battle of Sutjeska (May/June 1943), for example, eight percent were women.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Ekkehard Völkl, 'Abrechnungsfuror in Kroatien' ['Retribution Furor in Croatia'], in Hans Woller and Klaus-Dietmar Henke, eds., *Politische Säuberung in Europa. Die Abrechnung mit Faschismus und Kollaboration nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* [Political Cleansing in Europe. Settling Accounts with Fascism and Collaboration after the Second World War] (München: DTV, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> See the chapters on Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia in Alexander von Plato, Almut Leh, and Christoph Thonfeld, eds., *Hitler's Slaves. Life Stories of Forced Labourers in Nazi-occupied Europe* (New York: Berghahn, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Holm Sundhaussen argues that the destruction by the *Ustaša* regime of human lives and material assets on a horrifying scale resulted in a "classless" society, which increasingly questioned social conventions and traditional norms. See Sundhaussen, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 318.

<sup>24</sup> For the official number, see 'Žene u NOR' ['Women in the National Liberation War'], in *Leksikon narodnooslobodilačkog rata i revolucije u Jugoslaviji 1941-1945* [Lexicon of the National Liberation War and the Revolution in Yugoslavia 1941-1945; subsequently quoted as *Leksikon NOR-a*] (Ljubljana/Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1980), vol. 2, 1246-51. For a detailed discussion of this figure, see Barbara N. Wiesinger, *Partisaninnen. Widerstand in Jugoslawien (1941-1945)* [Women Partisans. Resistance in Yugoslavia (1941-1945)] (Köln: Böhlau, 2008), 27. Thereafter Wiesinger, *Partisaninnen*.

<sup>25</sup> See Wiesinger, *Partisaninnen*, 32 and 39-40.

<sup>26</sup> See Viktor Kučan, *Sutjeska – dolina heroja* [Sutjeska – The Heroes' Canyon] (Tjentište/Belgrade/Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga, 1978), 29.

At first glance, this percentage seems surprisingly high. After all, traditional gender ideology and social norms, which were in effect especially in Yugoslavia's extensive rural areas, prohibited women's participation in political affairs in general and in guerilla warfare especially.<sup>27</sup> Just like in other countries, Yugoslav public opinion held that women who lived among men who were not their family members must be of dubious sexual morals. Consequently, girls and women who decided to join the NLA had to expect open derision in addition to the physical hardships and risks of resistance.

Also, the CPY had not originally intended to mobilize women for armed resistance. Instead, female party activists and sympathizers were expected to organize the underground network in areas effectively under enemy control (such as urban centers or strategically important industrial sites). Only when threatened by arrest should women be allowed to go "into the forest", that is, to join the NLA.<sup>28</sup>

This policy changed when the conflict escalated in the autumn of 1941. As they became conscious of their growing need for medical personnel, the partisan leaders started to recruit women intentionally. Women's engagement as nurses seemed more easily acceptable socially since nursing was traditionally regarded as women's work. Also, women had already served in the Serbian Army's medical corps during World War I, so there was a historical precedent.<sup>29</sup> Altogether, 173 medical doctors and about 10.000 qualified nurses joined the NLA voluntarily, be it for ideological reasons,

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<sup>27</sup> Vgl. Karl Kaser, 'Der Balkanheld – wissenschaftlich beinahe ausgestorben' ['The Balkan Hero: In research nearly extinct'], in *L'Homme*. Z. F. G., 12, 2 (2001), 329; Ivan Čolović, *Bordel ratnika* [*The warrior's brothel*] (Belgrade: xx. vek, 2000), 75-77; Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch, 'Zur Genese der Gewalt der Helden. Gedanken zur Wirksamkeit der symbolischen Geschlechterkonstruktion' ['On the Genesis of the Hero's Violence. Thoughts on the Effectiveness of Symbolic Gender Constructions'], in Rolf Brednich and Walter Hartinger, eds., *Gewalt in der Kultur* [*Violence in Culture*] (Passau: Lehrstuhl für Volkskunde, 1994).

<sup>28</sup> See 'Pismo PK KPJ za Srbiju OK KPJ za Šabački okrug od 20.8.1941' ['Letter by the Regional Committee of the CPY to the District Committee of the CPY in the Šabac district of August 20, 1941'], in Vojnoistorijski institute, ed., *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka o narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda* [*Collection of Documents and Data on the National Liberation War of the Yugoslav Peoples*], subsequently quoted as ZDPNOR, series 1, vol. 1 (Belgrade: Vojnoistorijski institut, 1949-1982), 66.

<sup>29</sup> See Monica Krippner, *The Quality of Mercy. Women at War, Serbia 1915-1918* (London: David & Charles, 1980).

out of patriotism, or to escape political or ethnic persecution.<sup>30</sup> Many more women partisans were trained in NLA nursing schools to render first aid and elementary medical services.<sup>31</sup> By demonstrating that they were able to bear the hardships of partisan warfare and even to fight when necessary, the female doctors and nurses of the NLA paved the way for the recruitment of girls and women for combat roles.

Concurrent experience with a small number of women who had fought since the beginning of the uprising in some Serbian and Slovenian units affirmed the pertinence of broadening the scope of women's roles in the NLA.<sup>32</sup> In August 1941, the Serbian CPY had already stated: "Female comrades can be of great use in the units – not only in other functions, but, if need be, also with a weapon in their hands".<sup>33</sup>

However, the final decision on whether to engage women for armed combat or not lay with the Supreme Commander. In a letter of February 1942, Tito explained his position as follows:

"Since ever more women demand to join the [partisan] units, we have decided to accept them [...] not only as nurses, but also as fighters. It would be a real disgrace for us to make it impossible for women to fight with a weapon in hand for national liberation."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See Vera Gavrilović, *Žene-lekari u ratovima 1876-1945 na tlu Jugoslavije* [Women Doctors in the Wars of 1876-1945 on Yugoslav Soil] (Belgrade: Naučno društvo za istoriju zdravstvene kulture Jugoslavije, 1976), 56-65. Additional female medical personnel were conscripted towards the end of the war.

<sup>31</sup> See 'Sanitetski kadrovi i nastava u NOR' ['Medical Cadres and Instruction in the National Liberation War'], in Leksikon NOR-a, vol. 2, 981-82. In 1942, for example, partisan hospitals in the Bosnian towns of Grmeč, Livno, Duvno and Glamoč featured nursing schools. See 'Izveštaj referenta saniteta pri VŠ od 12.8.1942' ['Report by the medical officer of the Supreme Command of August 12, 1941'], in ZDPNOR, series 2, vol. 5, 291.

<sup>32</sup> See Bosa Cvetić, ed., *Žene Srbije u NOB* [The Women of Serbia in the National Liberation Struggle] (Belgrade: Nolit, 1975), 190, 251, 263-65, 286, 289, 325-27, 351-53, 393, 423-24, 496-98, 519-20, 551-53, 679, 724-25, 765-66, 811-12, 861; thereafter Cvetić, *Žene Srbije*; and Stana Gerk, Ivka Križnar, and Štefanija Ravnikar-Podbevšek, eds., *Slovenke v narodnoosvobodilnem boju. Zbornik dokumentov, člankov in spominov* [Slovenian Women in the National Liberation Struggle. Collection of Documents, Articles and Memoirs] (Ljubljana: Borec, 1970), 121-23. Thereafter Gerk et al., *Slovenke*.

<sup>33</sup> 'Pismo PK KPJ za Srbiju OK KPJ za Šabački okrug od 20.8.1941' ['Letter by the Regional Committee of the CPY to the District Committee of the CPY in the Šabac district of August 20, 1941'], in ZDPNOR, series 1, vol. 1, 66.

<sup>34</sup> 'Pismo Vrhovnog komandanta NOPO i DV Jugoslavije od 23.2.1942 delegatima VŠ [...] Edvardu Kardelju i Ivi Ribaru-Loli' ['Letter of the Supreme Commander of the National Liberation Partisan Units and the Volunteer Army of Yugoslavia of February 23, 1942, to Edvard Kardelj and Ivo-Lola Ribar, delegates of the Supreme Command'], in ZDPNOR, series 2, vol. 2, 436.

The party organ *Proleter* (The Proletarian) immediately announced Tito's decision.<sup>35</sup> From then on, even units whose leaders were critical of women's engagement in combat (as had been the case in many Croatian and Montenegrin partisan groups) had to comply, if often rather unenthusiastically, with the new party line.<sup>36</sup>

Pragmatic reasons were an important motive behind the CPY's change of policy on women in armed resistance: Besieged by the occupiers, collaborating armed groups, and the rival Četnici, the NLA needed every volunteer it could mobilize regardless of their sex if it hoped to eventually prevail. Presumably, women's proven efficiency both as nurses and fighters also influenced the decision. But the key factor was, as Tito pointed out in the letter cited above, the women's own initiative.

### Women's self-mobilization for armed resistance

Why did thousands of Yugoslav girls and women decide to transgress conventional gender norms and expose themselves to the perils of partisan war? I would argue that the answer lies in the chaos and terror created by occupation and collaboration.

Following the country's defeat in April 1941, the Axis powers had installed both incompetent and brutal regimes to govern Yugoslavia.<sup>37</sup> Their

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<sup>35</sup> See J., 'Važnost učešća žena u današnjoj narodno-oslobodilačkoj borbi' ['The Importance of Women's Participation in Today's National Liberation Struggle'], *Proleter*, 14-15 (1942), 16.

<sup>36</sup> On Croatia see Desanka Stojić, *Prva ženska partizanska četa* [*The First Women's Partisan Unit*] (Karlovac: SSRN Hrvatske, 1987), 12-16; thereafter Stojić, *Partizanska*. Sklevicky, *Konji*, 38-39; Helmut Kopetzky, *Die andere Front. Europäische Frauen in Krieg und Widerstand 1939-1945* [*The Other Front. European Women in War and Resistance 1939-1945*] (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1980), 80-81; on Montenegro see Jovan Bojović, Radman Jovanović, Zoran Lakić, Radoje Pajović, and Slavko Stanišić, *Žene Crne Gore u revolucionarnom pokretu 1918-1945* [*The Women of Montenegro in the Revolutionary Movement 1918-1945*] (Titograd: Istorijski institut, 1969), 127 and 153-56; thereafter Bojović et al., *Žene*. Neda Božinović, 'Studentkinje i diplomirane studentkinje Beogradskog univerziteta u narodnooslobodilačkom ratu i revoluciji' ['Female Students and Alumnae of Belgrade University in the National Liberation War and the Revolution'], in Dobrica Vulović and Božidar Draškić, eds., *Studentkinje beogradskog univerziteta u revolucionarnom pokretu* [*Female Students of Belgrade University in the Revolutionary Movement*] (Belgrade: Centar za marksizam univerziteta, 1988), 115; thereafter Božinović, 'Studentkinje'. Dušanka Kovačević and Dragutin Kosorić, eds., *Borbeni put žena Jugoslavije* [*The Struggle of Yugoslavia's Women*] (Belgrade: Sveznanje, 1972), 89. Thereafter Kovačević and Kosorić, *Borbeni*.

<sup>37</sup> For a detailed discussion see Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

reign of terror was additionally exacerbated by the civil war between monarchist Četnici, fascist Ustaša and the communist NLA, to name but the largest contending parties. For the civilian population, the escalating conflict meant the destruction of livelihoods and traditional social networks as well as a constant menace of violence.

The nature and scale of the threats civilians faced in occupied Yugoslavia – forced resettlement (*Umsiedlung*) and expulsion, conscription for forced labor, internment in prisons and concentration camps, theft and pillage, abuse and murder – allow us to comprehend why so many women opted for resistance. The destruction of families and local communities caused by the war left girls and women on their own, compelling them to defend their integrity and lives themselves. Joining an armed group which provided an alternative social network, meager means to live, and arms for self-defense, offered them much-needed, albeit precarious, protection. The general anomy brought about by the conflict also implied a decrease in social control, which enabled girls and women to transgress gender conventions more easily and try out new roles. As the NLA was the only party in the conflict which systematically recruited women, becoming a partisan was an obvious option for many of them.<sup>38</sup>

The words of women veterans support these hypotheses. Stana Nidžović-Džakula, an ethnic Serb from Croatia who joined the NLA after the destruction of her native village by Ustaša troops, underlined that the menace of rampant violence was the decisive motive for her and other young women to become partisans:

“What affected me were the general conditions. [...] Look, among us, at the time, patriarchal notions were that female children [...] could not go far from the house without a chaperon. And now to decide in this patriarchal notion [sic] to join the ranks, [to live] among men... That means, something had to compel her [the woman partisan]. There had to be some decisive event or something. [...] Not only in my case, but in general.”<sup>39</sup>

Radmila Velimirović from Belgrade lost her Jewish father at the hands of the occupiers. Her hatred of them and fear for her life were supplemented by her desire to protect her personal integrity. Rumors she had heard about sexual violence committed by the collaborating police strengthened her resolve to join the NLA, where she served as a nurse until the end of the war:

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<sup>38</sup> For a similar argument, see Bogdan Denitch, *The Legitimation of a Revolution. The Yugoslav Case* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 41.

<sup>39</sup> Stana Nidžović-Džakula, Interview by Barbara Wiesinger (thereafter BW), November 2003.

“[As a partisan,] I suffered such terrible ordeals, but I preferred that to... I am from Dedinje and there the police often drove by with young girls, screams, they beat them, and then they forced [...] the parents to watch while five or six of them had their way with the girl. [...] And I preferred that, even if I should perish, with this conviction I joined [the NLA].”<sup>40</sup>

For Jewish women, joining the resistance provided an opportunity to escape persecution and to contribute to the defeat of National Socialism at the same time.<sup>41</sup> Eta Najfeld from Croatia, who served in the NLA as a medical doctor, recapitulated her engagement as follows:

“And I have to say that the feeling that I was equal, that I had equal rights, that I was not the persecuted Jewish beast afraid of herself and everyone else anymore, was a great relief. I was not only equal; I was respected for my diligence, my work, my dedication and my gratefulness towards those who had saved me. If it were not for the partisans, we [she and her family] would not have survived.”<sup>42</sup>

But being part of the NLA could also mean improved material conditions. Dragica Vujović, an ethnic Croat from Herzegovina who was forcibly recruited by the partisans, eventually decided to stay because the NLA provided her with clothes and regular, if meager, provisions; something which her impoverished parents could not guarantee.<sup>43</sup>

Ideological convictions, on the other hand, inspired only a minority of women, most of whom had already been members of the CPY or the communist youth organisation SKOJ (*Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije*) before the war. For Croat partisan Radojka Katić and ethnic Hungarian party activist Ida Sabo, the National Liberation War was not only a war of liberation, but also a socialist revolution.<sup>44</sup> The majority of Yugoslav women partisans, however, opted for armed resistance in order to defend themselves in an existentially threatening situation rather than in response to the CPY's hazy promises of social and political change.

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<sup>40</sup> Radmila Velimirović, Interview by BW, March 2003.

<sup>41</sup> See also Anika Radošević, Interview by BW, December 2003. More information on Jewish women partisans can be found in Romano, *Jevreji*, 307-511.

<sup>42</sup> Eta Najfeld, Interview by BW, December 2008.

<sup>43</sup> See Dragica Vujović, Interview by BW, April 2003.

<sup>44</sup> See Radojka Katić, Interview by BW, January 2004, and Ida Sabo, Interview by BW, June 2003.

### Military practice

Following Tito's decision of February 1942, the NLA intensified the recruitment of women for armed resistance. In order to mobilize female volunteers, partisan propaganda painted an idealized picture of life in the army and conventionalized women activists as exemplary heroines motivated by patriotism, love of freedom and devotion to the community.<sup>45</sup> An obituary in the movement's press<sup>46</sup> for Croatian partisan Kata Bubalo, for example, presents her death as a selfless sacrifice for the nation. The fighter dies, "[h]er chest pressed to the ground [...] so that nobody would witness the moment when she gives her warm blood to her country, her people and her fatherland."<sup>47</sup>

The most vociferous advocate of women's participation in armed resistance, however, was neither the CPY nor the NLA, but the Antifascist Front of Women (*Antifašistički front žena*, AFŽ). In its founding resolution, the women's branch of the resistance movement called on the NLA to "continue to engage women, together with men, in armed [resistance] and diversion against the occupier."<sup>48</sup> Numerous articles in AFŽ journals asked girls and women to sign up as volunteers and praised their contributions to the National Liberation Struggle. Partisan propaganda focused on two roles for women partisans: the nurse and the fighter. An article in *Zora* (Dawn), the journal of the Serbian AFŽ, compared modern-day partisans to the mythic figure of the Kosovo Maiden (*Kosovka devojka*) of Serbian epic poetry – but with an important qualification:

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<sup>45</sup> See Anđelka Milić, 'Patrijarhalni poredak, revolucija i saznanje o položaju žene' ['The Patriarchal Order, the Revolution and Insights into Women's Situation'], in Latinka Perović, ed., *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima* [*Serbia in the Processes of Modernization*], (Belgrade: INIS, 1998), vol. 2, 556.

<sup>46</sup> The most important partisan paper was *Borba* [*The Struggle*]. During the war, the Antifascist Front of Women alone published 27 different local and regional papers, which were aimed at a female readership and prominently dealt with women's contributions to the resistance. *Žena danas* [*Woman today*], a continuation of the interwar leftist-feminist periodical of the same name, was the partisan movement's "federal" women's paper.

<sup>47</sup> See 'Najveći dar' ['The Greatest Gift'], quoted in Marija Šoljan, ed., *Žene Hrvatske u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi* [*The Women of Croatia in the National Liberation Struggle*], vol. 2 (Zagreb: Savez ženskih društava Hrvatske, 1955), 189. Thereafter Šoljan, *Žene Hrvatske*.

<sup>48</sup> 'Rezolucija sa prve zemaljske konferencije AF' ['Resolution from the first federal conference of the Antifascist Front of Women'], *Žena danas*, 31 (1943), 15-16. See also 'Žene učvršćuju svoju organizaciju' ['Women Strengthen Their Organization'], *Borba*, 28 (1942), 4.



“The epitomization of these women is the Kosovo Maiden, but her successors, today’s Kosovo Maidens, are rendering First Aid in battle as well as fighting themselves.”<sup>49</sup>

Due to the nature of partisan warfare, the roles of nurse and fighter were not neatly distinguishable anyway. Medics sometimes fought in order to defend themselves and their patients, while fighters helped take care of the sick and wounded. Also, many women held both functions during their NLA ‘careers’. In the case of Yugoslavia’s women partisans, then, the dividing line between combatant and non-combatant roles is particularly hard to define.

But revolutionary rhetoric about “women’s right to fight” notwithstanding, the prototypical female function in the partisan army was clearly medical service. Long before Tito’s decision to let women “fight for national liberation”, the NLA had already recruited medical doctors and nurses. Throughout the war, many units deployed women volunteers automatically for service in the medical corps.<sup>50</sup>

Partisan nurses were either attached to a unit or worked in hospitals, which either moved about with the army or were hidden in the more inaccessible corners of the country.<sup>51</sup> In these hospitals, nurses assisted with operations, tended to patients, took care of hygiene, and the like.<sup>52</sup> They also had to wash and repair clothes and prepare food.<sup>53</sup>

In addition, nurses were responsible for the construction and maintenance of dugouts where patients and personnel could hide in case of an

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Spremamo se’ [‘We’re getting ready’], *Zora*, 1 (1945), 16.

<sup>50</sup> See Julka Mešterović, *Lekarev dnevnik [A Doctor’s Diary]* (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1968), 130, 194; see also ‘Zadaci mesnih partizanskih jedinica u Sremu, 08/09-1944’ [‘Tasks of the Local Partisan Units in Syrmia, Aug./Sept. 1944’], in ZDPNOR, series 1, vol. 11, 22.

<sup>51</sup> Many hospitals were founded and directed by women, for example the Slovenian conspiratory infirmaries “Franja”, named after Dr. Franja Bojc Bidovec (1913-1985) and “Pavla”, named after Dr. Pavla Jerina Lah (1915-2007).

<sup>52</sup> See ‘Statut sanitetske službe, 10.11.1942’ [‘Statute of the medical service of November 10, 1942’], in ZDPNOR, series 2, vol. 6, 390.

<sup>53</sup> See ‘Mesečni izveštaj referenta saniteta štaba obalske artiljerije, 11-1944’ [‘Monthly report by the medical officer of the staff of the coastal artillery, Nov. 1944’], in *Zbornik dokumenata i podataka sanitetske službe u narodnooslobodilačkom ratu jugoslovenskih naroda [Collection of Documents and Data on the Medical Service in the National Liberation War of the Yugoslav Peoples; subsequently quoted as ZDPSS]*, vol. 4 (Belgrade: Sanitetska uprava državnog sekretarijata za narodnu odbranu, 1952-1969), 492; and ‘Uputstvo štaba 19. divizije, 30.6.1944’ [‘Instructions of the staff of the 19<sup>th</sup> division of June 30, 1944’], in ZDPSS, vol. 4, 292.



enemy advance.<sup>54</sup> Nurses ‘at the front’ accompanied their units into battle to evacuate the wounded, provide First Aid, and recover the dead.<sup>55</sup> Thus, medics were exposed to the same hazards as their fighting comrades. Radmila Velimirović, for example, was nearly killed by a German soldier during the liberation of Belgrade in autumn 1944 while she was preparing a wounded partisan for evacuation. Thanks to the presence of mind of her unit’s political commissar, the enemy soldier was shot before he could kill Velimirović.<sup>56</sup> A 1945 propaganda leaflet describes the perils partisan nurses faced as follows:

„In Gornja Sredica the battle is raging. Our [men] are drawing back, but on the battlefield five comrades lie in their blood. Roza bandages them up and saves them one by one, bringing them into cover. The enemy fire does not abate; a heavy machine gun mows down everything. It tears Roza’s stomach apart. She struggles with death, but continues the evacuation. Her wound deepens and Roza dies on the stretcher in terrible pain. Her last words: ‘Don’t leave them behind [...], bandage [them] up, save the comrades!’”<sup>57</sup>

This quotation is also an example of how partisan propaganda idealized nurses who died at the front as selfless heroines; a stereotype which socialist-era accounts of women’s contribution to the “National Liberation War” frequently reiterated.

Nurses who served in partisan units were usually armed with pistol, knife, and hand grenade.<sup>58</sup> As Radmila Velimirović explained, these weapons, which would have been of little use in combat anyway, enabled her and her colleagues to defend or kill themselves if need be:

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<sup>54</sup> See ‘Naređenje načelnika sanitetskog odeljenja štaba 4. korpusa NOVJ, 22.5.1944’ [‘Command of the head of the sanitary department of the staff of the 4<sup>th</sup> corps of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia’], in ZDPSS, vol. 5, 129–30; ‘Uputstvo sanitetskog odseka GŠ Hrvatske’ [‘Instructions of the sanitary department of the General Staff of Croatia of June 15, 1944’], 15.6.1944, in ZDPSS, vol. 5, 114–18.

<sup>55</sup> See ‘Uputstvo štaba 6. Vojvodanske brigade’ [‘Instructions of the staff of the 6<sup>th</sup> Vojvodina brigade of March 7, 1944’], 7.3.1944, in ZDPSS, vol. 9, 27; ‘Uputstvo za rukovanje sanitetom divizije i korpusa, 25.4.1943’ [‘Instructions on directing the medical service of divisions and corpora’], in ZDPSS, vol. 3, 85; ‘Uputstvo referenta saniteta 3. bataljona 3. brigade 20. divizije za rad bolničara’ [‘Instructions of the medical officer of the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade of the 20<sup>th</sup> division for the work of medics’], 11.3.1944, in ZDPSS, vol. 4, 207–8.

<sup>56</sup> Velimirović, Interview.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Komesar 33. Divizije X. korpusa o drugaricama’ [‘The commissar of the 33<sup>rd</sup> division of the X<sup>th</sup> corps on female comrades’], quoted in Ana Konjović, *Žena-vojnica [The woman-soldier]* (Zagreb: Glavni odbor AFŽ Hrvatske, 1945), 17–18.

<sup>58</sup> See ‘Statut sanitetske službe’, 10.11.1942’ [‘Statute of the medical service of November 10, 1942’], in ZDPNOR, series 2, vol. 6, 389.

“Of course I handled weapons, because one had to know that. [...] You shake the bomb, throw it and put an end to the story. You kill yourself, [it is] better [to kill] yourself than to fall into the hands of someone who will torture and torment you.”<sup>59</sup>

Insofar as nurses at the front were exposed to violence, but only actively engaged in it in emergency situations,<sup>60</sup> their service in the NLA did not represent as radical a breach with traditional gender norms as the deployment of women for combat. Even so, from 1944 onwards many partisan leaders decided to withdraw female nurses from the frontline units and send them to hospitals in the liberated territories instead.<sup>61</sup> This step indicates that a number of NLA commanders regarded the engagement of women in frontline service in any function whatsoever as an expedient only in a desperate situation. As the NLA's ability to recruit male volunteers grew with its military power and political influence, many partisan leaders tried to re-establish a more traditional division of the 'labor of war'. That, of course, is not to say that the partisan nurses themselves necessarily saw their redeployment to the rear negatively. After all, in territories under NLA control they were not exposed anymore to the constant stress and perils of the 'front', although their lives continued to be characterized by hardships and deprivation until the end of the war.

As opposed to women's medical service, their participation in armed combat was controversial both within the NLA and the wider population. Although individual women had fought in the anti-Ottoman uprisings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Balkan Wars, and in World War I,<sup>62</sup> common opinion was

<sup>59</sup> Velimirović, Interview.

<sup>60</sup> See 'Naše bolničarke' ['Our Nurses'], *Omladina*, 22 (1944), 5; see also 'Komesar VI. korpusa o drugaricama' ['The Commissar of the VI<sup>th</sup> Corpus on Women-Comrades'], quoted in Ana Konjović, *Žena-vojnica* [*The woman-soldier*] (Zagreb: Glavni odbor AFŽ Hrvatske, 1945), 21.

<sup>61</sup> See 'Raspis referenta saniteta 9. divizije, 19.11.1944' ['Letter by the medical officer of the 9<sup>th</sup> division, November 19, 1944'], in ZDPSS, vol. 4, 482; 'Uputstvo štaba 39. divizije, 3.12.1944' ['Instructions of the staff of the 39<sup>th</sup> division of December 3, 1944'], in ZDPSS, vol. 11, 380; 'Izveštaj načelnika saniteta 2. Korpusa' ['Report by the head of the medical service of the 2<sup>nd</sup> corps of January 30, 1944'], 30.1.1944, in ZDPSS, vol. 1, 418 and 423. Other units had already divided labor in this way earlier. See 'Izveštaj grupe NOPO za Liku, 29.8.1942' ['Report of the Lika group of National Liberation Partisan Units of August 29, 1942'], in ZDPNOR, series 5, vol. 30, 345.

<sup>62</sup> See Jovanka Kecman, *Žene Jugoslavije u radničkom pokretu i ženskim organizacijama 1918-1941* [*The Women of Yugoslavia in the Labor Movement and in Women's Organizations 1918-1941*] (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1978), 16; and Bojović et al., *Žene*, 15. Conversations with women veterans of World War I can be found in Antonije Đurić, *Žene-Solunci govore* [*Women Veterans of the Salonika Front Speak*] (Belgrade: Književne Novine, 1987).

that violence and warfare were essentially men's business. Tito's decision to recruit women for combat roles therefore caused conflicts within the resistance movement, as the case of the Lika's women's companies aptly illustrates.

In August 1942, AFŽ and SKOJ activists in the Croatian Lika region founded a women's company of about 70 members. Soon, four more followed. In October 1942, the General Staff of the Croatian NLA banned single-sex units and ordered the five women's companies to be incorporated into what was later to become the famous VI<sup>th</sup> Proletarian Division. Their commander, however, refused at first to integrate the predominantly teenage partisans into his ranks.<sup>63</sup> In her memoirs, Desanka Stojić, a member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Women's Company, explained:

"The formation of companies of female youths produced astonishment and doubt among certain parts of the population and the fighters. Can women be soldiers at all? [Soldiering] had always been a male activity. The majority of peasants [...] could not get used easily to woman's [sic] right to fight."<sup>64</sup>

Many partisans, including the commanding cadre, doubted that the young women would be able to bear the hardships of partisan war, let alone be useful combatants.<sup>65</sup> When the VI<sup>th</sup> Proletarian Division complied eventually with the General Staff's command, the young women were sent, mostly unarmed, into their first battle. Their assignment was to capture weapons for the NLA. This order seems cynical even when one considers that up to the autumn of 1943, the NLA notoriously lacked weaponry.<sup>66</sup>

Of the women who survived their first encounter with the enemy, most were deployed for medical service, although many would have preferred combat duty, if one is to believe a report by Kata Bubalo, the political commissar of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Women's Company:

"Selecting nurses was rather troublesome, because every [girl] wanted to be a fighter with a weapon in her hand. We had one wish only: To get hold of a gun and fight the enemy. All of us have heard of our comrades of the 1<sup>st</sup> Women's Company. They have proven themselves to be good and dauntless warriors. We have to become as good as them and even better. [...] We have to prove to everybody that we are able to fight just as well as our [male] comrades."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> See Stojić, *Partizanska*, 36.

<sup>64</sup> Stojić, *Partizanska*, 33.

<sup>65</sup> See 'Partizanke u borbi' ['Women Partisans in Combat'], (*Lička*) *Žena u borbi*, 7-8 (1942), 18-19.

<sup>66</sup> See Stojić, *Partizanska*, 46-47.

<sup>67</sup> 'Drugarica iz brigade nam piše' ['A Woman Comrade from the Brigade Writes Us'], (*Lička*) *Žena u borbi*, 9 (1942), 14-16.

In the following years, members of the Croatian women's units participated in the Battle of Sutjeska, defended Tito and the Supreme Command against *Wehrmacht* parachutists in Drvar, took part in the Battle of Belgrade, and served at the Srem Front in the final months of the war.<sup>68</sup> Altogether, more than 600 female partisans served in the VI<sup>th</sup> Proletarian Division.<sup>69</sup>

Although negative evaluations of women's performance in battle are surprisingly rare<sup>70</sup>, their military 'usefulness' must have been hampered by their lack of systematic training. Admittedly, women with a rural background sometimes knew how to handle guns, while others who had participated in the Spanish Civil War had some experience of guerilla war,<sup>71</sup> but hardly any women had undergone military training. The same was true, of course, of many male volunteers. Therefore the NLA organized "military-political courses" in which new recruits of both sexes were instructed in the handling of weapons, combat techniques and fundamental tactics, sprinkled over with the basics of communism.<sup>72</sup> Still, under conditions of war these courses were not run regularly, which meant that many women partisans took over combatant roles completely unprepared.

Ida Sabo, for example, who was originally an underground activist in occupied Ljubljana, joined the NLA to escape from being arrested for a second time. An unexpected enemy attack confused her so that she started to shoot standing upright until a more experienced partisan told her to seek cover and fire from there.<sup>73</sup> Stana Nidžović-Džakula, again, was barely able to handle a gun when she went into her first battle. Still, she conquered her fear in order to prove her worth as a warrior, especially because

<sup>68</sup> See Stojić, *Partizanska*, 74-76 and 81-93.

<sup>69</sup> See Kovačević and Kosorić, *Borbeni*, 126.

<sup>70</sup> The only example I have found is 'Izveštaj štaba Nikšičkog NOPO, 31.5.1942' ['Report of the staff of the Nikšić National Liberation Partisan Unit of May 31, 1942'], in ZDPNOR, series 1, vol. 16, 323.

<sup>71</sup> See 'Žene u NOR', in Leksikon NOR-a, 1246.

<sup>72</sup> See 'Plan izvođenja vojne nastave, propisan od Vrhovnog komandanta početkom oktobra 1941' ['Plan for the realization of military instruction, decreed by the General Commander in early October 1941'], in ZDPNOR, series 2, vol. 2, 68-71; 'Uputstvo Aleksandra Rankovića, 10.9.1942' ['Instructions by Aleksandar Ranković of September 10, 1942'], in ZDPNOR, series 2, vol. 6, 76; see also 'Vojno-političke škole i kursevi u NOVJ' ['Military-political schools and courses in the Yugoslav National Liberation Army'], in Leksikon NOR-a, vol. 2, 1201-1202; and 'Vojnostručna obuka boraca i starešina NOVJ' ['Specialist military training of soldiers and officers of the Yugoslav National Liberation Army'], in Leksikon NOR-a, vol. 2, 1203-1204.

<sup>73</sup> See Ida Sabo, Interview; see also Jancar-Webster, *Women*, 48.

she was the only female fighter in her unit.<sup>74</sup> By and by, Nidžović-Džakula claims, she became „quite a good marksman [sic]“ and a courageous *bombaš*<sup>75</sup> respected by her comrades: “They [her male comrades] regarded me and every other [woman] as equals. [...] They even admired some [women partisans]. [...] There was no mistrust towards us.”<sup>76</sup>

Generally, however, the women veterans I interviewed hardly spoke about the bloody ‘core business’ of war and even less about their own acts of violence. Radojka Katić put it especially succinctly: “He shoots at you and you shoot as well. That’s how it is.”<sup>77</sup> Written memoirs are also largely silent on the topic of partisan violence, while the partisans’ sufferings are depicted in great detail, often rather emotionally.<sup>78</sup> One explanation for this conspicuous silence could be the notorious difficulty of verbalizing experiences of violence. Another possibility is that the women veterans involuntarily suppressed negative memories, or that they consciously attempted to portray themselves and their war in a positive light and therefore censored memories of violence which might seem unacceptable from a peacetime perspective.

Wartime propaganda was less diffident when it came to describing what women fighters in the partisan army actually did. Since the NLA saw its struggle as a just war, concealing its bloody reality behind euphemistic language seemed hardly necessary. On the battlefield, women were expected to display the same martial behavior as men:

“Impatiently the partisans await the moment when they will attack the fascist arsonist, but the women partisans are even more impatient. [...] The comrades jump on the tanks. The female comrades do not stay behind. In Petrovo selo they compete with the most courageous [male] partisans. They catch live *Ustaše*.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> See Stana Nidžović-Džakula, Interview by BW, November 2003.

<sup>75</sup> *Bombaši* initiated attacks by disabling tanks and destroying enemy dugouts with hand grenades, which was a very dangerous task.

<sup>76</sup> Nidžović-Džakula, Interview .

<sup>77</sup> Radojka Katić, Interview by BW, January 2004.

<sup>78</sup> An illustrative example are the memoirs of Saša Božinović, MD, which were widely read in the former Yugoslavia. See Saša Božinović, *Tebi, moja Dolores* [*For you, my Dolores*], 2nd edn (Belgrade: 4. jul, 1981).

<sup>79</sup> ‘Kako se bore ličke partizanke. Dopis jedne partizanke’ [‘How the Lika’s Women Partisans Fight. Report by a Woman-Partisan’], (*Lička*) *Žena u borbi*, 9 (1942), 13-14. See also ‘Partizanka priča’ [‘A Woman Partisan Speaks’], (*Lička*) *Žena u borbi*, 7-8 (1942), 19-21; ‘Junačke ličke partizanke jurišaju na tenk i robove’ [‘The Heroic Women-Partisans of the Lika Attack a Tank and Trenches’], *Primorka*, 1 (1942), 14-15.

In partisan propaganda, women fighters judge, destroy, mow down or tear apart their enemies, who are often referred to as dogs, beasts, or monsters and thus dehumanized.<sup>80</sup> Generally, NLA propaganda normalized women's violence and negated the popularly perceived contrariety between a female gender identity and the use of violence, all with an eye to legitimizing and furthering the mobilization of women for resistance. Only rarely is the protagonist's gender contrasted with her actions, and if that is the case, her 'unusual' behavior is instantly justified by references to the enemy's viciousness:

"[...] during a battle [...] a duel develops between her and a bandit who carries a machine gun which Dragica craves passionately. Her tender girlish hands are cruel towards the dogs who have committed so much evil. With the butt of her gun Dragica overpowers the enemy and seizes the *šarac* [a machine gun]. On that day, her company received a beautiful gift, captured by the hands of a girl-hero."<sup>81</sup>

Although women's military prowess was generally evaluated positively in partisan propaganda as well as in internal NLA documents, only three women – Milka Kerin, Milka Kljajić and Danica Milosavljević – held leading positions outside of the medical service.<sup>82</sup>

Also, the year 1944 already saw the widespread demobilization of women combatants.<sup>83</sup> Concurrently, new female volunteers were deployed automatically for medical service, just as had been the case at the beginning

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<sup>80</sup> For text examples see 'Žene-borci' ['Women-Combatants'], *Žena u borbi*, 8 (1944), 6; Desa Miljenović, 'Žene junakinje' ['Women heroines'], *Žena u borbi*, 16-17 (1945), 10; Vladimir Bakarić, 'Partizanka sudi' ['Judgement by a Woman-Partisan'], *Žena u borbi*, 1 (1943), 18; Branko Vukelić, 'Prva Goranka partizanka – komesar bataljona' ['The First Woman-Partisan from Gorski kotar – commissar of a Battalion'], *Rodoljupka*, 2 (1944) 6-7; 'Tri godine herojske borbe, žrtava i uspeha' ['Three Years of Heroic Struggle, Sacrifices and Successes'], *Žena u borbi*, 9 (1944), 12; 'Osam puta ranjena' ['Wounded Eight Times'], quoted in Ana Konjović, *Žena-vojnica [The woman-soldier]* (Zagreb: Glavni odbor AFŽ Hrvatske, 1945), 8; 'Za našu decu' ['For Our Children'], *Žena danas*, 32 (1943) 17; Slavonka, 'One su dale svoje živote' ['They Gave Their Lives'], *Žena u borbi*, 3-4 (1943) 23; Jaroslav, 'Ubijte, ne znam ništa' ['Kill Me, I Don't Know Anything'], *Vojvodanka u borbi*, 4 (1944), 9.

<sup>81</sup> 'Žene-borci Prokuplja i Turopolja' ['The Women Fighters of Prokuplje and Turopolje'], *Žena u borbi*, 11 (1944) 14.

<sup>82</sup> See *Institut za savremenu istoriju, Narodni heroji Jugoslavije [National Heroes of Yugoslavia]* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1982), 376-77, 385-86, 547-48. See also Jancar-Webster, *Women*, 90, 93-94.

<sup>83</sup> See 'Primedbe CK KPJ PK KP Crne Gore i Boke, 8.2.1944' ['Critical remarks by the Central Committee of the CPY to the Regional Committee of the CP of Montenegro and Boka of February 8, 1944'], in ZDPNOR, series 2, vol. 12, 80; also Božinović, 'Student-kinje', 119.

of the war.<sup>84</sup> This policy reflects the changed position of the NLA. In the summer and autumn of 1944, Tito's partisans gained control over large parts of Yugoslavia, where they could conscript male soldiers. Offers of amnesty enticed members of opposing armed groups to join the rising NLA, where they could replace women fighters. Female partisans, who had been mobilized during the critical years of 1942 and 1943, were sent to the rear in growing numbers. In the liberated territories, they worked in hospitals, took care of war orphans, agitated for the CPY and the resistance movement, organized literacy programs, built new administrative structures, and participated in the reconstruction of homes, infrastructure, and the economy.<sup>85</sup> After the end of the war, all women partisans except those on medical or administrative duty were demobilized. Apparently, the communist regime was not so 'revolutionary' as to enable, let alone encourage, women's military engagement, especially as combatants, except in situations of dire need.

### Women partisans in cultural memory

So far, there are no systematic studies of the representations of women partisans in socialist Yugoslavia's cultural memory.<sup>86</sup> Still, it is obvious that after 1945, neither politics nor society, neither academic nor cultural circles paid much attention to women's participation in armed resistance during World War II. Admittedly, every Yugoslav republic published a volume on women in the resistance<sup>87</sup>, but 'general' historiography on the

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<sup>84</sup> See for example 'Pismo Glavnog NOO Vojvodine, 23.4.1944' ['Letter of the National Liberation Council of the Vojvodina, April 23, 1944'], in ZDPNOR, series 1, vol. 8, 173-174; 'Naredenje štaba 21. NOU divizije, 16.8.1944' ['Command by the staff of the 21st National Liberation Shock Division of August 16, 1944'], in ZDPNOR, series 1, vol. 9, 331.

<sup>85</sup> Katić, Interview.

<sup>86</sup> See, however, Renata Jambrešić Kirin, 'Heroine ili egzekutorice: partizanke u 1990-ima' ['Heroines or Executioners: Women Partisans in the 1990s'], in Renata Jambrešić Kirin and Tea Škokić, eds., *Između roda i naroda. Etnološke i folklorističke studije [Between Gender and Nation. Ethnological and Folkloristic Studies]* (Zagreb: Centar za ženske studije, 2004).

<sup>87</sup> In addition to the titles already quoted Kovačević and Kosorić, *Borbeni*, see Šoljan, *Žene Hrvatske*; Gerk et al., *Slovenke*; Bojović et al., *Žene*; Cvetić, *Žene Srbije*; see Alija Velić, ed., *Žene Bosne i Hercegovine u narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi 1941-1945. Sjećanja učesnika [The Women of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the National Liberation Struggle 1941-1945. Memories of Veterans]* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1977); Bosa Đurović, ed., *Žene Crne Gore u revolucionarnom pokretu 1919-1945 [The Women of Montenegro in the Revolutionary Movement 1919-1945]* (Titograd: Glavni Odbor Saveza ženskih društava Crne Gore, 1960); Drago Zdunić, ed., *Heroine Jugoslavije [Heroines of Yugoslavia]* (Zagreb: Naša



National Liberation Struggle only mentioned them in passing, if at all. Women partisans were also under-represented in popular media of remembrance such as partisan films. Official commemorations of the National Liberation Struggle paid no specific attention to women partisans. Significantly, plans for a “Memorial for the Woman Fighter” were also never realized.<sup>88</sup>

While the names of fallen women fighters and nurses appeared alongside those of their male comrades in books or on commemorative plaques and monuments, the specificity of their war experience remained ignored. After all, detailed research about the engagement of women in the resistance would unfailingly have brought to light the differences between historical reality and the official narrative of partisan equality.

If women’s armed resistance was discussed at all during the socialist period, then only within the limits of official interpretations, according to which the participation of women in the National Liberation Struggle was an effect of mass support for the CPY and its revolutionary project as well as a result of the party’s purported emancipatory politics. A common interpretation was that by participating in the National Liberation Struggle, Yugoslavia’s women had collectively proved their maturity as citizens<sup>89</sup> and thus ‘earned’ the equal rights codified in the laws of socialist Yugoslavia:

“Buried alive in pits, drowned in rivers, hanged on trees, massacred on [their] doorsteps, burned in their parents’ house, with eyes cut out and limbs cut off, with their youth, their slaughtered children and their martyred husbands, with grenades, guns, mines and their own blood they earned their rights.”<sup>90</sup>

It is no coincidence that this rather drastic quote mentions active resisters in the same breath as victims of war. References to women’s participation in the National Liberation Struggle often mixed activists and victims, the latter of which are thus engrossed as purported supporters of the National Liberation Struggle, and thus implicitly as advocates of communist rule.

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djeca, 1980); Vera Veskovik-Vangeli and Jovanovik, Marija, ed., *Zbornik na dokumenti za učestvoto na ženite od Makedonija vo narodnoosvoboditelnata vojna i revolucijata 1941-1945* [Collection of Documents on the Participation of Women from Macedonia in the National Liberation War and Revolution of 1941-1945] (Skopje: Institut za nacionalna istorija, 1976); Danilo Kecić, ed., *Žene Vojvodine u ratu i revoluciji 1941-1945* [The Women of Vojvodina in War and Revolution, 1941-1945] (Novi Sad: Institut za istoriju, 1984).

<sup>88</sup> See Karge, *Steinerne Erinnerung*, 94, 98-99.

<sup>89</sup> Among the many examples, see ‘Novo priznanje’ [‘New Recognition’], *Zora*, 1 (1945), 13.

<sup>90</sup> Andro Gabelić, ‘Zajedno u borbi – zajedno u pobjedi’ [‘Together in Struggle – Together in Victory’], *Žena danas*, 35 (1945), 5.



Against this background, women's armed resistance was reduced to mere clichés. Supposedly, between 1941 and 1945 tens of thousands of selfless nurses, courageous fighters, and determined party activists had fought shoulder to shoulder with their male comrades, happily risking their lives for a better future. This stereotypical idealization of women's (armed) resistance covered up the real conflicts about their participation in the National Liberation Struggle, especially as combatants. It also silenced the personal motives and experiences of the women veterans themselves, which have been the focus of this article.

OLENA PETRENKO

## ANATOMY OF THE UNSAID

### ALONG THE TABOO LINES OF FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE UKRAINIAN NATIONALISTIC UNDERGROUND\*

Lubov Gaiovska “Ruta” (literary pseudonym Olga Ilynska 1923-1954) became a legend of the Ukrainian underground during her own lifetime. She managed to escape from the Soviet Security Service four times in the 1940s-1950s under almost hopeless circumstances. In her autobiographical story “Oblava” (“The Raid”) she describes one such close-to-death episode. She was left alone, hiding in a peasant’s house. The peasant, who usually provided her with food every morning, didn’t appear. She heard voices and saw that the Soviet officers were searching around the yard. That day, the bunker of “Ruta” was not found; she caused the officers of the state security lots of trouble and headaches for quite a long time. Georgii Sannikov, a former KGB officer, recalls the speech of Oleksii Kyrychenko, the Secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine, during the meeting of the leadership of the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1953 in Kyiv. He yelled at the security officers, asking how it is possible that “they were not to able to catch this baba”.<sup>1</sup>

In 1954 the “baba”, this time occupying the position of referent in the underground’s propaganda department in Lviv and the Lviv region was finally found: she and her security guard committed suicide during the raid of the MGB.<sup>2</sup> By that time the underground structure practically did not

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\* I would like to thank Yulia Boyd, Pavlo Maykut, Ihor Prociuk and the editors of this book for their assistance in preparing this article.

<sup>1</sup> Georgii Sannikov, *Bolshaia okhota: Borba s vooruzhennym podpoiem OUN v Zapadnoi Ukraine* [The Big Hunt: The Fight with Armed Underground of the OUN in the Western Ukraine] (Moskva: Pechatnye traditsii, 2008), 249.

<sup>2</sup> MGB – Ministry for State Security, predecessor of KGB, which in the post-war time was responsible for the destroying of Ukrainian nationalists groups. The special operations were organized mainly by the Directorate for the Fight Against Banditry (*upravlenie po borbe s banditizmom NKGB URSR*), 2 H Directorate MGB URSR and 4 Directorate KGB.

exist anymore; the majority of insurgents had been eliminated or arrested. Gaiovska was actually one of the last key figures of the Ukrainian nationalistic underground eliminated by the Soviet counterinsurgency.<sup>3</sup>

The success of the Soviet counterinsurgency effort in the late 1940s led to not only numerous losses among the insurgents but also to a general demoralization and exhaustion. After twelve years of an uninterrupted state of war, declared or undeclared, the western Ukrainian population showed all the signs of war-fatigue.

Today the history of the *Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists* (OUN) and the *Ukrainian Insurgent Army* (UPA) remains one of the most controversial fields of the remembrance culture. The current research in Ukraine evokes opposing evaluations between the eastern and western regions of the country. On the one hand (from the perspective of West Ukraine), they are celebrated as martyrs who devoted their lives to the struggle of Ukraine; on the other hand (East Ukraine) they are portrayed as merciless gangsters and murderers of ordinary civilians. Although such a two-dimensional scheme does not consider numerous in-between positions, it represents the historical development of the East and the West of today's Ukraine. In western Ukraine<sup>4</sup> which belonged to the Polish state until 1939, the topos of the divided nation and the absence of their own state sovereignty strongly shaped the development of the national radical movement after WWI. Their main representatives were the members of the OUN and the UPA.

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See in detail, Oleksandr Ischuk and Valerii Ogorodnik, *General Mykola Arsenych: zhyttia ta diialnist shefa SB OUN* [General Mykola Arsenych: Life and activity of the SB OUN chef] (Kolomyia: Vik, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Four months later the last commander of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, Vasylii Kuk, was put to sleep and in such a way caught alive in his bunker. Individual insurgents and small groups operated until the 1960s in different areas of Western Ukraine, which in reality was more hiding from arrest. Individual insurgents hid until 1980s. The "official" last insurgent came out from the Underground life (hidden by his wife on the roof of their own house) in December 1991. See Zhanna Popovich, 'Podpolnaja liubov' ['Love in the underground'], *Segodnia*, 3 March 2006, available at <http://www.segodnya.ua/oldarchive/c2256713004f33f5c225712500591440.html> (last visited 31 July 2012). Thereafter Popovich, 'Podpolnaja liubov'.

<sup>4</sup> Volyn' and East Galicia (today Western Ukraine). About inside splitting and cultural ambivalence in Ukraine, see, Ola Hnatiuk, 'Zwischen Ost und West. Über die ukrainischen Identitätsdebatten' ['Between East and West : about Ukrainian identity debates'], in Renata Makarska and Basil Kerski, eds., *Die Ukraine, Polen und Europa* [Ukraine, Poland and Europe] (Osnabrück: Fibre Verlag, 2004), 91-115; Mykola Riabtschuk, 'Verschwommenes Grenzgebiet. Die ukrainische Identität am Scheideweg von Ost und West' ['The blurred area: The Ukrainian identity at crossroad from the East to the West'], in Renata Makarska and Basil Kerski, eds., *Die Ukraine, Polen und Europa* [Ukraine, Poland and Europe] (Osnabrück: Fibre Verlag, 2004), 117-134.

This complex ambivalence which exists in the current culture of remembrance as well as in the research field, also relates to the female participation in the OUN and UPA underground. For years, their presence was suppressed by the Soviet side and Ukrainian emigrants. Today it looks like they could celebrate their heroines' status, at the same time such problematic issues as participation in acts of violence and their involvement in the Security Service of the OUN and UPA have no place either in the memoir literature, or in research. That is why the target of my article, in addition to an evaluation and definition of an appreciation of female participation in historiography and memoir literature, is to picture their participation in violent acts and its dynamics, which accelerates in the post-war period when women were actively enlisted by Soviet power as well as by the underground fighters.

#### Genderless nationalists? Soviet propaganda versus Diaspora about OUN

The OUN (which was created in Vienna in 1929 by different nationalistic organizations) tried to resist polonization by using terrorist methods. In 1940, the OUN split into two parts, with the older more moderate members supporting Andrii Melnyk OUN(m), while the younger and more radical members supporting Stepan Bandera OUN(b). The later leading caste of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, which was officially founded in October 1942, belonged to the OUN(b).

The history of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army is marked by a highly visible presence and practice of violence: terrorist activities, subsequent actions against both communists and their followers and families, anti-Polish and anti-Jewish pogroms, and the physical extermination of insurgents who were suspected of betrayal. This brutality in its various contexts and frames remains one of the crucial factors which contributes to the ambivalent assessment of the Ukrainian resistance movement present in Volyn' and Eastern Galicia (today western Ukraine) from 1929 to the 1950s. Such ambivalent perceptions of the history of the OUN and UPA are in part due to the relative newness of the historical research on the subject. For a long time personal memoirs and Soviet propaganda literature were the main information source in the history of the Ukrainian underground.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Four months later the last commander of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, Vasylii Kuk, was put to sleep and in such a way caught alive in his bunker. Individual insurgents and small groups operated until the 1960s in different areas of Western Ukraine, which in reality

After the 1940s isolated rebels hiding in the Ukrainian woods crossed the border and located first in Germany and afterwards in the USA and Canada. When they started to publish their memoirs<sup>6</sup>, these authors did not have access to archival materials and were too personally involved in the events to be able to produce balanced accounts.

At the same time Soviet propaganda printed “Anti-Bandera literature”.<sup>7</sup> The activities of the OUN and the UPA during WW II, especially their contacts with German forces, the creation of the *Waffen-SS* Division “Galicia”<sup>8</sup> and the battalions “Nachtigall” and “Roland”<sup>9</sup> were the focus of the Soviet argumentation concerning the criminal acts of Ukrainian nationalists. The Soviet propaganda stressed and spread the image of western Ukrainian insurgents as offering a helping hand in establishing the Nazi

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was more hiding from arrest. Individual insurgents hid until 1980s. The “official” last insurgent came out from the Underground life (hidden by his wife on the roof of their own house) in December 1991. See Popovich, ‘Podpolnaja liubov’.

<sup>6</sup> Among others Zynovii Knysh, *Dukh, sho tilo rve do boiu* [*Spirit what brings the body to the struggle*] (Winnipeg: self-published, 1951); Petro Mirchuk, *Narys istorii Organizacii Ukraïnskykh Natsionalistiv* [*Describing of the history of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists*] (München, London, New York: Ukraïnske vydavnytstvo, 1968); Iurii Tys-Krokhmaluk, *UPA Warfare in Ukraine. Strategical, Tactical and Organizational Problems of Ukrainian Resistance in World War II* (New York: Society of Veterans of Ukrainian Insurgent Army, 1972).

<sup>7</sup> The choice of resources referring to the names of the victims killed by the nationalists as well as the places and forms of terror is obviously biased. Still, these resources provide important insight. In addition to that, the Soviet propaganda literature is essential for the pursuit of research on the second Sovietization of the Western Ukraine. This literature serves as a public platform on which the dominating discourses on the union of East and West can be found and it is still being used as a significant resource for research on that topic. Among others, Vitalii Cherednychenko, *Nacionalizm proty nacii* [*Nationalism against nation*] (Kyiv: Polityvydav Ukraïny, 1970); Serhii Danylenko, *Dorogoiu ganby i zrady: istorychna khronika* [*Along the way of shame and treason: historical chronic*] (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1970). In English see, Vitalii Cherednychenko, *Truth about UPA* (Lviv: Kameyar publishers, 1981); Andriy Sidiak, *Bankrupts* (Lviv: Kameyar publishers, 1984). For a comprehensive historical overview of literature on the OUN and UPA, see Serhii Zdioruk, Liudmyla Hrynevych and Olena Zdioruk, *Pokazhchyk publikacii pro diialnist OUN ta UPA (1945-1998)* [*Index of publications about the OUN and UPA (1945-1998)*] (Kyiv: Instytut istorii Ukraïny NANU, 1999); Oleksandr Lysenko and Oleksandr Marushchenko, *Organizaciia Ukraïnskykh nacionalistiv ta Ukraïnska Povstanska Armia. Bibliografichnyi pokazhchyk publikacii 1998-2002 rokiv* [*Organisation of Ukrainian nationalists and Ukrainian Insurgent Army. Bibliographical publication's index 1998-2002*] (Kyiv: Instytut istorii Ukraïny NANU, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Ukrainian military formation in the German armed forces during WWII. Formed in 1943, it was largely destroyed in the battle of Brody in July 1944.

<sup>9</sup> Two military units of the “Ukrainian Legion”. 1941 reorganized into the 201st Schutzmannschaft Battalion, which was disbanded in the winter of 1942.

regime. Women as betrayers played in the Soviet propaganda brochures the role of passive followers, who as a result of backward family relationships in the pre-Soviet Ukraine were supposed to submissively follow men. The situation of women in western Ukraine was particularly stressed by so-called re-education literature and agitation for the new Soviet life. The hopelessness of existing in the woods with the underground was compared against the wide range of distractions of the post-war Soviet life in Ukraine. With an emphasis on the backwardness of the western Ukrainian housewife, Soviet power promoted the female participation in all spheres of life, from achieving high level political positions to professions which were previously difficult to access.<sup>10</sup>

On the contrary to this, the postwar diaspora narrative emphasized the anti-German actions of the UPA and tried to keep distance from possible connections between the Insurgency and German forces. Both sides tended towards a schematic portraying of enemies and heroes and constructing images of the insurgents, giving solid foundation for the contemporary dominate culture of memory concerning the OUN and UPA. For the apologists of the UPA they were impeccable, self-sacrificing heroes whose lives and deeds were subordinated to one overarching goal, namely to die for Ukraine. Women appeared in such works in subsidiary roles, as self-sacrificing wives and friends and as sturdy, uncomplaining helpers.<sup>11</sup>

After obtaining independence in 1991, the official memory policy represented by politicians and former insurgents towards the nationalist movement in western Ukraine took on new shades in the Ukraine. Former rebels, who had spent many years in prison, became known as public persons, their glorification as Ukrainian heroes gained national status. The culmination arrived with the act of former Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko: on January 2010 he awarded posthumously the title Hero of Ukraine to the head of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, Stepan Bandera.

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<sup>10</sup> See Yoshie Mitsuyoshi, 'Public Representations of Women in Western Ukraine under Late Stalinism: Magazines, Literature, and Memoirs', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 54, 1 (2006), 20-36.

<sup>11</sup> See Tetiana Antonova, 'Zhinka ta ii myrni, napivmyrni ta voenni roli v borotbi OUN ta UPA' ['Women and her peaceful, semi-peaceful military roles in the struggle of the OUN and UPA'], *Ukrainskyyi vysvolynyii rukh*, 9 (2007), 138-47; Oksana Kis, 'Zhinochyyi dosvid uchasti u nacionalno-vyzvolnykh zmaganniakh 1940-50-kh rokiv an zahidnoukrainskykh zemliakh' ['Female Experience of the participation in the national liberation movement'], *Skhid- Zakhid: Istoryko-kulturologichnyi zbirnyk*, 13-14 (2009), 101-26.

The award of the honorary title has caused large debates on political as well as on academic levels.<sup>12</sup> Also the repeated attempts of Yushchenko to lend legal veteran status to the members of the OUN and UPA failed each time in the parliament. Under Yushchenko, several institutes of memory management were organized<sup>13</sup>, whose particular function was to build a heroic narrative around the struggle of Ukrainian nationalists.<sup>14</sup> A substantial part of the today's memory culture around the OUN and the UPA even consists of creating a kind of group biography, which should be applicable to each male and female former participant of the underground. However, these thoughts confirm a popular stereotype, which in the course of the last sixty years remained constant regarding its completeness, unanimity and clarity. Concerning the female participation in the underground, the pro-UPA side rests on the canon of *vitas* with two common narratives: one is the unbroken combatant marked by patriotism and unquestionable devotion to the ideological precepts of the movement. Disciplined and ready to sacrifice themselves, they placed national interests above the individual and justified any means to achieve the independence of Ukraine. Women appeared in such works in a complementary role, as self-sacrificing wives and friends and in most cases, as sturdy, uncomplaining, anonymous helpers. The other is the victim of the Soviet regime, and it pays particular attention to their arrest and torture during their hearing and time spent in a camp or prison.

Generalizing in this way, not paying attention to why women joined the UPA, not paying attention to all aspects of women's participation, and finally not paying attention to the tragic position of many women caught between NKVD and SB (Ukrainian insurgent security service), the contem-

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<sup>12</sup> The debate between John Paul Himka, a professor at the University of Alberta, Canada, and Zenon Kohut, the director of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, was published in the *Edmonton Journal*, 8-10 February 2010. Meanwhile the decree was cancelled by the new Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovic. See <http://www.president.gov.ua/ru/news/19103.html> (last visited 31 July 2012).

<sup>13</sup> See Per A. Rudling, *The OUN, the UPA and the Holocaust: A Study in the Manufacturing of Historical Myths*, (Pittsburgh: University Center for Russian and East European Studies, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Thereby this creation of new national collective memory took place under a strong selection policy, which downplayed for example the cooperation of Ukrainian nationalists with German forces. For more about this, see John-Paul Himka, 'War Criminality: A Blank Spot in the Collective Memory of the Ukrainian Diaspora', *Spaces of Identity*, 5, 1 (April 2005), available at <http://ia600202.us.archive.org/7/items/warCriminalityABlankSpotInTheCollectiveMemoryOfTheUkrainian/HimkaWarCriminality.pdf> (last visited 31 July 2012); David R. Marples, *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007).

porary memory narrative created a monochromatic picture which presented women either as victims or incredible heroines.<sup>15</sup>

### Recollections as a Research Source for the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. The Case of Maria Savchyn

The use of personal accounts has become a solid research instrument for historians within the few last years, although as before, the memories themselves continue to be the most unreliable ones in the eyes of researchers.<sup>16</sup> Particularly against a background of deep instrumentalization of facts according to the interests of contemporary political forces and because archival documents are largely closed, the landscape of Ukrainian memory evokes more skepticism than scientific interest with researchers. In many respects this view is fair: the theses of Halbwachs and Assmann about the primacy of the present, which prevails over the past, is perfectly proved by the published interviews and memoirs, whose presentations were created for specific reasons, expectations, hopes and goals, as well as being formed by the present political reference framework. (Auto-)Biography becomes social and political history, its creation and interpretation is consciously adapted to the political interests and circumstances. It is being written in order to single out certain chosen images.

Cooperation with Soviet Security forces, participation in executions (especially of the civilian population), love affairs with enemies and actions done for personal, non-ideological reasons are only a few of the ways in which a person's biography disqualifies them from being a good insurgent. These are the most common taboo topics which have been ignored or possibly repressed in the memoir literature until more recently.

The majority of printed remembrances are directly connected with the official canon of memory. As a rule, the main plot focuses on the activities and the heroic deaths of familiar insurgents, destinies of friends, inferior or

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<sup>15</sup> Contemporary research on women in the UPA is either local studies reproducing meta-narratives of heroic martyrdom of female fighters or they narrate individual biographies. The only scholarly study of the UPA foregrounding gender issues is a volume by the American historian Jeffrey Burds. See Jeffrey Burds, *Sovetskaia agentura: ocherki istorii SSSR v poslevoennye gody 1944-1948* (*Soviet Police Informants: Essays on the Postwar History of the USSR, 1944-1948*) (Moscow, New York: self-publishing, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Aleida Assmann, 'Stabilisatoren der Erinnerung – Affekt, Symbol, Trauma' ['Memorys stabilisers – affect, symbol, trauma'], in Jürgen Straub and Jörn Rüsen, eds., *Die dunkle Spur der Vergangenheit. Psychoanalytische Zugänge zum Geschichtsbewusstsein. Erinnerung, Geschichte, Identität* [*The Dark Trace of the Past. Psycho Analytical Approach to the Historical Consciousness*] (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1998), 131-52.



superior rebels in the context of their meetings, celebrations, or spending winter in bunkers.

Nevertheless, these memories make it possible to take a look at their everyday life, which is the least distorted in their memory, containing the least number of taboo issues. These repetitive actions, which could be described as simple routines, remain authentic in nature and therefore are a valuable object of analysis for researchers.<sup>17</sup> In the end, they mainly reflect how the officially constructed policy of remembrance influences the construction of remembrance of one's own.

In that sense the recollections of Maria Savchyn, the author of one of the few female insurgent memoirs that were translated into English, are a good example.<sup>18</sup> The case of Maria Savchyn, wife of the chief of insurgent propaganda Vasyl Halasa, had turned into a legend both among the rebels and within the MGB circles. Savchyn spent over nine years in shelters and conspiratorial dwellings. Having survived numerous battles and the loss of their first child,<sup>19</sup> in the spring of 1953 the couple while sleeping was tied up by their own guards and afterwards delivered to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Halasa, who was known under the pseudonym "Orlan"<sup>20</sup> in the underground, was of great importance for the Soviet security organs, because he knew the way to the shelter of the last underground commander Vasyl Kuk who had not yet been exposed. Halasa and Savchyn were brought from Khmelnytskyi by plane directly to Kyiv to be interrogated by

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<sup>17</sup> More in Lutz Niethammer, *Lebenserfahrung und kollektives Gedächtnis. Die Praxis des "Oral History"* [Experience and Collective Memory. The Practice of "Oral History"] (Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1980); Lutz Niethammer, *Kollektive Identität. Heimliche Quellen einer unheimlichen Konjunktur* [Collective Identity. Secret Resources of Enormous Boom] (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> Maria Savchyn, *Thousands of Roads: A Memoir of a Young Woman's Life in the Ukrainian Underground During and After World War II* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Mariia Savchyn was apprehended on the street by sheer accident, while carrying an infant baby in her arms. But when she asked quickly to wash her child, Savchyn managed to flee through the window. She left the child behind, something that officers of the state security did not take into consideration. In her memoir she tried to justify her behaviour. They would take her son away in either case, she thought, so she chose to evade the interrogation and the concomitant torture that could cause her to divulge important information. During the interrogations after her arrest 1953, she found out that her 6 months' old son was adopted by a childless high-ranking Polish police officer. After that his all trace of him vanish.

<sup>20</sup> Halasas memoirs, see Vasyl Halasa, *Nashe zhyttia i borot'ba* [Our Life and Struggle] (Lviv: Mc, 2005).

the Ukrainian Minister of the Interior Timofii Strokach. The other examiner of the two was the famous general Zhukov.<sup>21</sup>

State security organs were interested in successful ‘cooperation’: Halasa was to send a fake courier to the West (it was not known there that the couple was arrested). The task of courier was to establish contacts with emigrational circles and return to the Soviet Union.<sup>22</sup> Halasa’s wife Maria Savchyn was considered as a candidate for this ‘operation’. MGB was sure that a woman who had lost one child in the underground would not leave her second son and husband as hostages under any condition and so would return from the West to the Soviet Union. Halasa, who revealed the plans of Soviet security organs, saw Maria as his own courier to the West. He trusted her fully. He knew, she “would tell there all about them and would never come back.”<sup>23</sup>

The plan was turned into action. Maria Savchyn left the Ukraine in 1954, having crossed the Polish and then the German borders. The first question she put to a passer-by was: “Where is the American embassy?” Indeed, she never came back until after the fall of the Soviet Union when she with her new family visited Halasa and her 46 year-old son.<sup>24</sup>

Despite her ‘treacherous’ biography Savchyn did not accept the silence modus, which was usually taken on by thousands of the other insurgents, whose biographies did not fit in the linear scheme of a ‘good’ fighter. Moreover, in Savchyn’s case also a silent incomprehension on the part of the former insurgents takes place, since she had left her child. Here, first of all, there is a strong influence of a pattern of expected heroism: the woman has to be self-sacrificing, brave, but also a devoted wife and mother at the same time.<sup>25</sup>

At the same time the biography of Savchyn is not a ‘typical’ example of betrayal: the suspicion and the mistrust of the diaspora and Savchyn’s social isolation abroad did not stop her from writing and finally from publishing her memoirs, because Savchyn and her husband had never been agents of the Soviet Security service, which gave her the internal legitima-

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<sup>21</sup> Mariia Savchyn, *Tysiachi dorog. Spogady [Thousands of Roads. Memoirs]* (Toronto/Lviv: Litopys UPA, 1995), 490. Thereafter Savchyn, *Tysiachi*.

<sup>22</sup> Savchyn, *Tysiachi*, 202.

<sup>23</sup> Savchyn, *Tysiachi*.

<sup>24</sup> Marija Savchyn married again in the USA and has two children.

<sup>25</sup> In this context what is interesting is the footnote concerning rights and duties of OUN members, who were regimented during the meeting of Organization 1939: women members in the sense of position were able to carry out the aims like the man, but, concerning a natural sharing of functions, the women’s role is first of all in the educational agency. See Petro Mirchuk, *Narys istoriï OUN. 1929-1939rr [Essay of the OUN history]* (Kyiv: UVS, 2007), 452.

tion for writing. In spite of Savchyn, many other insurgents, who in various ways and for different reasons were incorporated by the Soviet power, remain silent or have published self documentations in a very selective format.

In the culture of memory this leads to a double concealment. On the one hand, the heroic presentation of the fight and the life of the majority of insurgents relating to the diaspora and lately Ukrainian historiography has not allowed for acknowledging the level of success of the Soviet agent network in counteracting these efforts. On the other hand, the Ukrainian underground opponents had no interest in revealing the mechanisms for recruitment of agents. In addition to the habitual application of physical and psychological pressure, they simultaneously extended tempting proposals for voluntary cooperation. To expedite the recruitment, MGB officers examined the details of individual biographies, skillfully exploiting personal wishes, motives, and needs.

The recognition of the use of brutal violence would mean locating the insurgents in the victim's role in a hopeless situation. In turn, the victim status would justify what they did, which, within the frame of the total condemnation, was not acceptable to the Soviet regime.

In the foreword Savchyn mentions, that her fundamental goal was to imprint the history of the underground fight, in which she was a participant, for those who followed.<sup>26</sup> This idea subordinates the whole narrative, which is focused on a specific excuse for not dying. Savchyn wrote her recollections under the condition of double isolation: on one level by the 1980s she had been separated from Ukraine and her family for more than 35 years; on another – her 'suspicious' arrival in the USA isolated Savchyn from the 'traditional' diaspora, as the majority of them came in the post-war period. This put Savchyn in a special writing frame, which influenced her memories tremendously. She constructed a lyrical monument for the insurgents who died in Ukraine and simultaneously condemned those who did not go back and remained as emigrants. In her "Thousands of Roads" Maria appeals to the men and women who had to endure hopeless circumstances and created a symbol of common identity of survival, uniting them in the desire to continue fighting until the end of their lives. Offering them such a platform of non-oppositional gender to act on, Savchyn overcomes the attributed 'norm' of behavior and refers to both sexes: "The criterion of people's (in the underground- A) value was only their contribution to the fight and disciplining of the other. If a woman justified itself [...] she did not have problems to be accepted."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Savchyn, *Tysiachi*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Savchyn, *Tysiachi*, 188-89.

Referring to these non-oppositional presentations of fighting for the same thing (*borotysja za odnu spravu*), Savchyn clarifies that it was always the man who had the authority to make final decisions.<sup>28</sup> In her recollections she gives many examples, whenever relations between men and women “reflect the female position in the society”.<sup>29</sup> In this context, Savchyn remembers that secretaries and stenographers (usually women) in the underground were as a rule more educated than the average male insurgent.<sup>30</sup> This led to tensions between the bunker occupants. Moreover, every woman’s mention or connotation of education level was perceived as a self-exaltation.<sup>31</sup> Savchyn, being the wife of a high-grade commander, often ran into the reaction that her ideas were looked at as merely an opinion of her husband, not perceiving her as an independent “thinker”.<sup>32</sup> Also in describing many female fates in a way displaying their characteristic features, Savchyn provides the majority of those with a common line – as accompanists of their men, who had understood and accepted the national priorities of husbands and sacrifice of their own life and safety of their families for a “common concern” (*spilna sprava*).

Savchyn’s attempts to demonstrate the character differences makes her memories alive and exciting, which could be an explanation for the subsequent popularity of her recollections. In spite of a mosaic and multi-faced representation of insurgents, she and many others memoirists were blinded to or only indicated the ‘unpleasant’ aspects of the history of the Ukrainian nationalistic underground, where the violent routines and the carrying out of massive terror acts belonged to pre- and post-war periods. In the establishment of ‘lyric monuments’ it would be hard to doubt a large period of her own life and the lives of the comrades. Admitting the violent policy, the insurgents would have offered to those who performed Soviet administration as well as citizens aggrieved by their actions a victim role, at the same time losing the position of devoted heroic fighters and giving themselves a status of nationalistic deviants.

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<sup>28</sup> Savchyn, *Tysiachi*, 189

<sup>29</sup> Savchyn, *Tysiachi*.

<sup>30</sup> Savchyn, *Tysiachi*.

<sup>31</sup> Savchyn, *Tysiachi*, 188.

<sup>32</sup> Savchyn, *Tysiachi*, 168.

## UPA-Insurgents: Role models

At the very outset of terror acts against Polish landowners and politicians by the OUN, the violence was perceived as acceptable, legitimate, and appropriate and was taken positively by a significant part of the younger generation within West Ukraine. Thereby, the ideology appeared as the most important and “exploitative” factor for the executed violence, which happened from the beginning of the foundation of the OUN predecessor - Ukrainian Military Organization (UVO).<sup>33</sup>

The work of Dmytro Doncov, one of the best known and at the same time most controversial Ukrainian society theorists, was regarded as a theoretical basis for radical Ukrainian forces.<sup>34</sup> However, his basic work “Nationalism” from 1926, where he valued the nation higher compared to individuality, representing it as the uppermost legitimate authority, raised great resonance in the radically minded milieu.

According to Doncov, the most important task for the Ukrainian nation would be the achievement of unity and independence, what is unreachable without the establishment of an authoritarian regime and a leading caste. The ideologist justified all means for achieving this goal and insisted on war against everyone who appears to be in the way and saw Russia as the main enemy of the Ukrainian nation. To defeat this powerful opponent, Doncov offered the concept of immorality (*Amoralnist*): If necessary, unite forces with every one of Russia’s opponents. Despite the fact that Doncov never became a member of the OUN and his work was not appreciated by the side of the nationalists over the course of the war, his ideas served for developing the postulates of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists.

Doncov did not examine the ‘female question’ in his doctrine, but nevertheless beginning from 1920s numerous women were involved in terrorist acts against Polish and Ukrainian politicians and public people. Because of their relatively unnoticed movement in the town, their ‘invisibility’ as a ‘safe person’, female prospective participants were included without reservations or preconditions in the terror acts. They maintained mainly the communication lines or participated in activities related to espionage, sabotage, and terroristic acts. Female members of the OUN observed the

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<sup>33</sup> UVO – was founded as a secret military organization in 1920 in Prague. Due to its conspiratorial nature, the UVO was an organization with a limited number of members engaging in carefully staged acts of terror. Gradually its influence spread beyond the exile. UVO’s main undertakings now consisted in armed attacks on functionaries of the Polish state and Polish settlers. In 1929 members of the UVO and representatives of Ukrainian student organization in exile created the OUN.

<sup>34</sup> Dmytro Doncov, *Nacionalism [Nationalism]* (London/Toronto: Ukraiinska vydavnycha spilka, 1966).

‘objects’, got acquainted with their habits and regular daily routines, started selective friendships with ‘useful’ people, hid weapons before and after the attempt, helped assassins to disappear, and laid bombs.<sup>35</sup> These participants in terror attempts became media stars, who had their names and stories on every front page and at the same time – they were a symbolic pattern for thousands of young radically-minded Ukrainians; their uncompromising behavior, as for example the refusal to answer in Polish or calls in the courtroom “Slava Ukraini” (“Honor to Ukraine”), their personal willingness to take risks made them national heroines in the eyes of young people.

The women, whose participation was legitimized above all by the general national appeal, appeared often in the press reports and propaganda works of the OUN as patriots who proved true to the ideological principles and not only tolerated the exercise of violence, but practiced it themselves.

OUN reached the peak of its popularity in the mid-1930s, owing primarily to the spread of its youth cells within educational institutions in western Ukraine. Of all social strata, youth responded by far the most enthusiastically to the ideologies of Ukrainian nationalism. Practically every school had its own loose OUN network, which enjoyed a good deal of prestige among the students. Those women who participated in the development of that network later occupied mid-level positions in the Insurgent Army, especially in the medical or supply divisions, which sometimes enabled their rise to leadership positions in the OUN hierarchy. The biographies of such women are quite similar. The majority came from the milieu of Ukrainian intelligentsia and acquired a good general education and political experience through their early participation in the OUN youth groups.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> See Lucyna Kulińska, *Działalność terrorystyczna i sabotażowa nacjonalistycznych organizacji ukraińskich w Polsce w latach 1922-1939* [Terroristic and Sabotage Activity of Ukrainian Nationalistic Organisations in Poland 1922-1939] (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2009). Olena Petrenko, ‘Makellose HeldInnen des Terrors. Die “Organisation der Ukrainischen Nationalisten” im Spannungsfeld zwischen Heroisierung und Diffamierung’ [‘Irreproachable Heroes of Terror: The “Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists” between contradictory contexts of glorification and defamation’], in Christine Hikel and Sylvia Schraut, eds., *Terrorismus / Geschlecht / Erinnerung. Tradierung und Transformation von Geschlechterbildern in Terrorismusdebatten (19.-21. Jahrhundert)* [Terrorism / Gender / Memory. Transmission and Transformation of the Gender Roles in the Terrorism Debate] (19.-21th Century)] (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2012, in print).

<sup>36</sup> Into this pattern fit, for instance, trustees of Roman Shukhevych, Commander of the UPA, today among the best had known female activists of the underground. See Lesia Onyshko, ‘Zviazkovi Romana Shukhevycha u 1945-1947 rokakh’ [‘Messengers of Roman Shukhevych 1945-1947’], in *Nacionalni rukhy oporu v Shkhidii I Centralnii Evropi kincia 1930- seredyni 1950 rokiv. Materialy Mizhnarodnoi naukovo-teoretychnoi konferencii* [National Resistance Movements in the Eastern and Central Europe at the End of 1930s-

The engagement of women in this first wave was characterized by a certain overriding priority of the national goals over the interests of gender and is marked with conscious sacrifice for the political goals. In a sense, the motivation for women's participation in the Ukrainian nationalist movement of this period most closely resembles that told in contemporary public memory.

Being adjusted to a strict juxtaposition enemy vs. friend, they were prepared for an uncompromised fight, the integral part of which was violence based on the ideological doctrine of the OUN.

### Female participation at the UPA and Security Service of OUN(b)

The second wave of women in the underground movement arrived after the outbreak of the Second World War and the creation of a military wing of OUN: the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. During the 1930s the OUN recruited the bulk of its cadres from the ranks of young radicals, particularly students at Ukrainian educational institutions. Following the creation in 1942 of the UPA, whose units operated in the woods far away from the cities; there rose problems with food supply and communication between individual military units. To assuage the situation, the Nationalists strove to bring into the ranks of the OUN-UPA (primarily UPA) women sympathizers from the neighboring villages. The overwhelming majority of women within the Ukrainian underground were deployed in the insurgent's medical services. From the very beginning women in this traditionally female field were recognized as 'ancillary fighters' and their achievements and presence were celebrated as such. Over the course of the war, the Red Cross increasingly became the one possibility for women to remain within the underground. Within its framework, they improvised field hospitals, gathered and prepared medicine, and organized courses. The Red Cross division employed almost exclusively women, who were under the command of other women.<sup>37</sup> Commanders preferred the services of nurses and orderlies who

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1950s. *Materials of International Scientific-Theoretical Conference*] (Kyiv: KMPU im. B.D. Grinchenka, 2005), 112-17; Olena Petrenko, 'Zwischenpositionen. Frauen im ukrainischen bewaffneten Untergrund der 1940er und 1950er Jahre' ['In-Between. Women in the Ukrainian armed underground of the 1940s-1950s'], in Klaus Latzel, Franka Maubach, and Silke Satjukow, eds., *Soldatinnen. Gewalt und Geschlecht im Krieg vom Mittelalter bis heute* [Female soldiers. Violence and Gender in the War from Middle Age until Today] (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2011), 257-78.

<sup>37</sup> Kateryna Zarycka, the chief of the insurgents' Red Cross, today is a symbol of the female involvement in the Ukrainian underground. In 1934 she was arrested in connection with the OUN assassination of Poland's Minister of Interior Pieracki. Sentenced to eight



had legal jobs in nearby villages. The latter spent most of their time at home, going to the forest only when necessary.

As UPA's situation worsened during the final stages of WWII, ever fewer women were to be found as permanent members of the resistance army. The increasingly difficult circumstances the underground had to offer to children or the restrictions insurgent fighters imposed on their wives' actions essentially stanching the flow of married women into the forest.<sup>38</sup> Increasingly, the UPA recruited women residing in western Ukrainian villages to fulfill auxiliary functions as part-time suppliers or messengers for the military groups. The duties UPA commanders assigned them remained loosely defined and thus very flexible. Above everything, it was the legal status and the 'inconspicuousness' of those women that proved of greatest usefulness to the insurgents. Thanks to the socially prescribed everyday errands women traditionally had to run, they also enjoyed a great deal of mobility. That quality made women particularly suitable for another function: communications. Messengers became the most important carriers of knowledge about the lines of communication and the possible hiding places not only of their commanders but also of numerous other messengers.

In generally the tasks of women insurgents and sympathizers of the movement were initially limited to the traditionally female domains, such as medical care and communications. But as the conditions of fighting worsened, the fields of participation expanded, especially around 1944-45.

In 1944 the Red Army crossed the Ukrainian border and could no longer be stopped. The victory of the Soviet Union stood right before them. The Ukrainian Insurgent Army, which during the war years had only rarely been involved in armed conflicts with German forces,<sup>39</sup> prepared for the inevitable struggle against the Soviets. With the final victory over Germany, the Ukrainian rebels became the main enemy of the Soviet regime and the Soviet Security Service focused their attention on them. Under such conditions, Ukrainian insurgents adopted a strategy of a 'deep underground', which became known as 'the bunker war'. Under these circumstances of secretive ways, numerous arrests and human losses, the opera-

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years of imprisonment, she was set free in 1939, a benefactor of the political regime change. In 1940 Zarycka who was already pregnant, was arrested again – this time by the NKVD. In prison she gave birth to a son. Following the outbreak of the Soviet-German war, she managed to escape from prison. In 1947 she was arrested for the third time and was sentenced to 25 years in the camps.

<sup>38</sup> As a rule wives of high rank members of the underground went in hiding.

<sup>39</sup> More see Anatolii Kentii, *Ukrainska Povstanska Armia v 1942-1943 rokakh* [Ukrainian Insurgent Army 1942-1943] (Kyiv: NAN Ukrainy, 1999).



tions of the insurgents and especially the roles of female participants quickly changed.

These often changing, unclearly defined functions were linked to the intensification of Soviet security force operations against Ukrainian nationalists after the war and the associated growth of casualties. Whereas in the early 1940s, when the UPA was first created, the majority of women in the underground were involved in medical work or performed auxiliary functions, after the arrival of the Red Army in the western regions of Ukraine (when insurgents flocked to the forests), women could be spotted even in such male-dominated roles as the security service.

The Security Service (SB) of the OUN(b) was created in 1939 and at the beginning had the task of protecting OUN-Members, control of conspiracy rules, organize sabotages, and participate in the conflict between OUN(m) and OUN(b). In 1941 Mykola Arsenich was appointed to the position of the head of the Security Service, and fulfilled it till his death in 1947. Especially the years under his supervision made the history and agency of the SB contested today. Since the end of the war the central task of the Ukrainian Security Service was in the identification and 'neutralization' of Soviet agents who penetrated structures of the underground. The mass purges and the ruthless terror of the SB became a constant part of insurgents' everyday life. Activities, structure, and functions of the SB were all taboo topics for years. Owing to the scarcity of sources and the politicization of the history of the underground, the female participation in the security service of the OUN at the same time remains largely unexplored.

Particularly revealing in this sense is the protocol of the interrogation of the chief of the insurgent security service of the city of Lemberg, Josef Pankiv. Pankiv told his interrogators that "Mikushka" (Hrygorii Pryshliak), at the time chief of the SB-West, decided to begin mass recruitment of women for the service in the SB as a response to the Red Army march into western Ukraine and the concomitant worsening of the conditions of operation.<sup>40</sup> Pryshliak reportedly imagined that women would be attracting less attention. Many of them, due to their as yet unblemished past, had an opportunity to move around legally. In addition, there were hardly any men left in the security service who did not have to evade arrest. Pankiv himself planned to flee from the city when he got arrested. For this reason his sister Iuliya Pankiv was made referent (chief) of the L'viv branch of the

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<sup>40</sup> The State Archive of the Russian Federation [hereafter abbreviated GARF], f. R-9478, op. 1, d. 135, l.193.

security service.<sup>41</sup> She must have graduated from the agents' school in L'viv in 1942 under the guidance of "Mikushka".<sup>42</sup>

The official documents of the OUN and UPA also point to the influx of women into the most important internal sector of the security service which precipitated the overall increase in the number of female members. In 1943 there were efforts to create a unified organizational structure of SB-sectors (*referaty*).<sup>43</sup> According to the order from September 1943, each sector was assigned two departments: agent/informational and police/executive. Couriers and archivists were regarded as auxiliary personnel who could be used by both departments.<sup>44</sup> The core of the agent/informational department consisted of three employees, one of them a woman, who also could rise to the position of chief of the department, provided she had demonstrated her "devotion and ability."<sup>45</sup>

The appearance of women in the security service was duly noted by the Soviet punitive organs. The extent of this phenomenon was illustrated by a secret report from 1944:

"The majority of representatives of 25 chiefs of the agent/informational departments of the SB 2 [code, could be SB-West] are women. That SB attaches so much significance to women becomes understandable when one takes into consideration that already UVO [Ukrainian Military organization] and later OUN devoted a lot of attention to raising cadres of fanatical female nationalists. They were messengers, couriers, and sometimes also terrorists."<sup>46</sup>

The atmosphere of mistrust pervading the underground was to a large degree a by-product of the numerous raids by the MGB. Soviet security agencies regarded each arrested insurgent as a potential agent who could conduct subversive work on their behalf. From the mid-1940s the MGB started to build special diversionary groups (*boiivky*) consisting of UPA

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<sup>41</sup> GARF, f. R-9478, op. 1, d. 135, l.193.

<sup>42</sup> GARF, f. R-9478, op. 1, d. 135, l204.

<sup>43</sup> The Security Service Archive of Ukraine [hereafter abbreviated GDA SBU], f. 13, sp. 376, t. 49, ark. 178; ark. 265-66; Dmytro Viedienieiev and Genadii Bystruchin, "Povstans'ka rozvidka die tochno i vidvazhno..." *Dokumentalna spadshyna pidrozdziliv specialnogo pryznachennia Organisasii ukrainskykh nacionalistiv ta Ukrainskoi Povstanskoii Armii 1940-1950-ti roky* ["Insurgent intelligence works precise and courageous..." *Documental heritage of the special police service of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists and Ukrainian Insurgent Army in the 1940s-1950s*] (Kyiv: K.I.C., 2006), 232-36. Thereafter Viedienieiev and Bystruchin, *Dokumentalna*.

<sup>44</sup> Viedienieiev and Bystruchin, *Dokumentalna*, 232.

<sup>45</sup> Viedienieiev and Bystruchin, *Dokumentalna*, 232.

<sup>46</sup> GDA SBU, f. 13, spr. 376, t. 49, ark. 178; Viedienieiev and Bystruchin, *Dokumentalna*, 229.

activists earlier recruited to act as agents of the Soviet security apparatus. Disguised as insurgents, they were to destroy the UPA from within.<sup>47</sup> Recruitment of insurgents (including women) by organs of state security proved extremely successful and effective. Relying on the assistance of wide-reaching agent network and ‘timely’ tips from the informers, Soviet punitive organs managed to arrest or kill a number of the key figures of the underground.

The SB took the law into their own hands and sentenced the insurgents and civil population who did not fit into certain behavior rules. This applied, for instance, to women who lived legally in the villages and allowed the soldiers of Red Army to stay in their houses.

In this respect, one appeal addressed in verse form to the women and girls from the village of Novosilki (in the Zolochiv region near L’viv) in 1943 sounds illustrative. The doggerel verse warns women to avoid relationships with *moskali* (Moscovites) and urges them to think of their “sons and men, who die of hunger in Siberia.”<sup>48</sup> The heroism of the deported Ukrainians is contrasted with the morally slack behavior of village women.

The poem warns that “those women, who don’t love their men/ or respect their country/ are traitresses. [...] The righteous women and girls who respect her country can live [...] Death to those who traffic with the Red Army Soldiers.”<sup>49</sup>

Having the image of “righteous” insurgents and “those, who respect the country” they regarded it as inconceivable to be arrested alive. Not to fall into the hands of the enemy was considered the duty of every insurgent. In this context, unwillingness to commit suicide was interpreted as treason. This attitude was particularly acute in the post-war times, when bunkers became one of the most important hide places. Trying to limit damage to the movement, resistance fighters were ordered to commit suicide in a desperate measure to avoid arrest.<sup>50</sup>

Insurgents discovered in hiding places rarely surrendered without resistance or allowed themselves to be taken alive. Usually the commander shot

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<sup>47</sup> In mid 1945 there existed 156 such special units that encompassed 1.783 fighters. See Viedienieiev and Bystruchin, *Dokumentalna*, 289. Documents point to the participation of numerous women in such special operations. For the detailed description of the involvement of the liaison woman see “Dzvinka”, see The Central State Archive of Public Organizations of Ukraine [hereafter abbreviated TsDAHOU], f. 1, op. 27, spr. 5454, ark. 14-19.

<sup>48</sup> Central State Archives of Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of Ukraine [hereafter abbreviated TsDAVO], f. 3833, op.1, sp. 220, ark. 10.

<sup>49</sup> TsDAVO, f. 3833, op. 1, sp. 220, ark. 10.

<sup>50</sup> See in *Volyn’, Polissia, Podillia: UPA ta zapillia. 1944-1946. Dokumenty ta materialy, Litopys UPA* [Volyn’, Polissia, Podillia: UPA und home front. Documents and materials], Nowa seriiia, Volume 8 (Toronto/Kyiv: Litopys UPA, 2006), 419.

other insurgents, and then killed himself. Insurgents who managed to escape from a discovered bunker were usually suspected of being traitors by the SB. Arrests and cooperation with Soviet power remain one of the most problematic aspects in the collective memory and in historiography.

### Conclusion

The female participation in the Ukrainian nationalistic movement from the beginning has been mythologized and purposely instrumentalized by different political sides. From the beginning the female involvement, having its peak in the early postwar period, was supported by the propaganda of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, which put the attention on national engagement in order to provoke self-sacrifice for political purposes. At the same time the Soviet power, which registered the mass mobilization of women in an underground life, tried to re-orient a 'backward' western Ukrainian woman into a progressive Soviet one. A specific fight for female resources took place in which Soviet propaganda portrayed the western Ukrainian woman as an object of instrumentalization in the hands of the OUN and the UPA. In contrast, the new Soviet Ukrainian women were characterized by the Soviet press as antipodes to "weak mothers" and wives who support their men in the 'wrong' way. They were presented as equals to their male counterparts and loyal to the Soviet power.

In the course of time, after the WWII within the diaspora, when more recollections of emigrants were published and the diaspora provided its own research actively, two narratives were created in which the woman appeared in two roles: as a victim of prisons and regimes and as a brave fighter for the nation. Thereby the female participation in the violent acts of OUN or SB OUN(b) as in general the terrorist practices against their enemies, still remained a taboo.

Regarding the above mentioned memory patterns, due to gender specific mechanisms; women were essentially associated with non-violent functions. This vision relates to traditional clichés of perpetrators and victims where the capacity to hurt is male, whereas vulnerability is female. According to these clichés there is a clear demarcation line between spatial categories such as battle field and home which stand for male protective and female protective needs respectively.

In the praxis, however, these definitions were blurred: if the tasks of women insurgents and sympathizers of the movement were initially limited to the traditionally female domains such as medical care and communications, so with unfavorable conditions of fighting, the fields of participation expanded, especially in the postwar period. A particularly revealing exam-

ple is the influx of female employees into the Ukrainian Security service, which was traditionally dominated by men.

On the one hand, a high status for several women is present in the underground of the 1920s: numerous women participated in the acts of terror of the OUN. On the other hand, the promotion of women can be explained by pragmatic reasons: the aim was to stabilize the networks between the participants of the underground. Therefore, under the conditions of the postwar period, the involvement of women seemed to be a good decision.

The female presentation still remains in the post-Soviet Ukraine where printed memoirs as well as the largest part of the modern historiography refer to these two positions, two schemes of self-description, one description of enemies and one of heroes.

What happens now is an open domination of today's canon of memory over and above self-documents and their right to exist and be published. Under these circumstances of selecting and correcting memories of ordinary unknown participants enable us to have a look behind the scheme of the traditional vision 'despotic occupant – innocent fighters for independence'.

In that way, the writing of the history of the underground and the contemporary perception of female presence in the Ukrainian nationalist underground is influenced by radical categorizations with no space for 'in between' positions.

## IV POST-WAR: (DIS-)CONTINUITIES AND MEMORIES



IRINA REBROVA

## RUSSIAN WOMEN ABOUT THE WAR

### A GENDER ANALYSIS OF EGO-DOCUMENTS

#### Woman and War: the Historiography in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia

The role of women in World War II has been studied by Soviet historians for a long period of time from the position of glorifying the socialist state. Articles and books about the mass participation of Soviet women in defense of the socialist Motherland were already written during the war time.<sup>1</sup> Such books had much in common with literary novels and journalistic essays and did not have any deep generalizations and conclusions. Nevertheless, the great role of Soviet women-patriots in protecting their Motherland, their dedicated work in factories and in farm fields, and their heroism at the front or in partisan groups and Komsomol underground were shown in those volumes. The political message was clear: It was emphasized that gender equality can exist only under a system of socialism.

Stories about military and labor feats of Soviet women can also be found in a number of books printed during the first postwar decade.<sup>2</sup> The authors used numerous documentary materials in these volumes. And yet, many of them had many important limitations in their account caused by the limitation on sources from those years. A number of historical papers about the participation of Soviet women in World War II appeared further after the XX<sup>th</sup> Communist Party Congress, which defined the direction of scholars' research, and especially after the publication of the decree of the Central Committee on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1957 which was called "About the publica-

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<sup>1</sup> Klavdia Nikolaeva and Lidiya Karaseva, *Velikaja Otechestvennaja vojna i soverskaja zhenshina* [The Great Patriotic War and the Soviet Woman] (Moscow: Gospolizdat, 1941); *Devushki na fronte: Sbornik* [Young Ladies at the Front Line. Collective Volume] (Leningrad, 1943); *Devushki-voiny* [Young Ladies to the War] (Moscow 1944).

<sup>2</sup> Natalya Aralovetz, *Zhenchina – velikaja sila soverskogo obshestva* [The Woman is the Great Power of the Soviet Society] (Moscow 1947).



tion of the History of the Great Patriotic War of Soviet Union, 1941-1945".<sup>3</sup> During 1960-1980s, many Soviet historians, especially women, did their research on the role of Soviet women in World War II.<sup>4</sup>

The whole complex of research literature, formed during the Soviet period, covers the theme of women's participation in the war in a similar way. Historians until the early 1990s tried to show the power of the Soviet socialist system. Papers about the contribution of women to the victory over the enemy were written from this perspective. Therefore, the Soviet historical papers on women's participation in World War II cannot be fully assigned to the works on critical gender studies which ask about male and female narrations – they are rather to be classified as an illustration of alleged gender equality in Soviet Union.

The papers about women's role in the war written from the gender position appeared only in post-Soviet historical science. Monographs and collections of papers in gender studies have been printed since the late 1990s in post-Soviet countries, such as Lithuania (the publishing house of

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<sup>3</sup> *Geroini vojny. Ocherki o zhenshinah – Gerojah Sovetskogo Sojuza* [Women-Heroes of the War: Stories about Women – Heroes of Soviet Union] (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1963); Airo Sarkisov, *Geroicheskie docheri Kavkaza* [The Heroic Daughters of Caucasus] (Baku: Rik, 1965); Marina Chechneva, *Boevye podругi moi. O letchicah 46-go Tamanskogo gvardejskogo aviacionnogo zhenskogo polka* [My Battle Girl-Friends. About the Pilots of 46<sup>th</sup> Taman Guards Aviation Regiment] (Moscow: DOSAAF, 1967); Vera Murmanceva, *Sovetskie zhenshiny v Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojne* [Soviet Women in the Great Patriotic War] (Moscow: Izd. Mysl', 1974); Nina Kondakova, 'Trudovoj podvig sovetskih zhenwin v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny' ['The Heroic Labor of Soviet Women during the Great Patriotic War'], in Andrej Grechko, ed., *Velikaja pobeda sovetskogo naroda. 1941-1945* [The Great Victory of Soviet People, 1941-1945] (Moscow: Izd. Nauka, 1976).

<sup>4</sup> Marina Chechneva, *Kommunisticheskaja partija – vdohnovitel' boevogo podviga sovetskih zhenwin v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny* [The Communist Party is a Father of the Heroism of Soviet Women during the Great Patriotic War] (Moscow: n.p., 1967); Larisa Avdeeva, *Kommunisticheskaja partija Sovetskogo Sojuza – vdohnovitel' i organizator geroicheskogo truda zhenwin-kolhoznic v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny: Na materialah Rostovskoj, Krasnodarskoj i Stavropol'skoj partijnyh organizacij* [The Communist Party of Soviet Union is a Father and Organizer of the Heroic Labor of Women during the Great Patriotic War: Materials of Rostov, Stavropol and Krasnodar Party Organizations] (Moscow: 1970); Aleksej Zhinkin, *Dejatel'nost' KPSS po mobilizacii sovetskih zhenwin na ratnye i trudovye podvigi v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny: Na materialah partijnyh organizacij Rostovskoj oblasti i Krasnodarskogo kraja* [The Work of Communist Party in the Mobilization of Soviet Women to the Heroic Labor during the Great Patriotic War: Materials of Rostov and Krasnodar Regions] (Krasnodar: Kn. izd-vo, 1981); Hava Karataeva, *Trudnyj put' k pobeде: zhenshiny v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny: Na materialah partijno-gosudarstvennyh organizacij Severnogo Kavkaza* [The Hard Way to the Victory: Women during the Great Patriotic War: Materials of the Party and State Organizations in the North Caucasus] (St. Petersburg: Gos. un-t, 1994).

European Humanities University<sup>5</sup>) and Ukraine (the Kharkiv Center for Gender Studies<sup>6</sup>). In Russia, central and regional centers study theoretical and practical gender problems.<sup>7</sup> The Russian Association for Research in Women's History, chaired by historian Natalya Pushkareva, was founded in 2007.<sup>8</sup> Much attention in publications in post-Soviet Russia has been paid to the role of women in the war, the peculiarities of women's writing, and visual images of the war.<sup>9</sup> This short historical excursus can point out the

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<sup>5</sup> Elena Gapova and Almira Ousmanova, eds., *Antologija gendernyh issledovanij* [*Anthology of Gender Studies*] (Minsk: Propilei, 2000); Elena Gapova, Almira Ousmanova, and Andrea Pető, eds., *Gendernye istorii Vostochnoj Evropy. Sbornik nauchnykh statej* [*Gender Stories of East Europe: A Collection of Papers*] (Minsk: EGU, 2002); Elena Gapova, ed., *Zhenshina na kraju Evropy* [*Women on the Edge of Europe*] (Minsk: EGU, 2003); Sergey Oushakine, *Pole pola* [*The Field of Gender*] (Vilnius-Moscow: EGU, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> *Journal Gender Studies* from 1997; Irina Zherebkina, "Prochti moe zhelanie..." *Postmodernizm, psihoanaliz, feminizm* ["Read my Desire..." *Postmodernism, Psychoanalyze, Feminism*] (Moscow: Ideja-press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Natalya Pushkareva, Yelena Trofimova, and Zoja Khotkina, eds., *Zhentchina. Gender. Kul'tura* [*Woman. Gender. Culture*] (Moscow: MCGI, 1999); Sergey Oushakine, ed., *O muzhe(N)stvennosti: Sbornik statej* [*About Masculinity. A Collection of Papers*] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2002); Pavel Tcherbinin, ed., *Zhenskaja povsednevnost' v Rossii v XVIII-XX vv.: Mat-ly mezhdunar. nauchn. konf. 25-26 sentjabrja 2003 g.* [*Women's Everyday Life in Russia in 18-20 Centuries: A Collection of Papers From the Scientific Conference, September, 25-26 th, 2003*] (Tambov: Izdvo TGU, 2003); Elena Metcherkina, ed., *Ustnaja istorija i biografija: zhenskij vzgljad* [*Oral History and Biography: The Women's Point of View*] (Moscow: Nevskiy Prostor, 2004); Irina Tartakovskaja, *Gendernaja sociologija* [*Gender Sociology*] (Moscow: Nevskiy Prostor, 2005); Galina Brandt, *Filosofskaja antropologija feminizma. Priroda zhenshiny* [*Psychological Anthropology of Feminism. The Nature of Woman*] (St. Petersburg: Aleteyya, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.rarwh.ru> (last visited 19 July 2011). This association has organized the annual conference on gender themes since 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Alexey Ermakov, 'Zhenskaja "Sluzhba truda" v Germanii v gody Vtoroj mirovoj vojny' ['Women's Service of Work in Germany during World War II'], in Inna Chikalova, ed., *Zhenshiny v istorii: vozmozhnost' byt' uvidennymi*: [*Women in the History: The Chance of Being Noticed*], vol. 2 (Minsk: BGPU, 2002), 130-41; Nechama Tec, 'U partizan: sud'ba zhentchin' ['With Partisans: the Fate of Women'], in Elena Gapova, ed., *Zhenwina na kraju Evropy* [*The Woman on the Edge of Europe*] (Minsk: EGU, 2003), 168-88; thereafter Tec, 'U partizan'. Irina Nikolaeva, 'Politika nemeckih okkupacionnykh vlastej v Belorusi v otnoshenii zhenskogo naselenija (1941-1944)' ['The Policy of the German Occupation Government in Belorussia toward the Women Population'], in Inna Chikalova, ed., *Zhenshiny v istorii: vozmozhnost' byt' uvidennymi* [*Women in the History: The Chance of Being Noticed*], vol. 3 (Minsk: BGPU, 2004), 68-76; Olga Nikonova, "Davajte prygat', devushki!", ili sovetskij patriotizm v gendernom izmerenii' ["Let's Jump, Girls!", or the Soviet Patriotism in Gender Meaning'], *Gendernye issledovanija* [*Gender Studies*], 13 (2005), 38-56; Olga Nikonova, 'Zhentchiny, vojna i "figury umolchanija"' ['Women, War and Silencing'], *Neprikosnovenny zapas* [*Emergency Ration*], 2-3 (2005), 40-41.

important role of women studies as a trend of social history in contemporary Russia.<sup>10</sup>

### Characteristics of Collected Sources and Research Methodology

My aim for this chapter is to analyze collected sources of women's experiences of World War II from a gender perspective, but with a focus on female texts. In order to analyze women's narrations about the war, its everyday life, and questions of sexuality and sexual violence, this paper discusses the study of gender-specific oral and written memoirs about the war which were collected in Krasnodarkij Kraj and the Republic of Adygea.

Oral history studies on World War II are a fairly new phenomenon in Russia. Most of this kind of research has appeared since the late 1990s and especially in connection with the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Victory.<sup>11</sup> Before, a history from below showing the experiences, feelings, and thoughts of 'Joe Citizen' was not possible. The fear of politically unwanted opinions was too strong. The stories of war veterans are now collected in nearly every region of Russia. But the level of the research and the professional quality of interviewers are different in every region and depend on the researcher's training skills in using the oral history method. The NGO *Memorial* plays an important role in collecting memories of World War II.<sup>12</sup> Its staff develops different programs and allocates funds to study the Soviet past from a personal point of view. Its center of oral history and biography has made more than 300 audio and video interviews with former concentration camp inmates. The annual school competition called "Russia. The Twentieth Century" is intended to attract the younger generation to future potential research work with personal sources.<sup>13</sup> Studying World War II through the personal experience of their relatives is the main theme of this student project. Professional historians in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Stavropol, Petrozavodsk, and in other regional centers are engaged in the collection of oral stories.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Approaches from within a history of masculinity are rare. See Kerstin Bischls' article in this volume for an overview about the research.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.pobeda-60.ru/main.php?trid=5587>; and <http://www.iremember.ru> (last visited 21 September 2011).

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.memo.ru> (last visited 14 November 2011).

<sup>13</sup> See <http://urokiistorii.ru> (last visited 14 November 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Marina Loskutova, ed., *Pamjat' o blokade: Svidetel'stva ochevidcev i istoricheskoe soznanie obvestva: Materialy i issledovanija* [The Memory of the Siege: the Testimonies and the Historical Consciousness of the Society: Materials and Researches] (Moscow: Novoe

A similar project exists in Krasnodar. In 2006, the students' scientific group on oral history was formed at the Department of History and Social Communications, Kuban State University of Technology, Krasnodar. The main interest of this group is based on creating and analyzing the complex of ego-documents on World War II. In 2007 together with colleagues from Stavropol, a project about the everyday life behind the frontline was developed. The result of the project was a web page with the voices of people who remember the wartime.<sup>15</sup> We published the oral histories in order to share our experience of collecting oral stories with historians who study the same problems.

During 2008-2010 we made over 30 interviews with women who struggled in or experienced the war. Most of our women informants were already retired persons. Most of them lived in rural areas, had large families and kept the house. Many of them had had to work since they were adults to help their parents, so they did not have the opportunity of studying in higher schools and universities. Several classes of elementary or middle school were all that they had behind them. When the war began they were young girls or adolescents. Only one of our story-tellers had been married and had a small child by then. All our informants experienced the occupation of their native town or village. The responsibility for working on the farm, forced work for the occupation government, and household management fell on the shoulders of women and adolescents when the men moved to the front. In addition, we made several interviews with former women soldiers and medical workers.

Unpublished written memoirs of women-members of the partisan movement in the Kuban region became another important source of this paper. These documents can be found in the State Archive of Krasnodarskij Kraj and in Center of Documentation of Modern History in Krasnodarskij Kray. The main part of a regional complex of memories of World War II was accumulated in 1960-1970s. Among the memoirs were people of different ages, some of them were over 70. Women wrote memoirs mostly in pre-retirement age. Among the authors of the complex, women-memoirists were generally younger than the male authors. Women, who wrote memories about the events of World War II were former Komsomol activists, residents of occupied zones, underground fighters, and partisans.

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izdatel'stvo , 2006); Elena Strekalova, 'Vozmozhnosti "ustnoj istorii": k postanovke problem' ['The Capabilities of Oral History'], Paper presented at *Novye issledovatel'skie praktiki izuchenija mestnoj istorii. Internet-konferencija* [New Research Practices of Studying Local History. Internet Conference], 20 October 2005, available at <http://newlocalhistory.com> (last visited 9 April 2011).

<sup>15</sup> See <http://oralhistory.kubstu.ru> (last visited 16 July 2011).

Oral and written memoirs of World War II have their gender-specific features along with other functions. The analysis of these sources can be useful in identifying patterns of the perceptions of women themselves of the war in reconstructing the woman's perception of war as a whole picture.

The methodology of military-historical anthropology highlights the task of collecting information about the everyday life of people in wartime. We can study the most important material and the common, cultural and psychological characteristics of human existence at the time such as housing, food, medical care, work, family relations, the role of official propaganda, religion, inter-ethnic relations, the image of the enemy and ally, and relations with the occupying authorities, etc.

Using the method of oral history indicates, first of all, the increase of historical knowledge through the personal testimonies of witnesses and participants in ordinary events. Russian sociologists Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina use the method of "analysis of categorization" when studying biographical interviews. The goal of such technique is to explore the way of constructing the descriptions of everyday life in the texts of interviews. Informants in their stories usually use categories that have inter-subjective meaning and, therefore, provide the possibility of understanding in the frame of existing culture.<sup>16</sup> The interview, therefore, is a narrative that contains the categories through which the informant describes social interactions in the specific field of study.

In her article "Feminist Strategies of Interviewing and Data Analysis", the Russian philosopher Tatyana Klimenkova states that "two women, the researcher and the informant have an experience of justifying knowledge and an unspoken understanding of cognition, which provides for the mutual understanding between them".<sup>17</sup> Thereby she stresses a common gendered experience as a common ground for interviews – a methodology where the experience and personal background of the researcher is in all cases especially important. Russian scholar Viktoriya Konstantinova compares traditional and feminist methods of making interviews in her article "Interactive

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<sup>16</sup> Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, 'Analiz narrativa: vozmozhnosti rekonstrukcii seksual'noj identichnosti' ['The Analysis of Narration: the Reconstruction of Sexual Identity'], in Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, eds., *V poiskah seksual'nosti: Sbornik statej [In Search of Sexuality: A Collection of Articles]* (St. Petersburg.: Izd-vo D. Bulanin, 2000), 549-58.

<sup>17</sup> Tatyana Klimenkova, 'Feministskie strategii interv'juirovaniya i analiza dannyh (Po stranitzam stat'i M. Devult)' ['Feminist Stratiges of making Interview and Analysis of the Data: According to the Papers by M. Devult'], in Marina Malysheva, ed., *Vozmozhnosti ispol'zovaniya kachestvennoj metodologii v gendernyh issledovanijah: Materialy seminarov [The Possibility of Using Qualitative Methodology in Gender Studies]* (Moscow: MCGI, 1997), 127.

Interviewing: The Concept of Ann Oakley".<sup>18</sup> She argues that it could be established the Subject-Subject relations between informant and researcher in the feminist strategy of making interview. The woman-researcher and the woman-informant could give "signs of engagement" during the interview. However, of course not only women can show signs of engagement for women. And, of course, engagement in oral-history-interviews by the interviewed depends also not only on the sex of the informant, but also on the importance of the theme of research. For example, if we want to interview a war veteran about the postwar period and his or her adaptation to the peace, he or she would be less involved in the interviewing process than talking about the main period of their life, the participation in the war. Further, there are other categories than age etc. For example, when we study the events of the past, our informants will be much older than the researcher. And in this case the informant's experience becomes relevant and the aim of the researcher is to construct her own 'visual' experience of those events.

Studies in qualitative sociology and oral history research point at the general problem of differences between using 'male language' and describing the 'female experience'. Even greater difficulties arise in the description of women's experience of war. War is considered to be the man's job, and the role of women in it focused on the rear and medical fields until World War II. World War II represented an example of mass participation of women on the front lines in the partisan groups, in underground organizations.

### Everyday Life in Wartime narrated by Women

The Russian historian Elena Senjavskaia explains the gendered perceptions of war by psychology.<sup>19</sup> Also Belorussian journalist and writer Svetlana Alekseevich interprets the different memories with the help of psychology:

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<sup>18</sup> Viktoria Konstantinova, 'Interaktivnoe interv'juirovanie: koncepcija A. Oakley' [Interactive Interview: the Concept by Ann Oakley], in Marina Malysheva, ed., *Vozmozhnosti ispol'zovaniia kachestvennoj metodologii v gendernykh issledovanijah: Materialy seminarov* [The Possibility of Using Qualitative Methodology in Gender Studies] (Moscow: MCGI, 1997), 132-43.

<sup>19</sup> Elena Senjavskaia, 'Zhentchina na vojne glazami muzhchin (Psihologicheskij jeks-kurs v istoriju Rossii)' ['A Woman at War in the Men's Perception (The Psychological Excursus to the Russian History)'], in Elena Senjavskaia, ed., *Psikhologiya voyny v XX. veke Ist opyt Rossii* [Psychological War in the 20th century. Historical Experience in Russia] (Moscow: ROSSPEN 1999), 216, available at [http://krotov.info/library/18\\_s/en/yavskaya\\_03.htm#555](http://krotov.info/library/18_s/en/yavskaya_03.htm#555) (last visited 7 August 2011).

“Women’s memories cover the part of human feelings in the war which usually escapes the attention of men. If a man grasped the war as an action, a woman felt and endured it differently because of her feminine psychology. The bomb attacks, the death and suffering were not the whole war to her. The woman felt strongly the physical and moral overloads of the war. It was difficult for her to bear the ‘masculine’ way of war life.”<sup>20</sup>

She argues that war was a contradiction to feminine nature. It was not only psychology as we can see by the statements of the women. Firstly, they had to deal with the breaking of stable social roles during wartime what seemed to women as the wreckage of life itself. In the countryside, norms had been quite stable before the war and were to some extent also still valid for the urban population. A sense of catastrophe permeated the entire structure of women’s memories and predominated in their tonality.<sup>21</sup> Further, the army discipline, a soldier’s uniform, and heavy physical exertion was a new and difficult experience for them. The loss of privacy was a further shock for those serving in the army or fighting in partisan groups: There was no space for women; there were no mirrors, no place for extra washing etc.

Nearly all of women-memoirists focused on the description of their first “baptism of fire” because it was their new role that they had to carry on during the war. Svetlana Tyurikova, who was the head of the department of children’s literature in the local library before the war, and in 1942 became a member of the partisan group “Kubanetz”, recalled:

“It’s difficult to put into words, and it’s even more difficult to describe the feeling of the first campaign, and participation in the combat operation. The first meeting with the enemy face to face; I remember that for all my life.”<sup>22</sup>

The writing about Russian women in World War II concentrated until the 1990s on their shown courage and bravery in struggle with the enemy along

<sup>20</sup> Svetlana Alekseevich, *U vojny ne zhenskoe litzo. Povesti [The War Doesn’t Have a Woman’s Face]* (Moscow: NoOstozh’e, 1988), 61-62. Thereafter Alekseevich, *U vojny*.

<sup>21</sup> Michail D. Ryzhih, *Vospominaniya byvshego komandira gruppy razvedki 1-ogo Neftegorskogo partizanskogo otrjada v period okkupacii Kubani nemecko-fashistskimi zahvatchikami [Memoirs of the Former Leader of the Military Intelligence of the 1<sup>st</sup> Neftegorsk Partisan Group during the Nazi Occupation of Kuban Region]*, Mashinopis’ [Print copy], 1979, in Center of Documentation of Modern History in Krasnodarskij Kray (hereinafter abbreviated CDMHKK). 1774-R/2/1126/2.

<sup>22</sup> Svetlana Tyurikova, *Vospominaniya o boevykh dejstvijah partizanskogo otrjada “Kubanetz” Kurganinskogo rajona v period okkupacii Kubani nemecko-fashistskimi zahvatchikami [Memoirs about the Fights of the Partisan Group “Kubanetz” in Kurganinsk Region during the Nazi Occupation of Kuban Region]*, Mashinopis’ [Print copy], 1971, in CDMHKK. 1774-R/2/936/3.



with men.<sup>23</sup> The equality of men and women was politically wished and drawing back to a rationalist tradition they were shown as equal in war-time. Even more a gender division was supposed to be overcome by World War II. But the oral memoirs show another picture, quite opposite to the politically wished. The interviewed women in this project lived mainly in rural areas. After the end of the war they returned directly to their 'former' life and were satisfied with it. But they learned that they could fulfill man's work, and replace men in the field or in the workplace – and they narrate it with a sense of pride. Raisa Barkova, who had survived the occupation in the village Dahovskaya, recalled about the work, which she had to carry out as a young girl:

"They drove us to work. First we dug trenches, then – the ditches [they needed to dig trenches on the order of the Soviet government at the beginning of the war, and the trenches – with the arrival of the invaders]. And trenches were just that. [...] Well, how do you say? From this apartment till the end of the third building. We dug to the yard [she tried to show the distance of the trench which is about 70 meters]. After that the Germans forced us to work in the woods. Well, the forest was so high, and we needed to cut it. We cut it down to they could see when the guerrillas were coming."<sup>24</sup>

The war forced the mass involvement of women in low-skilled labor; women had to develop ability in a traditionally 'male' profession. One of our story-tellers recalled:

"Oh, we worked. Personally I worked on tobacco fields. I wonder, as they are working now, and how we worked those years. I needed to wake up when it was dark, to heat the stove, to cook the meals. Then take the bottle of milk, eggs and go to the field. I left my younger sister at home alone. [...] I got up at five o'clock, filled the stove, milked the cow, cooked the meals and went to work. In the evening I needed to bring the firewood, because no one could do it for me. Then I needed to chop the wood and put it into the oven."<sup>25</sup>

Women story-tellers described their hard, traditionally 'male' daily work in details which they needed to do in the absence of men. We can see a sense of pride. But, however, this substitution is not to be simply described as the equality of genders. We can also think of it as an prolonging of patriarchal relations. Obviously women worked for the war purposes in fulfilling the

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<sup>23</sup> Julia Ivanova, *Hrabrejshie iz prekrasnyh. Zhenshiny Rossii v vojnah* [*The Bravest among the Beautiful. Russian Women in Wars*] (Moscow: Rossiyskaya politicheskaya entsiklopediya, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> Raisa Barkova, Interview, in Archive of Oral History in KubSTU. SKK-07/KK08.

<sup>25</sup> Maria Kolobova, Interview, in Archive of Oral History in KubSTU. SKK-07/KK10. Thereafter Kolobova, Interview.



vacated jobs, but remained in the shadow of the fame of the battlefield. In the recovery period, women undertook any work, because of the lack of men. With the men's gradual return back to home, women started to do the housework again. Starting their own family life and having children stopped any possibility of women's emancipation at the level of development of traditionally 'male' jobs.

A characteristic of female texts is the 'modest narration': Nearly all female story-tellers spoke often and full of recognition of their male friends who fought at the front or guided the guerrillas. Their own participation, action in fighting, or supporting the partisans, was played down. It was, according to the women, the men who won the victory; their deeds came to be the part of the collective memory about the war. Further, they explained that the real motive of their participation in the fighting was the feeling of the revenge of dead friends and relatives. Svetlana Tyurikova wrote in her memoirs:

"It was hard to loose your friends, fellow soldiers. At the same time we became more aggressive towards the enemy, we all wanted to revenge the Nazis for the loss of our friends; we have to go on combat operations more often."<sup>26</sup>

Another element of the 'modest narration' is the fact, that women pay much attention to non-battle-events, which, in their opinion, were more important than their own military experience. In general, one can state that women's memoirs are more emotional and less full of events in comparison with men's. An underlined emotionality of women is emphasized not only by scholars but also by the memoirists themselves, because it is in the character of people's image of women. Women's stories are full of epithets, similes, lyrical digressions, and metaphors. Factual descriptions in men's stories play a more important role. But we should remember that men's memories became quickly standardized. They had been edited by archival or journalistic staff several times, taking into account politically desired narrations. Women's memories stayed more authentic than men's stories, although the influence of social order of the glorification of the past can be traced in them. How the narration was influenced by social roles is shown in the example of the former prisoner Ludmila Avas. She is as many war veterans a frequent guest at school lessons on patriotism nowadays. Every year on February, 12 there is a lesson of memory in city schools on the anniversary of the liberation from the occupiers of Krasnodar. Therefore our informant recounts what she has to say in public many times. Her story contains personally experienced impressions of the war together with

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<sup>26</sup> Svetlana Tyurikova, *Vospominanija* in CDMHKK. 1774-R/2/936/1.

the information from other official sources. She describes Krasnodar during the period of occupation in this manner:

“All the factories had been bombed, all the big buildings, all [...] the Drama theater, other buildings had been blown up and burned. It seemed that all the Kuban territory was on fire. We didn’t see even the sky. It was in summer, in August. Sun was so hot. The sun and the sky were not visible. There was smoke and all were in black.”<sup>27</sup>

In general, living conditions, everyday life, is very present in women’s memoirs: They thematize the lack of food in general or any kinds of products. Maria Kolobova wrote many years later that there was no opportunity for cooking soup. At the same time she mentioned that she could cook the pottage with the roots she found in the forest. This illogical story makes the women’s memories a valuable source of everyday life in the pre-war period. Such stories suggest implicitly that the diet of working men consisted of soups in the conception of women from the rural areas. That’s why they missed soups in the everyday diet during the war in the guerrilla groups. Women in the partisan groups felt the difficulties related to the domestic chaos very strongly.

“Once I became a guerrilla, I began to cook the meals for all the men with the permission of the commander. At first it was very difficult: there were no spoons, or plates, no salt or something else.”<sup>28</sup>

The daily struggle against such details as lack of provisions, plates or other things settled permanently in the memory of women who were faced with similar difficulties during the war. And again, one can notice that the life organization in the guerrilla group had much in common with the traditional “Domostroy” with the man as a warrior, defender of the motherland; and the woman as a housewife. Living standards had been changed, but gender roles remained traditional. Of course, this should not surprise us: In extreme situations persons were used according to their individual skills, and women learned cooking. But the fact that even men who were not trained with an arm before got guns and women not so, shows the prevalence of gendered role models.

The women who stayed at the ‘home front’ described also the lack of everyday ordinary meals and clothes. Women who remained to live in the

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<sup>27</sup> Ludmila Avas, Interview, in Archive of Oral History in KubSTU. SKK-07/KK01.

<sup>28</sup> Maria Kolobova, *Vospominanija o boevyh dejstvijah partizanskogo otrjada “Kubanetz” Kurganinskogo rajona v period okkupacii Kubani nemecko-fashistskimi zahvatchikami* [Memoirs about the Fights of the Partisan Group “Kubanetz” in Kurganinsk Region during the Nazi Occupation of Kuban Region], Mashinopis’ [Print copy], 1977, in CDMHKK. 1774-R/2/938/2.

temporarily occupied territory described the difficulties they faced during the war in detail. The need not only for clothes, but for beautiful clothes shows that especially the then young women wanted to preserve their human dignity in fulfilling their need for being well-dressed and to feel good-looking. One of our interviewees, who was a pretty young lady of 17 years old in 1945, recalled:

“The Soviet military sector was situated in our village for some time after the end of the war. We were at the age of falling in love with young handsome men. There were some kinds of dance-parties in that military sector. But I had nothing to wear. My father made shoes and fabricated the leather by himself. And I didn’t have any shoes or dress to go for dancing. It was terrible. This is my worst memory that I had nothing to go in. And didn’t have any dress...”.<sup>29</sup>

Another person interviewed remembered how they tried to conserve good clothes:

“My mother had dresses, and even she bought fabrics. Also we patched the skirts and took them to work. We wore the clean clothes when we went to the job and then changed the clothes. I don’t remember if we had any trousers, but we didn’t have any shoes.”<sup>30</sup>

Further, from the memoirs it becomes clear that women adapted quickly to the extreme situations – and they are proud about this. Women memoirists underline that overcoming the difficulties tempered their character, made them more sturdy and strong persons. “We had such a very difficult way of life so that all partisans, including me, envied the dead people. But no one of us thought that he could leave the forest or stop destroying the enemy.”<sup>31</sup> One can imagine how great the difficulties and emotional stress were that fell on the women’s shoulders, if a terrible phrase “the envy of the dead” comes out in memories after many years of peaceful life.

### Sexuality and Sexual Violence in Wartimes: From a long silence to first narrations

One of the aspects of female experience in wartime Russia was omitted for a long time: sexuality in the army and sexual violence in and beyond the

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<sup>29</sup> Nina Belovitskaya, Interview, in Archive of Oral History in KubSTU. SKK-07/KK09.

<sup>30</sup> Kolobova, Interview.

<sup>31</sup> Nadezhda Beljanskaja, *Vospominaniya o podpol'noj rabote v g. Krasnodare v 1942 g. Rukopis'* [Memoirs about the underground struggle in Krasnodar in 1942], Mashinopis' [Print copy], 1977, in CDMHKK. 1774-R/2/1348/16.

military. Especially the rapes during the war were excluded for a long time from national historiography. As Elena Metcherkina, a Russian sociologist pointed out:

“Men became heroes if they died at the frontline. At the same time raped and murdered woman were never considered to be heroes, there is no monument in honor of them. Those who survived never tried to speak about their humiliation and traumatic consciousness.”<sup>32</sup>

In the 1990s feminist researchers spoke about this kind of women’s traumatic war experience for the first time. The paper by American sociologist Nechama Tec “Among Guerrillas: The Fate of the Woman” was among the first research done on understanding the peculiarities of women’s practice of living mostly among men in the soviet guerrillas groups.<sup>33</sup> The first stories of raped women appeared in the Russian mass media at the same time, the 1990s.<sup>34</sup> There were no stories about sexual violence in memoirs written during the Soviet period because such stories could destroy the official policy of the memory about the war.

Currently, there are several fragments of arguments in the historical literature that the officers turned to to account for their positions on the sexual violence against women-soldiers. Thus, the story of signaller Vera Yerokhina pointed that there were several women’s suicides after the attempts of sexual violence by men.<sup>35</sup> The war veteran Yuriy Krimskij marked the cases when “the soviet officers had been handed over to the court, or sent to the penal battalion, or even been shot if they raped women-soldiers in their army”. A special meeting of the command and the political leaders of the Red Army in 1943 was devoted to this problem.<sup>36</sup> Still, the study of women’s experience is complicated by searching for informants who usually prefer to forget and never speak about their experience of being raped.

But also the phenomenon of the *poxodno-polevaya* wife was for a long time omitted in historiography. In many cases we can classify these sexual

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<sup>32</sup> Elena Metcherkina, ‘Massovye iznasilovanija kak chast’ voennogo jeposa’ [‘Mass Raping as Part of the War Epos’], *Gendernye issledovanija* [Gender Studies], 6 (2001), 255.

<sup>33</sup> Tec, ‘U partizan’, 170.

<sup>34</sup> Alekseevich, *U vojny*; Evgenij Katchenko, *Seksual’naja kul’tura voennosluzhawih* [Sexual Culture of Military], Ph.D. thesis, Moscow University, 1994; thereafter Katchenko, *Seksual’naja*. Tec, ‘U partizan’.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Ne zhenskoe jeto delo – vojna’ [‘The War is not a Woman’s Business’], *Komso-mol’skaja pravda*, 14 April 2000, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Andrej Kljuchnikov, ‘Ljubov’ na fronte’ [‘Love at the Frontline’], *Argumenty i fakty*, 19 (2000).

relations as survival prostitution: For women, sex could become a reason of patronage by the officer, and therefore the slight possibility of staying alive at the front. Women usually tried to find a man who had some kind of powerful resource. For example, the Soviet officers could have a woman stay together with him in the rear (as can be noticed in the case of our informant). Usually men had a regular family before the war. Their temporary wives had an opportunity of having tasty meals; they were sent to the front line rarely. However, the position of a temporary wife was unstable; such women could be set aside for different reasons. And they could lose all the blessings they had before”.<sup>37</sup> One of our informants recalled:

“Well, there are few people who can talk about it. Of course there were situations when you started relations with the officer. Then you could be sent to the other troop where you can start a love affair with another one. Some such women got married finally.”<sup>38</sup>

Survival prostitution, which was the result of the traditional model, continues to legitimize the inequality of subjects (man and woman) in the field of sexual desire and pleasure in the extreme war situation. The fact that there was a low rate of marriage in the postwar period marked the powerful nature of intimate relations between men and women at war. Women lost during war time to get children or they had abortions. After the war often they were also unable to give birth own children. In peacetime, the woman did not need to find out the patron among the commanders and officers, and therefore such relationships stopped. Also a lot of men returned with unhealed venereal diseases and therefore were not attractive for women.

All social relations become stronger at the war. People had to live as it was the last day of their life, because the death was coming along with them. Consensual sexual relationships took place by mutual agreement of both a man and a woman. Several war survivors' memories point at the fact of exaggerated sex drive in war times. People had to live as if it was the last day of their lives, because death was coming along with them. Further, on the verge of death, they would not think about morality and social norms. Emotional needs caused by the loss of family members and

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<sup>37</sup> Evgenij Krinko, Irina Rebrova and Irina Tazhidinova, ‘Problemy adaptacii zhenchin-voennosluzhatchih k boevym uslovijam v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny’ [‘The Problem of Adoption of Women-Soldiers to the War Reality during the Great Patriotic War’], in Dmitrij Genadevitch Matishov, ed., *Vzaimodejstvie narodov i kul'tur na Juge Rossii: istorija i sovremennost'*: *Sbornik nauchnyh statej* [Interaction of Nations and Cultures in the South of Russia: History and Modernity] (Rostov n/D.: Junz RAN, 2008), 257-65.

<sup>38</sup> Semen Garkov and Elena Garkov, Interview, in Archive of Oral History in KubSTU. SKK-07/KK04. Thereafter Semen, Interview.

a stable world were acted out in relationships. To give an impression about some numbers: the order № 0365 by the People's Commissariat of the Navy dated May 6, 1942 mentioned that more than 8% of women who had been called to the Navy in 1942 were dismissed for "the lack of discipline in the behavior" and for "pregnancy".<sup>39</sup>

To the question "what relations were there in the troop between men and women" a male informant replied: "The only women we had was a nurse in our troop. We considered her as a soldier like we were. Any sex relations were forbidden."<sup>40</sup> His way of answering stopped any attempt of the researcher to find out details of interpersonal relationships. The storyteller clearly did not want to talk about these relations – firstly for not been being compromised in the eyes of this wife, who was present at the interview. Secondly, the official memory about the war, which was created by the Soviet government, still prevented him from speaking publicly about the sex relations at war. There is no place for such stories in the official image of the war. Moreover, the myth of friendship between different nationalities, as well as between men and women who won the war was very popular during the Soviet period.

The official policy of the memory of World War II could not include women's experience of sexual violence, sexual exploitation, and survival prostitution in the army because it can break the concept of the glorification of soldiers. Women who experienced sexual violence at war became the hostages of the official politics of memory in the peacetime and thus they were forced to "work through their past". Ideological slogans of the Soviet time became part of the collective memory and were reflected in the personal memory. Thanks to the stories of participants and witnesses of World War II about their war experiences, new images and concepts are being formed which can be included in the cultural memory of the war nowadays.

Among these are stories about problems caused by biology. There existed particular stress situations for women in army and partisan groups, such as menstrual cycles, pregnancy, and abortion. It is known that women in the war used various methods of traditional medicine to get rid of the undesirable consequences of sex relationships with men. Women became barren as a result of such experiments on their bodies, as well as various kinds of sexually transmitted diseases. There were many cases of the death of women.

These stories could help in the reconstruction of the dynamics of the images of relationships, formed in the Soviet mentality on the one hand and on the other hand existed in the silent personal histories. We could find less

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<sup>39</sup> Katchenko, *Seksual'naja*, 124.

<sup>40</sup> Semen, Interview.

official phrases of the past in the oral stories. Nevertheless, the narrative continues to be political on the whole. The communist ideology became a part of the individual consciousness of former soldiers. Therefore, they remember the Soviet past with nostalgia. There is no contradiction between the communism ideas and the real situation in their minds.

An even more complicated issue is relationships between Russian women and German soldiers. The German historian Regina Mühlhäuser showed in 2010 that a whole spectrum of relations, from rape and survival prostitution to love affairs, existed.<sup>41</sup> In Russia until now there exists a societal taboo about intimate encounters between German men and Russian women. Even more surprising was the following fragment of an interview. Our woman storyteller did not speak directly about her personal war experience. Our storyteller that served in the army stressed that “there were the girls who made love with the Germans, and then had been punished by Soviet men”.<sup>42</sup> First voicing the experience of the other girls in her troop, then she turned the conversation to another theme immediately, offering a meal to me or keeping a long silence. I had never heard such stories before, to hear about love and sexual relations between Soviet women-soldiers and German soldiers in the front area were very surprising. I made the interview with that story-teller for the second time and she spoke in the same way again. She always asked me to improve her words in the war veteran organization, because she was a real soldier. But we cannot verify her words. She spoke in the plural and impersonal about her women troop-mates. There is always an opposition of “me” and “they” in her story.

“I never went to the Germans, no. But I could talk to them. If they came to our side and started to talk to me. And we had girls who could simply follow them. You scolded those girls. Then the Germans began to be rude to you. And you tried to tell him in German that it was forbidden for an innocent girl to make love to any man. What can she tell her parents about her behavior at war. It’s hard.”<sup>43</sup>

We can assume a shift in her memory: Women were maybe not sent there, but it was a hint that consensual relations existed which were condemned by the environment.

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<sup>41</sup> See Regina Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen: Sexuelle Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutscher Soldaten in der Sowjetunion, 1941-1945* [Conquests. Sexual Violence and Intimate Relations of German Soldiers in the Soviet Union] (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2010). I thank Maren Röger for this remark.

<sup>42</sup> Natalya Razumnaya, Interview, in Archive of Oral History in KubSTU. SKK-07/KK13. Thereafter Razumnaya, Interview.

<sup>43</sup> Razumnaya, Interview.

### Instead of a Conclusion: Gender-specific Practices of Remembering

The gender specifications of written text and oral memories has become an important part of gender studies nowadays. Such kind of knowledge helps to interpret and analyze women's and men's<sup>44</sup> texts and oral interviews in a more detailed way.<sup>45</sup>

When drawing conclusions about female narration patterns about the war from women's written and oral texts, we need to take into consideration the specification of our sources. Written memoirs and oral stories belong to the group of non-official sources. They did not become that quickly standardized in comparison to their male counterparts. The following differences between male and female texts can be observed. The first difference is the language of narration. There are more emotions and lyric in women's texts and fewer events, they are full of epithets, similes, lyrical digressions, metaphors. Most men's memories are like the series of events.

Secondly, men and women lined up their narratives differently. Men give universality to the described events, and make general conclusions. There is a combination of collective and individual memory. In the women's memoirs, by contrast, much attention is paid to details, personal emotions and experiences. Often their texts are devoted to one particular event or episode of the war, which remained in their memory forever.

Thirdly, men and women have different approaches to the description of their own military experience. To women it was important to describe the first successfully completed assignment, which truly made them a soldier. They did not hesitate to describe the fear, feelings and emotions.

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<sup>44</sup> Compare Kerstin Bischls chapter in this volume.

<sup>45</sup> Ukraine researcher Elena Ivanova examined the differences in the mechanism of storing and recording of certain events of the past, based on the analysis of compositions about the history of Holocaust of today's schoolchildren. See Elena Ivanova, 'Pamjat' ob istoricheskikh sobytijah (na materiale Holokosta): gendernyj aspekt' ['Memory about the Historical Events: on the Materials of Holocaust (Gender Aspect)'], *Social'naja istorija, yezhegodnik [Social history, Yearbook]*, 5 (2003), Special Issue: Female and Gender History, 217-37. Natalya Pushkareva allocated about ten main differences between male and female image of the past in the article 'Androgyne or Mnemosyne? (Gender-specific practices of remembering and historical memory)', based on the analysis of foreign and Russian literature. She made the comparison of the practices of memorization according to the method and plot of narration, the spatial and temporal filling of narrative and other parameters. Natalya Pushkareva, 'Androginna ili Mnemoszina? Gendernye osobennosti zapominanija i istoricheskogo pamjati' ['Androgyne or Mnemosyne? (Gender-specific practices of remembering and historical memory)'], in Yelena Anatol'evna Vishlenkova, ed., *Sotvorenije istorii: Chelovek. Pamjat'. Tekst [The Foundation of History: Man, Memory, Text]* (Kazan: Master Layn, 2001), 241-74.



Fourth, men and women differently defined their place as the author of the narrative in the text. It was important to a man to point out his personal contribution to the victory. The war becomes a lifework, the main event of the whole biography. Former veterans emphasize their personal treasure to the Great Victory. Women, in contrast, name as the main actors of their narration their friends and relatives. If they describe their own participation in the war, the language of narration becomes restrained and less significant. Thus, the individual pronoun “I” in the women’s memories dissolves into collective “we”.

Fifth, the way of the description of the everyday life of war depends on the gender of the memoirist. The everyday life becomes the background for the description of military missions in the ‘male’ image of the war. In contrast, the ‘female’ image of the war consists of detailed descriptions of everyday life. The woman-soldier or partisan could not take of use the military way of life. The lack of minimum conditions of life changed the normal way of her life greatly. Army discipline, a masculine environment, heavy physical exertion – all this was a difficult challenge.

VITA ZELČE

## LATVIAN WOMEN AFTER WORLD WAR II

This paper offers a review of the history of Latvian women after World War II, with references to the war-situation and the restoration of the Soviet regime. Latvia, a country in the Baltic region bordered to the north by Estonia and to the south by Lithuania, had a territory of 65.79 km<sup>2</sup> with 1.995.000 inhabitants in 1938. Latvia's destiny was determined on August 23, 1939, when Nazi Germany and the Communist USSR signed the so-called Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with a number of secret protocols. These placed Latvia into the Soviet sphere of influence. Soviet military bases were installed in Latvia during the last months of 1939. During the summer of 1940, the USSR completely occupied Latvia and absorbed it into the Soviet Union. Latvia's independent statehood was no more. Latvia was incorporated into the Soviet Union on August 5, 1940 as the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Only one year later German troops occupied the territory which became a part of *Reichskommissariat Ostland*. Two years later the Soviet army came back and the Soviet system was reestablished. The war between the USSR and Germany ended in 1945, but the partisan war against the Soviet occupation continued in Latvia. The Soviet military and the country's repressive structures were turned against local residents. These attacks and the related repressions only ended when Stalin died, but they did create a deep cultural trauma which left long-lasting effects on the society.

The main focus in this paper is on the relations between the Soviet regime and women as a social group – a situation for which there was a special social contract. The paper describes the post-war demographic situation, reviews collaboration between women and the regime, analyses the reasons for and results of that collaboration, and looks briefly at women who were involved in the national resistance movement. The conclusion is that as social actors, women in post-war Latvia are hard to characterize, but research into this area would help to find answers to many historical questions which, for the time being, hinder people's ability to fully understand this complicated period.

**Literary Role Models:** The Latvian writer Anna Sakse received the Stalin Prize in Literature in 1949 for her novel “Uphill.”<sup>1</sup> Sakse was 44 years old and had two teenage daughters and a husband and brother, both of whom were incurably ill. She would later say that she wrote the novel in the evening and at night.<sup>2</sup> The Stalin Prize catapulted Sakse into the pantheon of Soviet culture, and to a certain extent this protected her against Stalinist repressions and guaranteed certain social and material privileges. Sakse became a symbol of the achievements and vast opportunities of Soviet women in Soviet Latvia, throughout the USSR, and also abroad.<sup>3</sup>

The novel “Uphill” is about Latvia between 1944 and 1946 – after World War II when the country had become a constituent republic of the USSR. The tale is set in a rural parish (*pagasts*), and starts with the arrival of the Soviet army and ends with the establishment of the first *kolkhoz*. The main character in the book is a young woman called Mirdza Ozola. She is courageous, independent, eager, always happy, able to take quick decisions, and capable of organizing everyone in the parish to work together and participate in public and cultural events. Later Sakse would write:

“In ‘Uphill’, my beloved character was Mirdza – this brilliant and unspoiled girl so full of life and hard work – initially somewhat naive, but always fundamentally fair toward herself and others. Just not just toward her enemies, but also her friends and her lover Ēriks.”<sup>4</sup>

Mirdza herself says in the book:

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Sakse received the third-level Stalin Prize, which involved a cash award of 25,000 Soviet roubles. She was the only female prose writer to receive the prize. Among the other recipients of the Prize that year was another woman, the playwright Valentina Lyubimova. She received the prize for her play “Little Snow”.

<sup>2</sup> Anna Sakse, *Kopoti raksti* [Selected Writings], 6 vols. (Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 1964), 181. Thereafter Sakse, *Kopoti*.

<sup>3</sup> For a biography of Anna Sakse, see Ingrida Behmane, ‘Anna Sakse’, in Ēvalds Sokols, ed., *Apcerējumi pat latviešu padomju literatūras vēsturi* [A Study of the History of Latvian Soviet Literature] (Rīga: LPSR ZA izdevniecība, 1955), 295–322; Voldemārs Melnis, ‘Anna Sakse dzīves un daiļrades ceļos’ [‘Anna Sakse’s life and writings’], in Anna Sakse, *Kopoti raksti* [Selected Writings], 6 vols., 2nd edn (Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 1965), 453–607. Thereafter Sakse, *Kopoti*. Ingrida Kiršentāle, *Annas Sakses dzīve un personība* [The life and personality of Anna Sakse] (Rīga: Liesma, 1979); Inguna Daukste-Silasproģe, ‘Anna Sakse (1905–1981)’, in Benita Smilktiņa, ed., *Latviešu rakstnieku portreti. Laikmeta krustpunktos* [Portraits of Latvian Writers at the Crossroads of an Era] (Rīga: Zinātne, 2001), 148–91.

<sup>4</sup> Sakse, *Kopoti*, 182.

“I want to be everywhere, I want to see everything for myself. If only I could, I would work for all of the brigades and the executive committee, I would bring structure to the school.”<sup>5</sup>

Mirdza is one of the first young people in the parish to join the Komsomol. She always subordinates her private interests (both in emotional and material terms) to the interests of the collective. Mirdza sees her future only within the Soviet system and believes that her purpose in life must be to work on its behalf. This is an image which, for readers of that era, was the image of a superhero. In Soviet literature, the main heroic characters were usually men. Sakse's novel is an exception, and it contains a message about women's emancipation in terms of the right of women to be actors in the public arena. Mirdza rejects her first love because he can picture her only in his own private sphere and as part of the traditional and patriarchal family. Her internal monologues denounce this lifestyle:

“Except for his home, he cared nothing about the world. [...] Let her make his bed and clean his house, let her reject the path which constantly leads toward the mountaintop that can't be reached by hand or by eye. What right does he have to try to keep her from this path? What right to pull her down into the peaceful valley, where the air is dusty and she would choke?”<sup>6</sup>

For Mirdza Ozola, a prerequisite for love is shared political beliefs and the freedom to be an active builder of Soviet life.

“Uphill” represents the writing style of socialist realism that was characteristic of the Stalinist period. This style demanded not just the depiction of reality, but also the presentation of socialist ideals and how they were to be embodied in life. Works produced in this style had to be optimistic, full of revolutionary romanticism and contain positive heroes who could build a new society and be leaders of the masses. Recognition had to be given to literature's grounding in the doctrines of the Communist Party. Socialist realism was meant to depict life as having a ‘brilliant future’ – life as it should be, not as it really is. The basic formula for Soviet literature written in this manner was fully in place by the 1930s. Katerina Clark has argued that Soviet literature was similar to medieval iconography, because there was a canonical style that was simply copied. Writers were expected to make use of a specific system of meanings and signs, employ concrete epithets, basic phraseology, images, etc., and make sure that the narrative syntax of their work was in line with examples that had already been set for the presentation of events. Accordingly, Soviet literature was quite homo-

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<sup>5</sup> Anna Sakse, ‘Pret kalnu’ [‘Uphill’], in Sakse, *Kopotī raksti*, 2nd vol, 138. Thereafter Sakse, *Kopotī 2*.

<sup>6</sup> Sakse, *Kopotī 2*, 443.

geneous.<sup>7</sup> Evgeny Dobrenko argues that socialist realism was a fundamental component of the political and aesthetic project that was the Soviet Union, because it served as “a mechanism for transforming Soviet reality into Socialism.”<sup>8</sup>

The thing that really was lacking in socialist realism was, ironically, realism. “Uphill” presented an image of rural life and human relations under the Soviet regime that had nothing much to do with reality. Sakse was simply successful in writing a novel that satisfied Soviet requirements about how the lives of Latvians should be depicted, and she used the examples of Soviet literature that were available to her. The author’s success also rests on an accurate understanding of the political requirements of her age. There was great demand for literature that could be used as an instrument of sovietization and collectivization. A history of Soviet Latvian literature published in the 1960s assessed the main character in “Uphill” in the following way:

“Mirdza’s brilliant image embodies all of the typical characteristics of the generation of Komsomol members who grew up after the war and became the best helping hands of the Communist Party from the very first days of liberation. Mirdza Ozola is the younger sister of Pavel Korchagin and Zoya Kosmodemyanska, and in post-war Latvia, she continued the battle that her older comrades launched in pursuit of Communism.”<sup>9</sup>

“Uphill” was first serialized in the literary magazine *Karogs* (The Flag) in 1947. It was published as a book in 1948, and then translated into Russian. Eventually, “Uphill” would be translated into more than 20 languages – nearly all of those of the Soviet republics, as well as those of Soviet protectorates. The book appeared in Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, East Germany, and China.<sup>10</sup>

In Latvia, “Uphill” had a wide readership for two main reasons. First, there were very few books published in Latvia during the 1940s because a large number of established authors had fled or emigrated during the war. Each book published in Latvian, therefore, attracted a great deal of interest. Second, “Uphill” is a relatively interesting book when seen against the backdrop of general Soviet literature. Sakse did not present cookie-cutter

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<sup>7</sup> Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel. History as Ritual*, 3rd edn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 4-15.

<sup>8</sup> Evgeny Dobrenko, *Politekonomikiya sotsrealizma [Political Economy of Socialist Realism]* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obezrenie, 2007), 25-29.

<sup>9</sup> Ēvalds Sokols ed., *Latviešu literatūras vēsture [History of Latvian Literature]*, 6 vols., (Rīga: LPSR ZA izdevniecība, 1962), 652.

<sup>10</sup> Ingrida Kiršentāle, ‘Komentāri’ [‘Commentaries’], in Sakse, *Kopoti 2*, 521-22.

images of the Soviet type, and she allowed her characters to have their own individuality. She devoted a comparatively large amount of the book to love and personal experiences, which means that the novel can also be seen as popular literature. “Uphill” was used as a teaching tool in schools, and that remained true until the collapse of the USSR. This means that everyone who finished school in the Latvian SSR had read the book at some point.

“Uphill” was also of great ideological importance for the successful implementation of sovietization. Anna Sakse offered to young women a model for behaviour and for life itself, promising that living in the USSR would provide them with a good and active future. Later many women who held senior positions in Soviet institutions, companies, and collective farms would say that they were encouraged to take on such public roles specifically because of Sakse’s novel. Thus, for instance, Komsomol activist and journalist Olga Vēja-Solovjeva wrote that she had read “Uphill” as a high school student in 1948:

“I feel certain in saying that ‘Uphill’ gave me my first assist in finding the right path – the most powerful and influential one. I wanted to get busy right away without waiting or looking around. I wanted to be like Mirdza Ozola. I thought that I could see the girl with my own eyes, that I had met her and talked to her. That’s how close she seemed to me.”<sup>11</sup>

Vēja-Solovjeva said that she had joined the Komsomol, through which she would become its school and then district Secretary, directly because of the novel.

The point is that Sakse set an example with her life and her book about how women could collaborate with the Soviet regime and become involved in public activities.

### “A New Woman”

Anna Sakse’s novel also incorporated a task related to gender policy in the Soviet Union – creating “the new Soviet woman”. Lynne Attwood has written that the concept of “the new woman” cannot be understood as an unchanging category, because it was reconstructed and redefined as the situation in the USSR changed.<sup>12</sup> The initial purpose of the concept, when

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<sup>11</sup> Olga Solovjeva, ‘Galvu augšā!’ [‘To keep one’s chin up!’], in Pēteris Bauģis, ed., *Atmiņas par Annu Saksi* [Memories about Anna Sakse] (Rīga: Liesma, 1989), 126-27.

<sup>12</sup> Lynne Attwood, *Creating the New Soviet Women: Women’s Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity, 1922-55* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 168.

Soviet society was in its infancy, was to create a contrast with women in czarist Russia and capitalist countries. Barbara Alpern Engel has argued that despite the fact that the 1920s in the Soviet Union were a time of enormous fluidity and flux, it was also a period in which lower-class women found unprecedented opportunities in gaining a voice in public debates and in organizations.<sup>13</sup> During the forced modernization of the USSR, labor was urgently needed and the ordinary woman became a “heroine of labor” in the public arena. There was a feverish construction of nurseries and kindergartens in many cities so that women could have jobs and children at the same time. In ideology, the mass media, and in public rituals, the image of the woman was transformed completely. She was now a hero who was conquering areas of work which had been the province of men. This new and modern woman was a Stakhanovite, a tractor driver or an aviator, and since her achievements came thanks to the Soviet state she was expected to express public dependency on the state, along with fulsome thanks to Stalin.<sup>14</sup>

As totalitarianism took root in the Soviet Union, the regime began to implement a stable policy of patriarchal families and conservative values. Abortion was banned in 1936, divorce procedures became more complicated, there were stronger support systems for mothers with many children, the authority of parents was strengthened, and irresponsible men and fathers were denounced.<sup>15</sup> External femininity also became a public value, and many women found that outer beauty was more important than pretending to be a heroine of labour.<sup>16</sup>

Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina have argued that the long-term relationship between the Soviet regime and the country’s women as an inclusive social group can be called a contract between the regime and working mothers. The government saw women as a special social group which required particular concern. Its status could be regulated with normative documents, ideological campaigns, mechanisms of social control,

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<sup>13</sup> Barbara A. Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 164–65. Thereafter Engel, *Women*.

<sup>14</sup> Choi Chatterjee, *Celebrating Women: Gender, Festival Culture and Bolshevik Ideology, 1910–1939* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), 135–40.

<sup>15</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 30s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 142.

<sup>16</sup> Engel, *Women*, 184; Sofie Chuikina, “Byt neotdelim ot politiki”: Ofitsial’nye i neofitsial’nye normy “polovoi” morali v sovetskom obshchestve 1930–1980-x godov” [“Life can not be separated from politics”: the formal and informal norms “of sexual” morality in Soviet society 1930–1980-s’], in Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, eds., *V poiskah seksual’nosti [In Search of Sexuality]* (Sankt-Peterburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2002), 99–127, here 104–5.

and the mass media. The paternal nature of the Soviet regime could be seen in social guarantees and the relief that was given to women who worked while giving birth to and raising their children. This state support meant that women were a social group that was dependent on the favors of the system of power, and that meant that they were expected to be loyal to it. Zdravomiskova and Temkina add that during the period of Stalinism, when the regime used repression as one of its key elements, strict control mechanisms were brought together with social guarantees to strengthen the contract.<sup>17</sup> Under Stalinist reality, women were thus completely reduced to subordinate status and second-classness in all areas of life. The government kept proclaiming gender equality officially, but it was all a smokescreen.

World War II saw no major change in the basic elements of the gender model or in the policies of the Soviet regime toward women. The work of women and their care for families became even more necessary, however, and the boundary between ‘men’s work’ and ‘women’s work’ quickly disappeared as the war progressed. At the same time, the presentation of the genders in media, art, cinema, and propaganda kept men and women apart even more than had been the case before the war. Engel has argued that the work of women was depicted as a personal obligation toward men who were on the front lines.<sup>18</sup>

War was depicted by the Soviet media mostly as a man’s business. The public emphasis on the femininity of women could be quite emphatic, and it was also embodied in the sense that men who were risking their lives at war were doing so because of their homes and their families.<sup>19</sup> Official propaganda still presented the image of the heroic woman, however, but now she was, in most cases, a partisan or a field medic. Heroines of this type occasionally appeared in the gallery of male heroes. Olga Nikonova has written that these heroines were not part of the common nature of the front lines, they did not at all represent the true attitudes of war, nor did they speak to the emotions and true everyday heroism of most women. The iconography of war presented women on posters, in films, literature, songs, and the press, but mostly as embodiments of the Motherland or as

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<sup>17</sup> Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, ‘Sovetskii etakraticeskii gendernii poryadok’ [‘Soviet state gender order’], in Natalia Pushareva, ed., *Sotsial’naya istoriya. Ezhegodnik, 2003. Zhenskaya i gendernaya istoriya* [Social History. Yearbook, 2003. Women and Gender History] (Moskva: Rossiiskaya politicheskaya entsiklopediya, 2003), 436-42.

<sup>18</sup> Engel, *Women*, 220.

<sup>19</sup> Engel, *Women*, 221.



feminine women waiting for their men to come home from the front lines.<sup>20</sup> Those women who were on the front lines had very different, albeit extreme, experiences, but these became unnecessary in the post-war Soviet state, because such memories hindered the ability of the regime to create new peacetime normality and to reinstate the traditional system of gender roles. According to Nikonova, in official memorial culture, heroic women of the front lines disappeared almost entirely for several decades.<sup>21</sup>

During the post-war period, women were represented as wives and mothers in most cases. Maternity was positioned in public discourse as a woman's national duty.<sup>22</sup> It was also her obligation to reconstruct the 'home' which had been destroyed by war. Engel has written that the basic job of the woman was to heal the 'scars' of her menfolk after they came home from war and that the traumas and needs of women themselves were therefore perceived as non-existent. In comparison to the pre-war era, the content of literature, the cinema, and the mass media was focused to a far greater extent on the subject of love. Magazines encouraged women to neaten their homes, to prepare tasty and filling foods, to take care of their own appearance, to do some gardening, etc. Femininity dominated fashion pages – high-heeled shoes, complicated coiffures, cosmetics.<sup>23</sup> Greta Bucher has written ironically about this:

"The ideal postwar woman was an outstanding worker and dedicated party or union member, who had a spotlessly clean home, sewed, cooked, and spent a lot of time with her children. In her spare time, she read classic literature – 'And Quiet Flows the Don' was a favorite – went to the theater, shopped for the family, and exercised. Women had two primary responsibilities – to work and raise children."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Olga Nikonova, 'Zhenshchiny, voina i "figuryi umolchaniya"' ['Women, War and the "Figure of Silence"'], in Mikhail Gabovich, ed., *Pamyat' o voine 60 let spustya. Rossiya, Germaniya, Evropa* [The Memory of the War 60 Years later. Russia, Germany, Europe] (Moskva, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2005), available at <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2005/2/ni32.html> (last visited 1 August 2012). Thereafter Nikonova, 'Zhenshchinyi'.

<sup>21</sup> Nikonova, 'Zhenshchinyi', 571.

<sup>22</sup> Vineta Sprugaine, 'Padomju sievietes pienākums pret valsti: Sievietes reproduktīvās veselības diskurss jaunās valsts pirmajā piecgadē izdotajās informatīvajās brošūrās' ['The Duty of Women in the Soviet State: The Discourse of Reproductive Health in the First Five Years of Soviet Latvia, as Presented in Informational Brochures'], in Vita Zelče, ed., *Agora. 3. sēj.: Pēckara Latvijas cilvēklaitelpa ≠ staļinisms* [Agora. 3 vols., The Post-War Time and Space of Latvia's People ≠ Stalinism] (Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2005), 294.

<sup>23</sup> Engel, *Women*, 224–229. See Anna Krylova, "Healers of wounded souls": The crisis of private life in Soviet literature, 1944–1946', *The Journal of Modern History*, 73, 2 (2001), 311–19.

<sup>24</sup> Greta Bucher, 'Struggling to survive: Soviet women in the postwar years', *Journal of Women's History*, 12, 1 (2000), 152.

The post-war reality was very different. It was dominated by poverty, shortages, insufficient food, and Stalinist repressions.

The Anna Sakse novel “Uphill” was about a new Soviet woman who was unlike the Soviet woman represented after the war. She was more similar to an activist of the late 1920s and early 1930s – a woman who gained satisfaction from participation in public affairs, not in her family. Mirdza did not possess the elements of femininity that were key to post-war Stalinist women. On the contrary, she did not use cosmetics, and she did not curl her hair. The reasons for this contrast with the public image of Soviet women can be explained by the situation in which Latvia found itself at that time – Sovietisation, the demographic catastrophe caused by the war, and the need to involve women in the labor force.

### A Look Back: Latvia During the War

A traditional gender model existed in pre-war Latvia, where an authoritarian political regime had been in place since 1934. Men dominated the public space, even though there were certainly some women who were active participants in the area of economic and cultural issues. The 1935 census in Latvia showed a population of 1.950.502 people – 912.051 men (46.75 %) and 1.038.451 women (53.25 %). 68.6 % of men had jobs, and so did 54.6 % of women.<sup>25</sup> Some women worked as homemakers and were not, therefore, listed on employment rolls. The public believed that married women from the middle or upper classes who had paid jobs were destroying the social prestige of their families.

Once the Soviet regime was instituted in 1940, by contrast, there was much propaganda in support of the idea that women should be involved in work. Press articles at that time insisted that the identity of women must be based on a combination of work outside of the home and the social role of a mother. Sadly, there have been no studies of the social history of Latvia between 1940 and 1945, which means that it is rather difficult to describe gender model transformations during that period of time. There have, however, been studies of individual aspects of the history of women during the Nazi and Soviet occupation.

Thus, for instance, historian Iveta Šķinķe has studied women who were arrested by the Communist authorities and deported to various locations in Siberia and other remote regions of the Soviet Union on June 14, 1941. This round of deportations particularly focused on Latvia's social elite.

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<sup>25</sup> M. Skujenieks, ed., *Ceturtais tautas skaitīšana Latvijā [Forth census in Latvia]* (Rīga: Valsts statistikas pārvaldes), 26, 449.

Men were separated from their families and sent to different places of incarceration. Šķiņķe argues that the deportation “placed women in a socially unnatural situation – their families were violently torn asunder, and women had to perform roles that were created by extreme conditions and were socially unaccustomed.”<sup>26</sup> Under such extreme situations, women had to take full responsibility for children and elderly family members who were deported in the same echelons. They also had to deal with the fact that their husbands quite often perished in prisons, labor camps, or settlements and that their children frequently died as well. There was also the fact that women faced moral humiliation by being seen as criminals and deportees. This was a status which replaced their former status as members of the social elite or the middle class.

In June 1941, Hitler’s Germany invaded the Soviet Union, forcing Soviet authorities to abandon Latvia temporarily and creating a three-year long German occupation of the country. Historian Iveta Dreimane has studied collaboration between women and the repressive institutions of the Nazi regime. She argues that this did not happen frequently and that in those cases where collaboration was seen, it was almost always a forcible process. Women who declined to collaborate almost always ended up in prison or were executed, and their relatives also faced repressions. Yet, some women did volunteer to collaborate with the repressive structures of the Nazi regime. In most cases that was because they wanted to take revenge against the earlier year-long Communist system and its supporters. In other cases, personal reasons or pure greed were the motivation. In some cases, women collaborated because they fell in love with German soldiers or civilians stationed in Latvia and wanted to confirm it.<sup>27</sup> Holocaust researcher Andrievs Ezergailis has noted that the names of women are seldom seen on lists of people who propagandized anti-Semitism during

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<sup>26</sup> Iveta Šķiņķe, ‘1941.gada 14.jūnija deportācijā arestētās un izsūtītās sievietes. Ieskats problēmā’ [‘The women arrested and exiled during the deportation of 14 June 1941. An insight into the problem’], in Māra Brencē and Dzintars Ērglis, eds., *Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti. 6. sēj.: 1941.gada 14.jūnija deportācija – noziegums pret cilvēci. Starptautiskās konferences materiāli 2001. gada 12.-13. jūnijs, Rīga* [Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia. Deportation of 14 June 1941: Crime against humanity. Materials of an International conference 12-13 June 2001, Riga], 6 vols. (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūts, 2002), 331. Thereafter Šķiņķe, ‘1941’.

<sup>27</sup> Inese Dreimane, ‘Sieviešu sadarbība ar nacistu represīvajām struktūrām Latvijā 1941.-1944.gadā’ [‘Women’s Collaboration with Nazi Repressive Structures in Latvia from 1941 to 1944’], in Dzintars Ērglis, ed., *Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti. 16. sēj.: Okupētā Latvija 20.gadsimta 40.gados* [Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia. 16 vols., *Occupied Latvia in 20<sup>th</sup> Century (1940-s)*] (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūts, 2005), 319-68.

the Nazi occupation. Indeed, there are quite a few known cases in which women helped to save Jews from the Nazis.<sup>28</sup>

During the war, women were involved in the armed forces of the USSR and Nazi Germany alike. There were several hundred women in the 201<sup>st</sup> Latvian Division of the Red Army (later the 43<sup>rd</sup> guard) – a brigade that was entirely made up of Latvians. They served as medics, snipers, radar operators, laundresses, kitchen workers, barbers, secretaries, etc. There is no precise information about exactly how many women served in the Latvian military units during the war, largely because the Soviet system was very careless when it came to human statistics. Most war veterans today say that there were more women in Latvian units than in other Red Army structures. Fiction and newspaper articles published during the Soviet period spoke of the invaluable role of women in the Latvian division. The first movie to be produced in post-war Latvia, “Homeward With Victory” (1947), was about the Latvians who fought on the Soviet side during the war, and a woman was one of the central characters in that film.<sup>29</sup> During the last years of the war, some Latvian women served in the Nazi German forces – some 1.000 women aged 13 to 33 were drafted as assistants to the German Air Force.<sup>30</sup>

Most women, however, spent the war as civilians, doing their work, taking care of their families and homes, and paying the taxes which the occupant regimes collected. Fear was a key element in these lives – concerns about one’s own destiny and that of one’s loved ones during the war, as well as about what kind of lives people would have after the war. Changes in the Baltic States during the 1940s are unfathomable from the present-day perspective. Many people at that time had a very hard time in comprehending the realities of life, the biography researcher Aili Aarelaid-Tarta has argued. The fact is that over the course of just four years, Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union, then by Nazi Germany, and then again by the USSR. The social order in the country had to shift from a western-oriented to a Soviet mode of life far more quickly than people could accept in the new situation. What is more, that happened under circumstances of war, when people were terrified about their lives and when many Soviet and Nazi forces murdered people and destroyed cities and villages. The

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<sup>28</sup> Andrievs Ezergailis, *Holokausts vācu okupētajā Latvijā. 1941-1944* [*Holocaust in Latvia Occupied by Germans. 1941-1944*] (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 1999), 116.

<sup>29</sup> Daina Eglitis and Vita Zelče, ‘Unruly Actors: Historical Remembrance and Forgetting of Latvian Women of the Red Army in World War II’, unpublished paper.

<sup>30</sup> Daina Bleiere, ed., *Latvija Otrajā pasaules karā (1939-1945)* [*Latvia in the Second World War (1939-1945)*] (Rīga: Jumava, 2008), 373.

war itself, of course, represented a socio-psychological crisis, because people's lives and plans collapsed. There was no sense of peace at all and people permitted themselves the use of behavior they would have frowned upon in normal times. The land was wearied from battles during the war and afterward, and many people simply tried to avoid the realities of life. Others made incorrect choices and/or decisions, and in many cases they ended up having to regret that fact.<sup>31</sup> When the war ended in 1944 and 1945, that did not at all mean that it ended in Latvia as well.

### Post-war Latvia

Latvia lost a substantial part of its population because of World War II, Soviet and Nazi repressions, and the flight of refugees from the country at the end of the war. The loss amounted to approximately one-third of the population. Demographers maintain that post-war Latvia had only some 1.4 million residents. In 1946, when some refugees and soldiers had returned, the size of the population had increased to 1.6 million.<sup>32</sup> The totality of events, however, had changed the people who had survived and remained alive. The damage to the minds, spirit, and destinies of human beings cannot be identified as precisely as the number of destroyed factories, power stations, bridges, buildings, railroads, and highways. People had learned to live under extreme conditions. They suffered traumas, pain, and a yearning for security and refuge in their own homes. For most of those who survived, politics were far less important than satisfying a yearning for welfare, fundamental comforts (home, heat, food), and the capacity to establish or restore a family.<sup>33</sup> Historian Mark Mazower has written that in

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<sup>31</sup> Aili Aareleid-Tart, 'The theory of cultural trauma as applied to the investigation of the mind-set of Estonians under Soviet rule (Based on the Biographical Method)', in Baiba Metuzāle-Kangere, ed., *Inheriting the 1990s. The Baltic Countries* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet), 50-51.

<sup>32</sup> Pārsla Eglīte and Ilmārs Mežs, 'Latvijas kolonizācija un etniskā sastāva izmaiņu cēloņi 1944.-1990. Gadā' ['The colonization of Latvia and changes in ethnic composition of its population (1944-1990)'], in Irēne Šneidere, ed., *Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti. 7. sēj.: Okupācijas režīmi Latvijā 1940.-1956. gadā: Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas 2001. gada pētījumi* [Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia. Vol. 7: Occupation Regimes in Latvia in 1940-1956. Research of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia in 2001] (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūts, 2002), 414-15.

<sup>33</sup> Vita Zelče, 'Par dažām (iz)dzīvošanas praksēm pēckara Latvijā' ['Strategies of life and survival in post-war Latvia'], in Vita Zelče, ed., *Agora. 3. sēj.: Pēckara Latvijas cilvēklaikelpa ≠ staļinisms* [Agora. Vol. 3: The Post-War Time and Space of Latvia's People ≠ Stalinism] (Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2005), 15. Thereafter Zelče, 'Par dažām'.

the lands that were consumed by war, what was of value was human warmth, intimacy, attention and love, along with a secure and stable private world in which everyday living conditions would obtain.<sup>34</sup>

Table 1: War generation in 1946<sup>35</sup>

Year	Men		Women	
	Total	%	Total	%
1906	10.671	41.42	15.089	58.58
1907	10.856	41.33	15.408	58.67
1908	9.459	38.06	15.395	61.94
1909	9.579	38.87	15.067	61.13
1910	9.317	37.40	15.593	62.60
1911	9.208	37.13	15.198	62.87
1912	9.656	37.15	16.334	62.85
1913	8750	37.52	14.572	62.48
1914	8.611	37.11	14.591	62.89
1915	7.022	37.11	11.898	62.89
1916	5.200	33.99	10.098	66.01
1917	4.495	33.23	9.030	66.77
1918	5.622	32.65	11.598	67.35
1919	5.056	31.57	10.959	68.43
1920	5.177	29.50	12.372	70.50
1921	5.514	28.93	13.545	71.07
1922	5.463	25.99	15.559	74.01
1923	5.155	24.03	16.300	75.97
1924	5.153	24.29	16.063	75.71
1925	5.855	27.92	15.119	72.08
1926	5.825	26.62	16.060	73.38
1927	10.300	40.01	15.446	59.99

<sup>34</sup> Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 221-25.

<sup>35</sup> Source: National Archives of Latvia, State Archives of Latvia, 277/ 14/5: 47.

One consequence of World War II was a distinct gender imbalance in the structure of Latvia's population. Late in the autumn of 1944, when the USSR controlled only one part of Latvia's territory, a survey of rural residents found that 58.47 % of them were women, and only 41.53 % of them were men.<sup>36</sup> The greatest proportional difference was found among younger men and women. Early in 1946, in preparation for a Soviet Supreme Council election, a census was taken of the adults in the Latvian SSR, and this showed that among legal residents who had reached the age of 18, there were 424.573 men (37.20 %) and 716.602 women (62.80 %). The greatest imbalance was found in those age groups from which men were mobilized into the military – particularly the generation of young men who had been born between 1916 and 1926. In early 1946, for instance, there were 5.153 men in Latvia who were born in 1924 (24.29 %), as against 16.063 women born that year (71.71 %).<sup>37</sup> In 1945, when the war ended in Latvia, women thus constituted the majority of civilians in the country. Of particular importance is the fact that they also constituted a majority of those who were able to work. Men were in the Soviet or the German armies and in filtration camps, and some took part in armed opposition movements while others were in an illegal situation while they waited for events to develop.

The gender imbalance caused by the war remained in place long after the conflict was over. Data from the 1959 census allow us to draw certain conclusions about the situation that prevailed. In 1959 there were 919.008 men (43.90 %) and 1.174.450 women (56.10 %) in the Latvian population. The proportion of women was slightly higher in urban areas than in the countryside. Among urban residents, women represented 56.66 % of the population, while in rural areas, they represented 55.39 %. The largest proportion of women was found in those age groups in which the men had been subject to wartime mobilization. In the 35 to 39 age group (20-24 in 1945), for instance, there were 385 men and 615 women per 1.000 residents. In the age group from 40 to 44 years (25-29 in 1945), there were 405 men and 595 women per 1.000 residents.<sup>38</sup>

After the war, there was increased violence in the country – robberies, unjustified arrests and executions, as well as other types of violence against women which became a part of life at that time. There are no statistics to show how many women fell victim to the violence of the Red Army and

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<sup>36</sup> National Archives of Latvia, State Archives of Latvia, 277/14/2, 53.

<sup>37</sup> National Archives of Latvia, State Archives of Latvia, 277/14/2, 5: 47.

<sup>38</sup> Komitet po statistike [Committee on Statistics], ed., *Itogi Vsesoyuznoi perepiski naseleniya 1959 goda [Results of the All-Union census in 1959]* (Moskva: Gossizdat TsSU SSSR, 1962), 19-20.

the rest of the Soviet occupation regime. The fact that violence caused by Soviet military officials was a serious problem, however, is seen in confidential correspondence between the government of the Latvian SSR and the commanders of the Leningrad frontline military, asking that the violence be brought to an end. The letters mention many cases in which military officials robbed homes, stole livestock, and raped women.<sup>39</sup>

Women did play another major role in post-war Latvia – they were participants in or supporters of the national resistance movement. These women remained unnoticed by the public's eye, but it is known that approximately 10 % of the rebels in the larger resistance units of the post-war years were women. Historian Zigmārs Turčinskis has collected data about female partisans in Northern Vidzeme, and he has written that the majority joined the movement before fierce repressions carried out by the occupying regime: the mass arrests in January and February 1945, as well as the deportations of March 25, 1945. The proportion of women in the resistance probably was between 6 and 8 %. Many of them were killed. Their most important roles were as deliverers of food, clothing, and medical supplies to the partisans, as well as messengers.<sup>40</sup> After the reinstatement of Soviet rule in Latvia, many resistance groups were organized by students and other young people, with girls representing one-half or one-third of all these participants. Nearly all of these groups were destroyed, and the young people ended up incarcerated. Among those students who were convicted of resistance efforts in the early 1950s, 16 % were female.<sup>41</sup>

The comparatively few published memoirs from women who took part in the resistance movement have been rather skimpy on emotions. These women tell relatively little about their involvement in resistance battles, their duties as signallers and providers of food, their conflicts with KGB agents or military units, or the partisans who fell in battle. They are even

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<sup>39</sup> Irēne Šneidere, ed., *Latvija padomju režīma varā, 1945-1986. Dokumentu krājums* [Latvia in Power of Soviet Regime, 1945-1986. Collection of Documents] (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2001), 36-37.

<sup>40</sup> Zigmārs Turčinskis, *Ziemeļvidzemes mežabrāļi. Latvijas nacionālo partizāņu cīņas Valkas apriņķī un Alūksnes apriņķa rietumu daļā. 1944.-1953.gads* [The Forest Brethren of North Vidzeme. The Battles of the Latvian National Partisans in the Valka District and in the Western Part of Alūksne District. 1944-1953] (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2011), 301.

<sup>41</sup> Heinrihs Strods, 'Latvijas skolu jaunatnes nacionālā pretošanās kustība (1944.gads-50.gadu vidus)' ['The national resistance movement among Latvian schoolchildren (1944-Mid-50s)'], in Irēne Šneidere, ed., *Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti. 3. sēj.: Totalitārie režīmi un to represijas Latvijā 1940.-1956. gadā* [Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia. Vol. 3: Totalitarian Regimes and Their Repressions Carried Out in Latvia in 1940-1956] (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūta apgāds, 2001), 636.



less likely to talk about interrogations, beatings, and other violations at the hands of the KGB or in prison.<sup>42</sup>

It also has to be noted that women made up the majority of those who were deported from Latvia on March 25, 1949 – 16.869 men (40 %) and 25.256 women (60 %).<sup>43</sup> Historian Iveta Šķiņķe has argued that deportation is a more difficult process for women than for men, because their primordial links to their native land are closer, and cultural re-adaptation is more difficult:

“Separation from the accustomed society is difficult, and the things that are new initially repel them. Eventually, women make do with their lives in the new situation, start gardening, and find work that is more in line with their education. And yet they dream, and most of them return to Latvia, even though that, too, brings a new experience. They cannot return to their own homes. Much has changed in the women and in those who are around them.”<sup>44</sup>

The replacement of one occupant regime by another in 1944 and 1945 created a threshold situation in which antagonistic principles clashed and the world was turned upside-down. Borders create battles, efforts are made to maintain disappearing benefits as long as possible, there is a lot of waiting, a battle between good and evil forces is renewed, and sometimes there is hope that even in the worst circumstances things will get better and that threats and uncertainties will someday be gone. People waited, watched, and were cautious. This watchful waiting was facilitated by the ethno-psychological nature of Latvians created by the sum total of their historical experiences over the centuries.<sup>45</sup> The ethno-sociologist Ilga Apine places Latvians among cultures that are individualistic. They want to maintain a certain amount of autonomy and want to be personally responsible for finding a legitimate path in life. Apine argues that Latvians love order and settled questions. They hate chaos, and they are sensible, thoughtful, and hard working. In relations with strangers, they tend to close themselves

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<sup>42</sup> Antoņina Brasla was a resistance member as a student and suffered a very bitter fate, and when she was asked in 2005 what role the movement played in her subsequent life, she replied: “Do I regret it? No, we had no other choice, that is how we were raised. [...] I see no reason to feel evil in my heart in terms of those who betrayed me. The only thing, however, is that I cannot forget. We must never forget the things which the red plague did to Latvia and to other nations.” See: Anna Rancāne, ‘Sakarniece’ [‘Signaller’], *Diena*, 7-13 May 2005, 35.

<sup>43</sup> Jānis Riekstiņš, ‘The deportation of March 25, 1949 in Latvia’, in Iveta Šķiņķe, ed., *Aizvestie. 1949.gada 25.marts [Deported. March 25, 1949]* (Rīga: Latvijas Valsts arhīvs; Nordik, 2007), 48.

<sup>44</sup> Šķiņķe, ‘1941’, 337.

<sup>45</sup> Zelče, ‘Par dažām’, 18.

off. Apine insists that the central axis of the Latvian nation –around which all other characteristics circle – is stoicism. Stoicism is their reaction to difficulties in life and to negative and unexpected changes. Latvian identity also includes the capacity adapt in order to survive.<sup>46</sup>

After the war, everyday life did not allow people to assume a position of waiting for years and decades. Instead, people became more insistent in wanting to know what would happen next and what they should do. People were forced to learn about the forms of Soviet society and to integrate themselves with the Soviet way of life.

### On Social Contracts

The semiotician Yuri Lotman has argued that in any community, the cultural behaviour of individuals is organised by two contradictory elements: 1) That which is ordinary, of an everyday nature, and seen by members of the community as being natural, the only possible one, and the normal one; 2) All celebrations, as well as state, cultural and ceremonial rituals, which are perceived as carriers of culture and have an independent meaning. The first type of organizing behaviour is learned by members of a specific cultural community just as they learn their native language. They do not even notice when, where, and from whom they learn to work with the existing system and its order. Knowledge of it seems so natural that there is no point in asking from where it came. The second form of behaviour, however, is learned as if it were a foreign language with its own laws and grammar. Norms are learned first, and then they are used to shape the correct ‘texts of behaviour’. The first form of behaviour is learned automatically, the second is learned purposefully and with the help of teachers; it is a dedication and a wish.<sup>47</sup> In post-war Latvia, people had to learn the ‘foreign language’ of the Soviet way of life. This necessity was dictated by the wish to survive, by memories about what had been seen and experienced in 1940 and 1941, and by the recollection of the scope of repressions and of the reasons why the occupant regimes punished people in their particular way.

Repairing wartime damage and bringing the economy and social organization of Latvia in line with the ideology of the Soviet regime required

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<sup>46</sup> Ilga Apine, ‘Latvieši. Psiholoģiskā portretējuma mēģinājums’ [‘Latvians. An Attempt at Psychological Portrayal’], *Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis*, 56, 4/5/6 (2002), 66-68.

<sup>47</sup> Yurii Lotman, *Stat'i po semiotike i iskusstva* [Articles on Semiotics and Art] (Sankt-Peterburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2002), 485-6.

many more women to become involved in work and in political and social activities. The regime needed women for their working abilities, their capacity for raising new citizens, and for their loyalty and co-operation (in every sense of the word). Women were expected to adapt to and make their peace with the new circumstances.

The first (and last) Congress of Soviet Latvian Women was convened in Rīga on March 30 and 31, 1945. One thousand one hundred women took part in what was one of the grandest public exhibitions of those years. Its purpose was to demonstrate that the regime, on the one hand, and women as an inclusive social group, on the other, supported each other and worked together. All of the elements of Soviet rituals were present at the Congress. The event was reported on extensively in the press and on the radio. The speeches and documents of the Congress were published in a compendium. Representatives of the Soviet regime delivered addresses containing pointed demands on and warnings to women: 1) Do not support or work with those who represented the former governments, do not believe them, do not partner with Nazi (collaborators?), and understand that if you obey these rules, you will not face the threat of arrest and deportation to Siberia; 2) Do not give your support to the movement of armed rebels; 3) Obey the state by delivering to it the required grain and forest products, go to work in factories, on the railroad, and elsewhere; 4) Support the Soviet army; 5) Help to remove the ruins of destroyed buildings in urban areas; 6) Handle the spring harvest; 7) Become involved in public life and cultural activities.<sup>48</sup>

The central focus of these speeches, however, was on labour mobilization. Delegates testified to their support for the Soviet regime and vowed to work as hard as they could to renew the economy and ensure the flourishing of the Soviet state, as well as to make themselves more like the women in the older Soviet republics. Speakers vied with one another to deliver thanks to the Soviet regime, and the speeches were dominated by the discourse of 'happy' co-operation. Milda Runce, mother of nine, observed:

"Because men have taken part in defeating our enemy, women have had to take their place, and the work of women is by no means of lesser importance. The all-providing and omniscient Soviet government has not forgotten the woman, the mother and the child. Here the Soviet woman can go to work and into battle against the enemy without any concern."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Vita Zelče, 'The First Contract Between the Stalin's Regime and Latvian Women: 1945', *Ennen ja nyt*, 3-4 (2006), 11-17. Thereafter Zelče, 'First Contract'.

<sup>49</sup> Ansis Rudevics, ed., *Sieviešu uzdevumi vācu okupācijas seku likvidēšanā: Latvijas PSR sieviešu pirmais kongress, 1945* [*The Duties of Women in Reversing the Consequences*

Milda Brauna, a worker at a paper factory, joined in:

“Women were not appreciated, and our work was not recognised in the past. It is due to the Soviet government that now the work of a woman is respected, and women can take the place of men.”<sup>50</sup>

The speeches at the Congress were clearly meant to demonstrate the loyalty of a social group and to display overwhelming support for the occupant regime. The texts were rooted in everyday reality only to a limited extent. As was the case elsewhere in the Soviet Union, an imaginary reality was conjured up – one that was the cornerstone of the legitimacy of the Soviet state. Women praised Socialism even though Socialism did not exist then or ever.<sup>51</sup>

Another element in the Soviet-era social contract was the social guarantees for women who were mothers. The press published extensive information about Soviet benefits for pregnant women. Starting with the fourth month of pregnancy, they could not be required to work overtime, and beginning with the sixth month and during the breastfeeding period after childbirth, they could not be required to work at night. Working women received 35 days before and 42 days after childbirth as vacation time. Pregnant women and young mothers received more and better food allocations. Single mothers and mothers with many children were also paid state subsidies. Women with more than five children received state awards. Women with ten children were known as “Mother Heroes”.<sup>52</sup> The first awards of this kind to mothers in Latvia were granted as early as March 8, 1945.<sup>53</sup>

### Sovietisation and Collaboration

When the Soviet Army returned to Latvia in the summer of 1944 and reoccupied it, the Soviet structure of governance – the Communist Party and its system of *soviets* (councils) – was also reinstituted. The Soviet Latvian government devoted serious attention to governance. The administration of the republic was organized long before the territory itself re-

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of the German Occupation: The first Congress of Women of the Latvian SSR, 1945] (Rīga: VAPP grāmatu apgāds, 1945), 163. Thereafter Rudevics, *Sieviešu*.

<sup>50</sup> Rudevics, *Sieviešu*, 175.

<sup>51</sup> Zelče, ‘First Contract’, 11-17.

<sup>52</sup> *Kalendārs 1947. gadam* [Calendar 1947] (Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 1946), 121-22.

<sup>53</sup> *Cīņa* [Struggle], 4 and 8 March 1945, 1.

turned to Soviet control. There was active preparation in 1943 of local-level soviets that would implement sovietisation and organize lower and medium-level jobs. Reports indicate that in 1943, 300 war invalids and more than 2.000 Latvians who had been removed to Soviet Russia during the war were trained for this purpose at special courses.<sup>54</sup> At a time when countless men were mobilised, many of the graduates of these courses were women. Once they completed their training, they received assignment as *part-orgs* (Secretaries [leaders] of party organization) in economic enterprises, institutions, schools, parishes, and machine- and tractor-stations.

When the war was over, the Soviet authorities faced a distinct shortage of persons who wanted to become involved in this new system of governance. Most people were afraid of the return of Soviet authority, and Communist ideology was alien to them. The supposedly natural supporters of Communism – landless people and working people – were very reserved about the whole situation, and they were by no means eager to join local government organs or, for that matter, the Communist Party itself. The number of Party members increased slowly, and for a long time, the majority of members in Soviet Latvia were people from other Soviet republics. Data show that at the beginning of 1947, only 10 % of the members of the Soviet Latvian Communist Party were ethnic Latvians who had lived in Latvia before 1940.<sup>55</sup> The historian Daina Bleiere has written that those residents of Latvia who chose to co-operate actively with the Soviet regime can be divided into three groups: 1) Those who accepted the ideology; 2) Those who were careerists; and, 3) Those who were realists. Each of these

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<sup>54</sup> Gatis Krūmiņš, 'Teritorijas pārvaldes organizēšana un vadošo darbinieku atlases politika Latvijā 1944.-1947. gadā' ['The organisation of territorial administration and the policy of selection of its leaders in Latvia 1944-1947'], in Dzintars Ērglis, ed., *Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti. 25. sēj.: Okupācijas režīmi Baltijas valstīs. 1940-1991. Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas 2008. gada pētījumi un starptautiskās konferences "Okupācijas režīmi Baltijas valstīs (1940-1990): izpētes rezultāti un problēmas" materiāli, 2008. gada 30.-31. oktobris, Rīga* [Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia. Vol. 25: Occupation Regimes in the Baltic States. 1940-1991. Research of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia, 2008 and Proceedings of the Interantional Conference "Occupation Regimes in the Baltic States (1940-1990): Research Results and problems," 30-31 October 2008, Rīga] (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūts, 2009), 641-64, here 642. Thereafter Krūmiņš, 'Teritorijas'.

<sup>55</sup> Krūmiņš, 'Teritorijas', 680; Daina Bleiere, 'Latvijas Komunistiskās partijas organizācijas skaitliskais, nacionālais un sociālais sastāvs 1944.-1949.gadā' ['Membership, ethnic and social composition of the Latvian Communist Party organization in 1944-1949'], in Rudīte Vīksne, ed., *Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti. 21. sēj.: Latvijas vēsture 20.gadsimta 40.-90.gados: Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas 2006. gada pētījumi* [Symposium of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia. Vol. 21: History of Latvia of the 1940s-1990s. Research of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia in 2006] (Rīga: Latvijas vēstures institūts, 2007), 368-71.

groups had its own unique motivation for becoming a part of the apparatus of the Sovietisation of the Latvian economy and society – true belief, ambition, career-building, material benefits, and/or pragmatism.<sup>56</sup>

During the first decade after the war, the percentage of women in the Soviet Latvian Communist Party did not increase above 30 %.

Figure 2: Members of Communist Party of Latvia (1946-1956)<sup>57</sup>

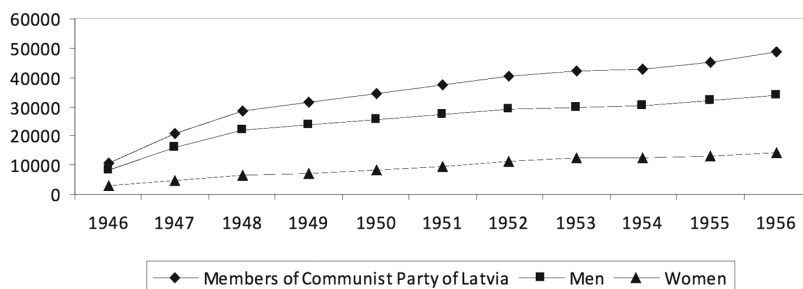


Figure 3: Secretaries of Communist Party of Latvia's organizations<sup>58</sup>



The percentage of women in positions of leadership in Party organisations was even lower. Few women were at the top in the Party's organizational structures, but they were more visible at the medium level – first and

<sup>56</sup> Daina Bleiere, Ilgvars Butulis, Inesis Feldmanis, Aivars Stranga, and Antonijs Zunda, *A History of Latvia: The 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Rīga: Jumava, 2006), 331-32. Thereafter Bleiere et al., *Latvia*.

<sup>57</sup> Source: *Kommunisticheskaya partiya Latvii v tsifrah (1904-1971 gg.)*, ed. Lubova Zile (Rīga: Liesma, 1972), 43-100.

<sup>58</sup> Source: *Kommunisticheskaya partiya Latvii v tsifrah (1904-1971 gg.)*, ed. Lubova Zile (Rīga: Liesma, 1972), 43-100.

second Secretaries of Party organizations at the regional level. At the lowest level, and particularly during the first post-war years when many men were still gone or were missing, there were a great many women.

The *partorgs* at the parish level held very complicated and risky jobs after the war. They were intermediaries between the new regime and the local community, while, at the same time, overseeing local society and having the task of initiating punishment of those who transgressed against the new rules. There were party Secretaries in Latvia who defended the people of their parishes successfully and did not get swept up in the drive for Sovietisation. There were just as many, however, who were cruel and stupid, ready to do whatever the regime wanted them to do. They caused serious damage and destroyed countless people. The *partorgs* at the parish level were expected, among other things, to help organize the deportations on March 25, 1949. During the latter half of the 1940s, there was still an active and determined armed guerrilla movement bent on opposing the Soviet regime. The resistance of these national partisans included the murder of Soviet officials and representatives. Several women who as *partorgs* had been involved in repressions against local residents and national partisans lost their lives in these confrontations.<sup>59</sup>

Women *partorgs* at the parish level were quite often characters in the post-war Latvian literature that now had to be written within the framework of socialist realism. Most of these characters were young women who had spent the wartime in the Soviet Union, either on the front lines or behind the lines. As party Secretaries, they were portrayed as the souls of their communities, handing down just punishments to the enemies of the Soviet regime and making sure that good people had a good life. Enemies of the Soviet regime were usually portrayed as unsuccessful assassins who did no more than seek to injure the party Secretary. Authors also chose to reward their party Secretary characters with finding true love because they had such positive attributes.<sup>60</sup>

In texts about distinguished Soviet personalities, however, post-war party Secretaries were usually depicted as bitter, silent, humble and secretive women. In 1973, an article appeared about the legendary party Secretary Nora Melnalksne, who had been injured during the war and carried a bullet in her leg for the rest of her life. The author quoted her:

“Oh, so you want to know about my post-war career? You know what? All kinds of things have happened to me. A couple of times I was offered top jobs

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<sup>59</sup> Bleiere et al., *Latvia*, 344-45.

<sup>60</sup> For example, see Vilis Lācis, *Vētra [The Storm]* (1946-1948), and *Uz jauno krastu [To the New Shores]* (1955); Anna Brodele, *Ar sirdi un asinīm [With Heart and Blood]* (1956).

in Rīga, but I don't like those top jobs or Rīga itself. I'm a country woman, I'm used to the countryside and the forest. People in the countryside are closer to me. I mostly did political work in several districts. Sometimes life was good, sometimes it was difficult. I have been a personal pensioner now for several years. The Soviet government takes care of me. I have not been forgotten. I am lacking nothing."<sup>61</sup>

Another position that women occupied fairly often was that of chairwoman of the executive committee of parishes or villages. In 1947, women chaired 19 parish executive committees (3.73 %) and 78 village executive committees (5.73 %) in Soviet Latvia.<sup>62</sup>

Women's Sections – a type of Party organization that had been present in the Soviet Union from the 1920s – were also established in Soviet Latvia. Their assignment was to involve women in work and to train them in political terms. There were lectures, political activities, and organized women's brigades that harvested potatoes and did forestry work. The truth is, however, that the Women's Sections were largely a formality, and they did little to truly involve women in public events.<sup>63</sup>

More effective in involving women in work and in bringing about collaboration with the Soviet regime were the economic situation and everyday needs. The regime destroyed Latvian agriculture through collectivization. Hoping to protect their farms from destruction, many farmers fulfilled excessive norms for the delivery of food, taxes, and forest products, but in the process ruined their health through overwork and drove themselves into poverty. There were no men on many farms during the first years after the war, and so all of the work had to be done by women. Many country women recalled how hard life was then. In an autobiographic novel, the teacher Daina Zupa recalled:

"There was always so much work that it was hard to do all of it. During the autumn, digging of potatoes was particularly heavy work. There was no more group work, because there was no money to pay. There was a horse-drawn machine which brought the potatoes up from the ground. You spent hours on the field, bending down to pick the potatoes. Your back hurt so badly that it was hard to stand up straight. Perhaps the work would not have seemed as difficult and hopeless if it had not been absolutely clear that nearly all of the harvest would be taken, for hardly any money at all, by the Soviet regime. [...] Load after load of grain and potatoes were taken to the government's collecting facilities. The threshing barn was swept clean. [...] The cattle barn was also

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<sup>61</sup> Daina Avotiņa and Jānis Peters, *Baltijas tovertī sāļti...* [*Salt in Baltic Tub...*] (Rīga: Liesma, 1973), 75.

<sup>62</sup> *Padomju Latvijas Boļševiks* [*Bolshevik of Soviet Latvia*], 4 (1947), 48.

<sup>63</sup> State Archives of Latvia, PA-126/7/92: 10-13, 15, 42.



emptied thoroughly. [...] Marija felt distraught, and she quietly wept at the fruit of her labor – fruit that disappeared like dust in the harsh wind. Why did she have to suffer so? She had worked so hard every day that she had lost her strength and her health.”<sup>64</sup>

The destruction of the traditional life of the countryside encouraged more women to find jobs in factories and government institutions. In 1947, women comprised 41.2% of all working people in Soviet Latvia.<sup>65</sup> Work in the Soviet Union was portrayed as heroism deserving honor and praise. The media spent much time constructing images of the heroes of labor. During the first years after the war, six farm workers in Latvia received the highest title of all – Hero of Socialist Labor. Among them was one woman – a milkmaid called Milda Lazdiņa-Judina.<sup>66</sup> In the media, she was described as an exemplary Soviet woman who owed all of her successes to the Soviet regime. In the magazine published for collective farmers, she is portrayed in the following way:

“The most typical characteristics of Milda Lazdiņa are relentlessness in pursuit of her goal, great inborn shyness, simplicity, and an effort to constantly move forward and not to rest on her laurels. [...] As a young member of the party of Lenin-Stalin, Milda Lazdiņa is continuing to study the short course in Communist (Bolshevik) Party history in depth, and she is carefully monitoring international events. She is also doing serious work in training young milkmaids for the Soviet farm. None of that keeps her from being a careful mother who is raising a two-year-old son Arvids and a baby Anniņa.”<sup>67</sup>

The image of Milda Lazdiņa-Judina embodied the model for an emancipated Soviet woman – women were involved in work and public activities, but that did not mean that they were freed from their housework or their duties as mothers.

Vera Dunham has argued that after the Soviet victory in the war, there was a latent conflict between the upper elite of the Soviet Union and the country's residents. What is more, the potential of opposition in the social base tended to expand. In order to maintain and preserve the existing system of political and social privileges and to gain greater support for the regime, Stalin and his team prepared an unspoken concordat with the

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<sup>64</sup> Daina Zupa, *Skolotāj, partija jā-klausa! [Teacher, Party must Follow!]* (Rīga: A. Mellupes SIA BO “Liktenstāsti”, 2002), 119-21.

<sup>65</sup> *Padomju Latvijas Boļševiks [Bolshevik of Soviet Latvia]*, 4 (1947), 48.

<sup>66</sup> Jānis Buholcs, ‘Pirmie Latvijas sociālistiskā darba varoņi’ [‘The first heroes of socialist labour in Latvia’], in Vita Zelče, ed., *Agora. 3. sēj.: Pēckara Latvijas cilvēklaitelpa ≠ staļinisms [Agora. Vol. 3: The Post-War Time and Space of Latvia's People ≠ Stalinism]* (Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2005), 256.

<sup>67</sup> *Padomju Latvijas Kolhoznieks [Collective Farmer of Soviet Latvia]*, 10 (1950), 22.

middle class, strengthening its social status and value system while also giving it certain privileges. Dunham has described this internal contractual alliance in post-war Soviet society as the “big deal.”<sup>68</sup> Orlando Figes, for his part, has argued that in order to avoid public demands for political reforms and to ensure the loyalty of the community, the regime had to “cater to people’s bourgeois aspirations.”<sup>69</sup>

The regime in post-war Latvia, too, needed the support of the middle ranks of the social system and of the intelligentsia, and therefore a certain agreement had to be reached with them. The regime could offer its partners not only the opportunity just to survive but also social privileges and comparative wealth (larger and better flats, access to scarce food items and other products, etc.), as well as various state honours (orders, medals, bonuses, honorary titles, praise in the media, etc.). The regime ‘lifted’ its most trustworthy and valuable allies into the pantheon of the social elite.

Women were also used in the public arena to represent the Soviet elite. The women who entered this elite world were usually actresses, opera singers, ballet dancers, authors, poets and scientists. In the media, they were presented as beautiful and elegant, well-dressed and well-coiffed. The first illustrated magazines in Soviet Latvia, *Padomju Latvijas Sieviete* (Soviet Latvian Woman) and *Zvaigzne* (Star), often published photos and descriptions of these women, thus popularising the values of the Soviet bourgeoisie under Stalin’s rule.

Soviet press publications and official documents claimed that women’s lives in the Soviet Union were better than at any time in the past. The ability of women to achieve things in the workplace, in management, and in Communist governance was presented as a great advantage. In truth, however, most women in Soviet Latvia spent the first years after the war in heavy labor, poverty and insecurity, not least because violence and repressions continued throughout those years.

## Conclusion

The Soviet Latvian public arena and the media spoke of a “new Soviet woman.” The regime insisted that women accept the Soviet way of life and the role of women therein. It also wanted women to conclude a social contract with the regime. The war, the losses which occurred during the

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<sup>68</sup> Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction*, 2nd edn. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 3-23.

<sup>69</sup> Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers. Private Life in Stalin’s Russia* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 471.

war, the violence and the repressions, or simply the threat of violence and repressions led many women to accept the Sovietization that was occurring and to make peace with it in their lives. That was the price for survival. Life and survival under a totalitarian regime dictated the need for women to find strategies that would allow them to adapt to the system actively or passively, engage in manipulations with the regime and its instructions, engage in passive resistance, etc. Women represented the distinct majority of Latvia's population after the war, and the recovery of society after the war and during the period when lives were normalised depended on their ability to adapt to the Soviet regime and to accept, at least externally, the role of "new women" that had been assigned to them.

As noted, the post-war history of Latvia is complicated. It cannot be described in black-and-white colors, and that is also true when discussing the role of women in public and private affairs or their collaboration with and/or resistance to the occupying regime. Anna Sakse's novel "Uphill" remained just a fairytale about the life of Latvian women in the Soviet state. In general terms, Latvian women made peace with the existing situation, hoping to secure their own survival and welfare, as well as those of their families. They accepted life under the regime in terms of the social contract that had been offered to them.

Women who survived the occupation period have largely been silent: the experience has cut a deep and traumatizing gash in their social memory. Research into the history of women in Latvia after the war offers a very important key to an understanding of this difficult period of violence, fear, instability and change. This means that analysis of Latvia's history from the gender perspective is work that must be continued.

BARBARA KLICH-KLUCZEWSKA

## MAKING UP FOR THE LOSSES OF WAR

### REPRODUCTION POLITICS IN POST-WAR POLAND\*

“Dearly beloved in Christ, our Families are facing a new danger! We have not yet managed to calculate the losses inflicted upon us by the war, we still do not know exactly how many millions of our compatriots gave their lives during the war so others might live in freedom, and yet, new warnings are required against an enemy threatening our family and Christian morals. This time it is the enemy lurking within the four walls of our homes, creeping quietly like a thief to the sources of new life [...] the enemy of love and sacrifice, the enemy of natural law, divine and human law, the enemy of the family, Nation and God!”<sup>1</sup>

This passage from the homily issued to Catholics by the Polish Episcopate in 1952, at the height of Stalinism, could be the motto of considerations regarding the Polish population policies of the first post-war decade. Despite the fact that the Catholic Church had, in that time, lost its political role, this dramatic appeal of the bishops reflects a broadened apprehension of the nation-state (that was not motivated exclusively by faith), of the nation's people as its main strength, and finally, of abortion as a moral, religious, economic and national hazard. The concept of the numerical strength of the national community and (related directly to it) the need to replace the casualties from World War II had become an axiom of public discourse in post-war Poland, particularly during the reconstruction (1945-1948) and Stalinist (1949-1955) periods. Furthermore, as evidenced by the above quote, this could not be attributed solely to the ruling Communist party, although in this case, the concept of *replacing the lost human lives*

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<sup>1</sup> ‘List pasterski Episkopatu Polski w obronie życia nienarodzonych 2.12.1952’ [‘Pastoral Letter of Polish Episcopacy defending Life of the Unborn, 2.12.1952’], in *Listy pasterskie Episkopatu Polski 1945-1974* [Pastoral Letters of Polish Episcopacy 1945-1974] (Paris: Éditions du Dialogue, 1975), 117-24. Thereafter *Listy pasterskie*.

was further strengthened by the commitment to the expansion of the economy based largely on the mobilization of the society.

In this article, I focus primarily on the expectations towards women as potential mothers, the socio-political contexts of pro-natalist policy and its assumed consequences. Such a perspective will, in my opinion, enrich the two unequivocal pictures of the situation of women in the forties and fifties, and underscore the important dimension of the perception of the war experiences in the post-war Poland.

Poland of the 1940s and 1950s, like the rest of the Eastern bloc under communist rule, had undergone a political redefinition of the gender order under which the model of masculinity had not been disputed, but new tasks were assigned to women:

“Now, an ideal socialist woman in Poland, as in other people’s democracies, was to fulfill the following three significant roles: that of a worker, that of a mother taking care of her family and home, and that of a social and political activist.”<sup>2</sup>

Which was, however, more important for the policy-makers of the time – the professional activation of women or population growth? Was it possible to effectively encourage both of these trends? What was the policy of promoting the traditional social roles of women made up of and what role did the fight against abortion play in this process? Finally, what impact would it have on the individual choices of women?

The question of the importance of the traditional model of womanhood in the post-war, Stalinist project, especially the practical aspect of this policy, has not yet been satisfactorily answered. It is noteworthy that our knowledge about the experiences of Polish women of that time has deepened considerably thanks to the recent publications of Małgorzata Fidelis, Dariusz Jarosz and Katherine Lebow.<sup>3</sup> However, these authors’ interests were focused predominantly on the working-class environment. In the new one, the sources inevitably lead us toward experiences of work and self-reliance. It is in turn difficult to search the historiography for reflections on the scope and effectiveness of centrally directed pro-natalist activities (not exclusively in the context of the assessment of the coherence of the policy

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<sup>2</sup> Dobrochna Kałwa, ‘Between Emancipation and Tradition. The Situation of Women and the Gender Order in Poland after 1945’, in Sabine Hering, ed., *Social Care under State Socialism (1945-1989). Ambitions, Ambiguities, and Mismanagement* (Opladen, Framington Hills: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2009), 178. Thereafter Kałwa, ‘Emancipation’.

<sup>3</sup> Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Thereafter Fidelis, *Industrialization*. Dariusz Jarosz, *Polacy a stalinizm 1948-1956 [Poles and Stalinism 1948-1956]* (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 2000).

regarding women as such). Therefore, I would like to point out some characteristics of Stalinist bio-politics on the basis of tactics used in dealing with abortion.

### Opening Balance: National sense of loss

The symbolic dimension of the loss of lives suffered by Poland during World War II is one of the most important components of the collective memory of Poles.<sup>4</sup> Modern analysis of the number of casualties, however, verifies the data, which for years was an axiom of the Polish historiography as well as one of the foundations of the social perception of the tragic consequences of war. Historians admit, however, that (using the bishops' words quoted at the beginning) it is impossible to determine "how many millions of our compatriots gave their lives during the war so others might live in freedom".<sup>5</sup>

We will probably never know how many citizens of the Second Polish Republic died during World War II due to the war and the occupation. Estimates of losses are extremely difficult due to the fact that Poland's territory was shifted westwards in 1945. On the one hand, Poland lost half of its territory in the east to the USSR, i.e. the Soviet Republics of Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. The population losses suffered by the inhabitants of these territories were not taken into account when estimating their levels at the end of the war. In turn, the Big Three decided to compensate Poland with lands in eastern Germany. When we add to that the phenomenon of mass (forced or voluntary) migration of thousands of wanted and unwanted, tolerated and not-tolerated people, it becomes understandable that it was only from around 1950 that the data on the post-war Polish population become reliable. And so, while on 1. January 1939 the population in Polish lands amounted to 35.100.000 people, in 1950 it had decreased by around

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<sup>4</sup> It is also an important component of historical policy, which played a significant role in the nationalist legitimization of the Communist rule in Poland. On the nationalist context of the ideology of power of this time see: Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizm, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* [Communism, Legitimism, Nationalism. Nationalist Legitimation of Communist Power in Poland] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Similarly common is the phenomenon of heroization of death during wartime, application of meanings characteristic of death *on the battlefield*, *conscious* death, resulting from the risks undertaken for patriotic reasons *for our freedom and yours*.

10 million.<sup>6</sup> These numbers – and they are only estimates – can only be a starting point for approximations of the losses.

Without a doubt, the duration of the war on Polish territory meant that population losses were the highest among all the countries affected by World War II. In 1947 they were estimated at just over 6 million people. The calculation, however, excluded the representatives of minorities – mainly Ukrainians, Belarusians and Germans. Therefore, the number of 6 million victims included Poles (2.6 million) and Jews (3.4 million), with 644.000 listed as the victims of war and over 5 million as victims of the German terror. The effects of Soviet actions were, quite understandably, not taken into account at all. Subsequent studies gave slightly lower numbers. Recent textbooks estimate the number of victims at 2.35-2.9 million Polish citizens of Jewish heritage and 2 million ethnic Poles, with 90 % of the losses resulting from German actions.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of whether 4.5 or 6 million is the correct number, the more important factor than the objective data is the subjective sense of social loss. And it was huge.<sup>8</sup> Detailed, empirically verifiable numbers did not play an essential role. The number began to serve as a metaphor. Jacek Leociak, recalls the metaphor of the number in the context of the Holocaust and the *topos* of “six million victims of the Holocaust”, which has become synonymous with unimaginable and infinite loss. Six million represents in this case, all the Jews lost, a murdered nation. Like Auschwitz, the “six million number” is the main representative of the Holocaust in the collec-

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<sup>6</sup> Waldemar Grabowski, ‘Raport. Straty ludzkie poniesione przez Polskę w latach 1939-1945’ [Report. Human Losses by Poland between 1939-1945], in Wojciech Materski and Tomasz Szarota, eds., *Polska 1939-1945. Straty osobowe i ofiary represji pod dwiema okupacjami* [Poland 1939-1945. Human Losses and Victims of Repressions under two Occupations] (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu 2009), 13-38; Krzysztof Latuch, ‘Straty demograficzne Polski w latach 1939-1945 (z prac nad weryfikacją oficjalnych szacunków)’ [‘Polands Demographic Losses between 1939-1945 (based on the verification of official estimations)’], in Wojciech Materski and Tomasz Szarota, eds., *Polska 1939-1945. Straty osobowe i ofiary represji pod dwiema okupacjami* [Poland 1939-1945. Human Losses and Victims of Repressions under two Occupations] (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu 2009), 39-50.

<sup>7</sup> Czesław Brzoza and Andrzej L. Sowa, *Historia Polski 1918- 1945* [History of Poland 1918-1945] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006), 695-7. Thereafter Brzoza and Sowa, *Historia Polski*.

<sup>8</sup> This was also due to the fact that more than every third person with a higher education (37 %) had been killed during the war, and almost every third secondary school graduate, see. Brzoza and Sowa, *Historia Polski*, 697.

tive consciousness.<sup>9</sup> The rhetorical dimension of the metaphor of a *large number of victims* played a huge role (still needing analytical description) in the political debate on the future of the nation in post-war Poland, and hence, in the gradual process of separating an individual from the real experience of wartime sacrifice.

Wartime losses in Poland are particularly important in the context of the particular situation of the Polish society in the inter-war period. In the 1870-1920 period, when Western Europe experienced the so-called *demographic transition*, i.e. a sharp decline in births, the Polish lands were outside the range of this transformation. Respectively, in the inter-war period, from 1926 to 1930 the population growth in France was at 1.4 per 1.000 inhabitants; in Germany – at 6.6; and in Poland – a poorly urbanized country with underdeveloped industry – it stood at 15.5. The number of citizens of the Second Republic grew from 27 million in 1921 to 35 million in 1938, and the high fertility rate was primarily a result of the stability of social structures in the Second Republic.<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to find any purposeful and permanent pro-natalist actions in the politics of that time.<sup>11</sup> However, the *fertility cult* supported by certain right-wing activists was

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<sup>9</sup> Jacek Leociak, 'Liczba ofiar jako metafora w dyskursie publicznym o Zagładzie' ['The Number of Victims as a Metaphor in Public Debates about the Holocaust'], in Wojciech Materski and Tomasz Szarota, eds., *Polska 1939-1945. Straty osobowe i ofiary represji pod dwiema okupacjami* [Poland 1939-1945. Human Losses and Victims of Repressions under two Occupations] (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu 2009), 51-61.

<sup>10</sup> Magdalena Gawin, 'Planowanie rodziny – hasła i rzeczywistość' ['Family Planning – Slogans and Reality'], in Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc, eds., *Równe prawa i nierówne szanse. Kobiety w Polsce międzywojennej* [Equal Rights and Unequal Opportunities. Women in interwar Poland] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2000), 222-3. Thereafter Gawin, 'Planowanie'.

<sup>11</sup> Legal regulations on motherhood at that time resulted primarily from the Convention of the International Labour Organisation, signed by Poland, which introduced significant differences in the legal position of women, depending on the workplace and occupation. Legislation of the Second Republic forbade the employment of women in conditions harmful and dangerous to health, morals and decency. Female worker had the right to refrain from work for 6 weeks prior to birth, and, after giving birth, she was required to abstain from work for 6 weeks. For 8 months the mother received a benefit equal to 100% of her salary, and for another four - 60% of salary. In 1933, the entitlements of (insured) pregnant women and mothers were extended by the law on insurance, and included, among others, a benefit for nursing mothers in kind (milk) or cash, see. more broadly: Michał Pietrzak, 'Sytuacja prawna kobiet w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej' ['Legal Situation of Women in the Second Polish Republic'], in Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc, eds., *Równe prawa i nierówne szanse. Kobiety w Polsce międzywojennej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG 2000), 87-89.



already present, and birth control proponents were accused of undertaking actions aimed at weakening the *vigor of the nation*.<sup>12</sup>

Given such a high population growth, it is not surprising that population losses suffered as a result of World War II, being the first such severe experience of *demographic decline*, could lead to social and political effects similar to those that took place in Western European countries during the period before World War II. Bio-politics conducted by the Western European countries at the time (but also in the second half of the nineteenth century) were focused primarily on strengthening nations through an increase in the number of citizens and thus on achieving a victory in the alleged Darwinian struggle of nations for survival. These actions intensified due to the effects of World War I. The fear of depopulation and/or loss in “the breeding race” resulted in pressure being applied on the family and attempts being made to control women’s attitudes towards maternity.<sup>13</sup>

### Demographic and socio-political transformation and the position of women

An important consequence of the losses suffered during World War II was a shift in the gender balance. The number of women greatly outweighed the number of men, which was particularly pronounced in cities, where in 1945 there were on average 128 women per 100 men.<sup>14</sup> As a result many women, whose husbands or potential candidates for life partners did not return from the camps, or died at the fronts or stayed (voluntarily or under compulsion) outside of the new borders of the state, had to fend for themselves. The women’s self-reliance practiced during the war proved to be useful also in peacetime.<sup>15</sup> However, women were less prepared than men

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<sup>12</sup> Gawin, ‘Planowanie’, 229.

<sup>13</sup> David L. Hoffmann, ‘Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist Pronatalism in Its Pan-european Context’, *Journal of Social History*, 34, 1 (2000), 35. Thereafter Hoffmann, ‘Mothers’.

<sup>14</sup> This number decreased gradually in the second half of the forties (1946 – 122, 1947 – 118, 1949 – 115, 1950 – 118), see Dariusz Jarosz, ‘Stalinizm’, in Krzysztof Persak and Paweł Machcewicz, eds., *PRL od lipca '44 do grudnia '70* [PRL from July 44 to December 70] (Warszawa: Muzeum Historii Polski, 1977).

<sup>15</sup> Małgorzata Fidelis, ‘Czy nowy matriarchat? Kobiety bez mężczyzn w Polsce po drugiej wojnie światowej’ [‘A new Matriarchy? Women without Men in Poland after World War II’], in Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz, eds., *Kobieta i rewolucja obyczajowa* [Women and the Revolution of Conventions] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2006), 267. Thereafter Fidelis, ‘Matriarchat’. It should be noted that the image of a Polish woman as a witness and direct victim of war did not become engrained in the general consciousness.

to survive in a difficult post-war labor market due to poorer education and weaker qualifications and, if they had children, they also had to balance paid work with caring for them. Politicians in many European countries had to face this situation, but the number of victims undoubtedly affected the size of this phenomenon in Poland. When looking closely at statistical estimates, it appears that immediately after the war, four million women between the age of 20 and 49, i.e. nearly half of the women in the so-called reproductive age had to fend for themselves.<sup>16</sup> This situation, according to some commentators of that time, should have led to the inevitable transformation of the situation of women in Poland. However, with the gradual equalization of the demographic divide between the genders, the pressure on women to return to traditional social roles, including in areas of public life, was getting stronger and, according to Małgorzata Fidelis, proved decisive in preventing the 'revolution', which, immediately after the war, seemed very probable and, in a sense, obvious.

In the Western European countries, gradually separated from Central and Eastern Europe by the Iron Curtain, the patterns of femininity began to go back into their old familiar tracks. However, the spirit of socialist modernization in Poland and in other Eastern Bloc countries necessitated changes leading to gender equality, although its scope, source, and real consequences for the individuals themselves remain controversial. I will only mention the most important elements of this transformation.

The new family law adopted on 25. September 1945 and entered into force in early 1946 was considered the main achievement of the post-war era. It underwent many amendments (e. g. in 1950 and 1964), but from 1945 it defined marriage in Poland as a secular agreement of two equal people, and therefore this act is rightly regarded as the basis for the moral revolution in the People's Republic. The law guaranteed equal rights to and duties of both spouses; the legal age for marriage was set at 18 for both men and women; and finally, in case of a breakdown of the marriage, both spouses had the right to apply for divorce.<sup>17</sup> Even though the introduction of the Code resulted from the fact that the lands of the Second Republic were governed by five different legal codes (a legacy of the partitions of Poland), and the act itself was based on a pre-war draft of the left-wing parties, which, due to opposition from the right wing of the Parliament did not become law in 1929, its implementation in the new political context

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Despite the fact that one-quarter of forced labourers sent to Germany were women, the most common image of Polish woman is that of a mother and wife waiting at home for the return of her husband-soldier.

<sup>16</sup> Fidelis, 'Matriarchat', 270.

<sup>17</sup> 'Prawo małżeńskie, 25.09.1946', *Dziennik Ustaw*, 48 (1945), 270.

was seen, even by its pre-war supporters, as part of the takeover of power by the communists. Article 66 of the Constitution of 1952 was an equally important regulation (though more so in a propaganda context) as it emphasized equality before the law regardless of gender, including the equal right to work and pay. The constitution also guaranteed special rights for mothers, which in turn confirmed the concepts of emancipation and protectionism of the inter-war period.<sup>18</sup>

The six-year plan implemented in the first half of the fifties included a large-scale project of *productivization*, i.e. an action aimed at encouraging women to pursue careers in all sectors, including in the occupations traditionally reserved for men. Previous research of this phenomenon, which is essential for assessing the emancipatory role of Stalinism, has led to opposing conclusions. On the one hand, historians emphasize the extremely unfavorable circumstances associated with the work undertaken by the women of that era (discrimination in the workplace, low wages, unemployment, disappointment with the living conditions in the new location), in sharp contrast with the propaganda image of the female worker. Małgorzata Fidelis, in turn, highlights the advantages of the new situation, including the professional and social mobilization of young women or better wages in positions previously unavailable to women such as in mining.<sup>19</sup> These conclusions, however, only seem to be in conflict. They actually demonstrate diversity of experience, which depends on the studied environment in the unstable reality of forced industrialization of the country.

### Fertility Policy: The dimensions of the Polish pro-natalist policy

It should be emphasized that the Polish pro-natalist policy in the forties and the first half of the fifties had developed under the specific conditions of a constant baby boom, which very clearly indicates that the post-war reconstruction of the social fabric (and not the inhibition of the negative downward trend from the demographic point of view) was its principal objective. As it later turned out, the fifties were the biggest baby boom in the history of the Polish People's Republic.<sup>20</sup> The observers of that time considered it to be further evidence of a particular strength of the nation:

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<sup>18</sup> Kałwa, 'Emancipation', 175-6.

<sup>19</sup> See Fidelis, *Industrialization*, 5.

<sup>20</sup> In 1946, the number of births was 622,500, in 1950 – 763,100, and in 1955 it reached a record level of 793,800 thousand. In the fifties there were 29-31 newborns per 1,000 population, see Izidor Sobczak, 'Niże i wyże demograficzne w Polsce w latach 1946-1998' ['Population Decline and Boom Periods in Poland between 1946-1998'], *Studia Gdańskie. Wzję i rzeczywistość*, 1 (2002), 133-7. Thereafter Sobczak, 'Niże'.

“The strength and power of our nation lies in biological resistance, in the self-defense of the nation in the face of annihilation, as evidenced by the large number of pregnant women. We must not weaken it; on the contrary, we should do everything to intensify it.”<sup>21</sup>

The baby boom was caused by a number of factors, but above all, by the demographic factor typical of the post-war period, i.e. by a compensation trend, which involved a very large increase in the number of marriages. Demographers agree, however, that the poorly measurable non-demographic factors played a major role as well, including macro-economic ones, such as urbanization, mass migration from overpopulated rural areas, but also better educational opportunities and protection of mothers and children.<sup>22</sup> They point out, however, that the assessment of the impact of these factors on the actual increase or decrease in the number of births is – especially in case of a strong demographic factor – impossible.

Measures supporting fertility were not a part of a social campaign comparable, for example, with actions aimed at *productivization of women* or collectivization of agriculture. The pro-natalist policy consisted of scattered decisions in several areas, primarily as part of the development of the new social policy,<sup>23</sup> policies aimed at raising the level of health care, and, finally, the transformation of criminal law. All these elements simultaneously co-created a discourse on the socio-political role of women.

### Propaganda dimension

According to Małgorzata Hajdo, who has examined the major titles of the women's press (in the period being studied here) in terms of promoted models of femininity, she has determined that motherhood in its ideological dimension gave way to the role of worker and social activist. At the same time, the sources cited in the text indicate that, although the public tasks were listed in the first place, to “achieve harmonious fullness of life [a

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<sup>21</sup> Zbigniew Tabeński, ‘Zagadnienie przyrostu naturalnego ludności w świetle obecnego kodeksu karnego’ [‘The Issue of Population Growth in the eye of the current Penal Code’], *W służbie zdrowia*, 3 (1948), 61.

<sup>22</sup> Sobczak, ‘Niże’, 135.

<sup>23</sup> More on social policy transformation, see Barbara Klich-Kluczevska, ‘Social Policy and Social Practice in People's Republic of Poland’, in Sabine Hering, ed., *Social Care under State Socialism (1945-1989). Ambitions, Ambiguities, and Mismanagement* (Opladen, Framington Hills: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2009), 161-74.

woman] must balance all these [public and private] responsibilities".<sup>24</sup> Motherhood is a kind of natural duty, which should be carried out by every married woman, with the help of her husband (the father) and public agencies: nurseries, kindergartens, schools and youth organizations. Just like in the Soviet Union, the conflict between a woman's professional duties and her role as a wife and mother was not anticipated.

The main purpose of marriage was to have children, and the primary role of women as mothers was to give birth as many times as possible. The Crosses of Merit handed out by the highest dignitaries to mothers of at least ten children can be seen as part of the propaganda efforts promoting large families.<sup>25</sup> They resembled the medals awarded to mothers with many children in the Soviet Union (Medal of Motherhood, Order of Maternal Glory, the title of Mother-Heroine), the Third Reich (Cross of Honor of the German Mother) or those in pre-war France. They had a special significance in the second half of the forties when the re-population of the Western and Northern lands was proposed. Inevitably, the medals were mostly awarded to rural women. Women such as Julia Sowińska – a farmer and mother of eleven children who also worked as the secretary of the Women's League Club in Pilica, or Magdalena Szymanowska, who gave birth to twenty children (of whom eight died in infancy). They were portrayed as model mothers.<sup>26</sup>

While one should fully agree with the opinion that the propaganda in favor of productivisation of women dominated the public debate of the Stalinist period, it should not be forgotten that the pro-natalist policy of that time was supported in the public forum by a strong negative propaganda in the form of extremely ideologized criticism of the neo-Malthusian movement.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Małgorzata Hajdo, 'Wizerunek kobiety jako matki, pracownika i działaczki społecznej prezentowany na łamach prasy kobiecej w latach 1948-1956' ['The Image of Women as Mothers, Workers and Social Activists in Womens Press between 1948-1956'], *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 3 (2006), 57-60.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.; On the interpretation of images of women in newspapers of the Stalinist era, see also Katarzyna Stańczak-Wislicz, 'Uroda traktorzystki' ['The Charm of Female Tractor Drivers'], *LiteRacje*, 2012 [to be published].

<sup>26</sup> Dariusz Jarosz, 'Wzory osobowe i modele awansu społecznego kobiety wiejskiej w Polsce w prasie periodycznej w lat 1944-1955' ['Personal Examples and Models of Social Advancement of Rural Women in Poland in Press Periodicals between 1944-1955'], in Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz, eds., *Kobieta i edukacja na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku* [Woman and education: In the Polish lands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries], vol. 1 (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 1992), 185.

<sup>27</sup> These propaganda efforts require a separate study.

## Social dimension

As in other countries, the pro-natalist policy in Stalinist Poland was accompanied by various incentives in the form of financial benefits (maternity, childbirth, family) or holidays. However, most of them were available only to people entitled to social insurance, which back then covered only a small part of the rural population. The right to receive such benefits in rural areas was generally limited to employees of state farms or cooperatives. However, it is worth paying attention to some fundamental changes in social policy on the protection of mothers and children, which from 1952 onwards was a right guaranteed by the Constitution.

Extending the period of eligibility for the childbirth benefit from 8 to 12 weeks was one of the first changes introduced after World War II. The system of family cash benefits introduced in 1947, aimed, in turn, to partially compensate for the expenses related to raising the children and to close the wealth gap that resulted from the number of children in the family. The benefit increased from the second child in the family onwards. A special benefit for non-working mothers was also introduced.

The number of people who were entitled to a full range of benefits (i.e. people insured under the contract of employment) increased significantly in the Stalinist period, which was a period of increased migratory flows from rural areas to towns and cities in search of work. The overall number of those insured, including women, increased to 56 %. Interestingly, a mother-worker was in a slightly worse position than a mother-clerk or teacher. White-collar workers were entitled to full remuneration in the event of sickness or maternity leave, whereas blue-collar workers in the same situation received only 75 % of their salaries. Such a differentiation of benefits was maintained until the seventies. Families were also entitled to a benefit, which at the beginning of the Stalinist era (in the case of families with two children) amounted to 21.7 % of the average wage, in the case of three children 34.9 %. In 1955 it fell to 17.2 % and 23.5 % respectively.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, young children of working mothers were, at least theoretically, entitled to a place in a nursery. In practice, however, these facilities could only accept between 10 and 12 % of eligible children, and practically only in the cities. Moreover, these institutions often did not meet, both in terms of equipment and personnel, the expected standards. It quickly became clear that the state could in no way live up to the social promises regarding care offered to mothers, and that the promoted model of mar-

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<sup>28</sup> Danuta Graniewska, *Formy i metody pomocy rodzinie pracowniczej [Forms and Methods of Labour Families Welfare]* (Warszawa: Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych, 1980), 7-16.

riage based on partnership, in which both parents play equal roles in raising children, was too distant from the traditional model of a Polish family.

### Medical dimension

The Polish experts of that time considered maternal and infant mortality and the availability of abortion to be the main threats to the constant continuing increase in the number of births.

Despite the lack of reliable statistical data on this issue, maternal mortality in childbirth was estimated in the late forties at about 4 to 5 women per thousand births (the number also included deaths caused by artificial abortions). Death occurred primarily as a result of a puerperal fever or a gestosis. Comparing this data with that of Western European countries, where maternal mortality rate usually did not exceed 3 per 1.000 live births, or the neighboring Czechoslovakia, where it hovered around 2, resulted in legitimate concerns about the quality of prenatal care in Poland.<sup>29</sup>

The data on maternal mortality in the rural areas was unavailable, but it was expected to be much higher than in the examined, large urban centers, hence the development of gynecological and obstetric care in rural areas was of particular interest. It also had an important modernization dimension and was part of a broader campaign carried out in the rural areas from the late forties to combat charlatans, superstition and, so-called, 'grandmas'.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, it proves that it was the traditional peasant family with many children that was expected to bring about the biological regeneration of the nation.

Marcin Kacprzak, one of the influential figures of the Polish movement for the development of medical care, speaking to the gynecologists and obstetricians at a convention in 1948, pointed to the need to base maternity care on three pillars: midwife, obstetrician and independent institute or hospital maternity ward, and the main role was assigned to midwife:

"If [...] at this time we had to move, for tactical reasons, one [pillar] to the fore, it would be the midwife. If we take into account what is at our disposal

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<sup>29</sup> Marcin Kacprzak, 'Opieka nad macierzyństwem w Polsce' ['Motherhood Care in Poland'], *Zdrowie publiczne*, 7-8 (1948), 39-40. Thereafter Kacprzak, 'Opieka'.

<sup>30</sup> Ewelina Szpak, 'Pojęcie zdrowia, choroby i cielesności w wiejskim postrzeganiu świata po 1945 r., czyli o zmianach mentalności na wsi polskiej' ['Concepts of Health, Disease and Corporeality in Rural Perceptions of the World after 1945, that is about Changes of Mentality in the Polish Countryside'], *Roczniki Antropologii Historii*, 1, 1 (2012) [to be published].

and the interests of broad sections of the society, it is the most pressing issue today. As far as midwifery care is concerned we are in a bad condition. We do not have enough midwives, they are poorly deployed, as they are present in big cities only, they are poorly qualified, and their social skills, in the narrow sense, as well as willingness and ability to become a part of the Health Service, are insufficient.”<sup>31</sup>

Kacprzak stressed that discussion about reducing the role of the midwife, which took place, among other places, in the United States was out of the question. Elaborating on the issue, he referred to the concerns of physicians, gynecologists and obstetricians regarding the domination of midwives, whom they considered insufficiently prepared to work with pregnant women.<sup>32</sup>

He blamed the high maternal, infant mortality and mortality of children under the age of one on activities of the above-mentioned ‘grandmas’, i.e. residents of rural areas who offered help in childbirth. The objective of the 6-year plan was to ‘catch up in this regard’; and a large number of trained specialists were sent to the front of the campaign against charlatanry, symbolized by the ‘grandma’. According to the experts, the specialists were to provide assistance to the young and helpless rural mothers:

“We have to think about these rural mothers, afraid of everything that relates to their babies, passive in their helplessness, blindly believing in superstitious practices and various counsels harmful to their babies that were offered to them by their older mothers, aunts or neighbors.”<sup>33</sup>

The process of introducing midwives to rural communities started in 1949 with a program of organizing communal maternity units, which meant that the main objective of midwives was the eradication, wherever possible, of the practice of home births.<sup>34</sup> It was not a conflict-free process. As the court files indicate, the competition between *grandmas* and midwives

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<sup>31</sup> Kacprzak, ‘Opieka’, 43-44.

<sup>32</sup> The *Położna* (Midwife) magazine, which promoted the modern, that is, well trained and socially committed specialist, focused in a special series dealing with this issue on emphasizing the limits of her competence.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Stanisława Kicka, instructor of the Regional Maternity and Child Health Care Consultation Centre in Poznań, *Położna*, 1, 1 (1951), 5-8.

<sup>34</sup> Circular No. 68 of the Office of the State Council on the establishment of centers of obstetric assistance and maternity and child health care centres was issued on 14 October 1949. Maternity units were promoted as the optimal solution, which should completely supplant home births. Hospital maternity wards (in complicated cases) were to be the only alternative to births in maternity units.



sometimes ended up in courts, and accusations of illegal abortions were important tools in the fight with the 'old order'.<sup>35</sup>

It is worth noting that the midwives were expected to do much more than provide care for the pregnant women. A midwife in rural areas was not in competition with physicians (as usually there were not any), and was the only person considered a medical professional in the area, so was expected to become a living advertisement. She was to carry the torch of medical learning to the 'common people'. Thus, three trends converged in the communal maternity unit: improvement of health care in rural areas, which was practically synonymous with the medicalization of life, change people's mentality, and finally, promotion of fertility by prevention of maternal mortality in childbirth and improvement of newborn care.

### Policy towards abortion as part of the pro-natalist policy

Authorities in countries conducting pro-natalist policies usually attributed special importance to the reduction in the number of abortions carried out in the country. In the Third Reich, the policy of gradual tightening anti-abortion legislation resulted, during World War II, in people who performed the procedure being sentenced to death. Penalties for abortion existed in Italy and, since 1923, in France. The United Kingdom had banned the procedure during the inter-war period.<sup>36</sup> Legal and penal control seemed to be relatively simple to implement and did not require special funding. While the tightening of anti-abortion laws in twentieth-century Europe was usually associated with limiting the availability of contraceptives, in post-war Poland the issue of combating contraception was practically non-existent due to unavailability of contraceptives in the market and relatively low awareness of the need to use them.<sup>37</sup>

The limited scope of public debate on abortion in the 1945-1956 period (although, as for the 1945-1949 period, it cannot be said that it was non-existent) made me reach directly to the judicial sources of the time, although due to a number of court records missing (only 'typical records'

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<sup>35</sup> Archiwum Państwowe w Kielcach, 348/ II Sąd Powiatowy Kielce 212 (IV Kp 160/53).

<sup>36</sup> Hoffmann, 'Mothers', 39.

<sup>37</sup> In the inter-war period contraceptives were known and used practically only by the urban intelligentsia, see more Katarzyna Sierakowska, *Rodzice, dzieci, dziadkowie. Wielkomięjska rodzina inteligencka w Polsce 1918-1939* [*Parents, Children, Grandparents. Urban Intelligentsia Families in Poland 1918-1939*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG 2003).

were kept), the available documentation is relatively limited.<sup>38</sup> The Krakow district court records from the 1945-1950 period include only nine cases processed under Articles 231-234 of the Penal Code, i. e. carrying out 'illegal abortion'. I also managed to find similar cases handled by the District Court in Kielce (five cases from 1946 to 1948) and one case handled by the Poviát Court in Kielce in 1953.

According to the Penal Code of 1932, a woman who underwent an abortion faced up to three years in prison; a person helping with or performing the procedure faced up to five years, and if the woman died – ten years. The legal policy of the forties and the first half of the fifties was therefore a continuation of the pre-war policy, while simultaneously from 1948 up to 1956 was in line with the strict pro-natalist policy of a Stalinist state.<sup>39</sup>

### Enforcing law

It is estimated that experience of illegal abortion was shared in 1950-1955 (the Stalinist era), by 300.000 women and around 80.000 women were hospitalized in a serious condition and there diagnosed to have had a miscarriage earlier.<sup>40</sup>

The political pressure to eliminate the underground abortions at the beginning of the Stalinist era was reflected in the court verdicts of 1949. Krakow court records show that between 1945 and 1948 most cases resulted in acquittals or, more often, discontinuation of the proceedings.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> A quantitative analysis at this stage of research is further complicated by the lack of court registries, which may have not been transferred, for practical reasons, to state archives and remain in court archives.

<sup>39</sup> *Kodeks karny z komentarzem [Penal Code with Legal Commentary]* (Lwów, 1932), 327-32.

<sup>40</sup> They were usually placed there as a result of improperly performed procedure or due to infection. Midwives and nurses would typically use a rubber catheter to inject a solution of soap or possibly iodine into the uterus, and administer quinine or drugs inducing uterine contractions. The so-called "grandmas" mainly used the soap and iodine solution, sharp instruments, kneading the abdomen so as to produce haemorrhage or opening the uterus with a "glass wire" and letting air in, as was the case with one of the accused in the discussed case, Helena Wolińska, *Przerywanie ciąży w świetle prawa karnego [Abortion in the eyes of the law]* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1962), 111-2.

<sup>41</sup> E.g. in case No: APKr, SOKr 29/1989/0/5105 the sentence reads: "Although the accused admitted her guilt, the trial did not provide evidence that she indeed was pregnant and allowed an abortion. [...] Summary of the testimony of both accused [...] raises the suspicion that the self-incrimination of Janina was perhaps aimed at forcing the accused to marry her." In case No. 29/1989/0/4523 in turn, both the pregnant woman and the midwife

The case in 1949 against a young inhabitant of one of the villages near the town of Bochnia, located twenty kilometers outside of Krakow, can be interpreted as a clear sign of a turn in relation to suspects prosecuted under Articles 231-234 and of a tightening of the policy towards abortion.

The nineteenth year old girl named Maria was brought before the court as a result of a denunciation. District Militia Station in Bochnia employed, judging from the preserved material, responsible and efficient officers, including an inquiring sergeant who had a sort of female intelligence 'on the ground'. They worked quickly and efficiently. The militiamen worked late into the night. That same day, late in the evening (at 10 and 12 pm) they managed to interrogate further two people and track down more women. The militiamen attempted to detain the suspected women as soon as possible so that they could not communicate with each other and agree on the testimony. The full indictment against seven suspects was ready by the end of May; they were tried jointly.

All but one accused were sentenced. The appeal was rejected. The pleas for clemency were also turned down by the court. The President did not exercise the right of pardon, despite letters signed by numerous residents of the convicted midwife's home community who had painfully felt the absence of the only midwife in the area. The most severe sentences were given to two women who were proven to have carried out illegal procedures (18 months in prison). The women who underwent the procedure were given six months jail sentences suspended for 4 years. A severe sentence was handed out to Maria's "fiancé", who turned out to be a married man with two kids. He was sentenced for 'inducement' to four months in prison and he served it in full. The verdict contained a symptomatic sentence:

"The accused [...] is a qualified midwife, and thus, by virtue of her profession [is] appointed to ensure the proper and rapid level of natural increase of population decimated by the war and the occupation, and she abused her profession to the detriment of public interest."<sup>42</sup>

A similar sentence can be found in documents issued a month earlier in relation to the case of Waclaw J., tried for inducing an abortion:

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were found guilty, but automatically pardoned (3 and 10 months in prison) under the amnesty law of 2 August 1945. Case No. APKr, SOKr 29/1989/0/4615 was dismissed due to a lack of connection between the death of a woman and possible termination of pregnancy (Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie, hereafter abbreviated APKr, Sąd Okręgowy w Krakowie [SOKr]).

<sup>42</sup> APKr, SOKr, 29/1989/0/5367, *Sentencja wyroku z dnia 21 września 1949 roku*.

“[...] [M]oreover, the harmful effect that the act intended by the accused has in relation to the State’s population policy, which act during the post-war loosening of morals and the frequent occurrence of these crimes should meet a particularly harsh repression.”<sup>43</sup>

The methods of investigation, the haste and determination of police services, the relatively severe final judgments and their reasoning clearly show the politicization of the process. The termination of pregnancy became a matter of great importance in 1949. Although the abortion trials were not publicized as they took place, for example in the case of show trials of 1952-1953 in Hungary, they were intended to have a strong local response.<sup>44</sup> According to the sentences termination of pregnancy directly affected the population policy of the state and the Polish public interest, so that the accused should be treated as political ‘saboteurs’. Judicial sentences of 1949 also provide a clear diagnosis of the role of midwives, as guardians of intense population growth. A midwife, who decided to perform an abortion (regardless of its methods), crossed the barricades of civilization, staying on the side of ‘ignorance and quackery’, which were to be eliminated. The midwife carrying out the procedure was a double ‘traitress’ – of the political ideals as well as of modern medicine.

The court records prove that the authorities in the first place enforced the law of 1932 in accordance with centralized Stalinization policy of the country in line with the directives of the USSR. A similar situation took place in the other eastern bloc countries making up for the population losses from the war.

The tightening of the penal code was the next step. Unfortunately, the ways of implementing the policy in Poland are relatively unclear, and mechanisms governing the policy on the fertility of women only become transparent in the Ministry of Justice’s documents concerning a subsequent amendment to the abortion law (1955-56). Despite the absence of many key documents, we know that the work on the amendment to Art. 231-234 began in 1949. Stanisław Chrempiński, who at the time reported the legal status and direction of changes in a specialist legal journal, justifying the need for a tightening of the law under which Maria had been convicted, directly referred to a Soviet regulation of 1936 “on abortion ban, on increasing financial support for midwives, on the introduction of state aid for large families, on extending the network of maternity clinics, nurseries and children’s shelters, on increasing criminal liability for failure to pay child

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<sup>43</sup> APKr, SOKr 29/1989/5570, *Sentencja wyroku z 3 sierpnia 1949*.

<sup>44</sup> See Andrea Pető, ‘Women’s Rights in Stalinist Hungary. The Abortion Trials 1952-1953’, *Hungarian Studies Review*, 29, 1-2 (2002), 49-75.

support and on amendments to the divorce law”.<sup>45</sup> This law – says the author –

“provides more far-reaching restrictions and criminal penalties for abortion than the Polish Penal Code. If the development of post-war Soviet legal thought ruled against the death penalty even for the gravest crimes, it can be expected that taking a life of a child in the mother’s womb will be completely ruled out.”<sup>46</sup>

The new legislation was to exclude the possibility of termination of pregnancy to save the mother’s life, as “respect for life in the womb requires both from the mother, and from her relatives a lot of resolve and sometimes heroism”.<sup>47</sup> The medical term foetus was to be replaced by unborn baby. Demography was the primary justification for this new approach to the problem of abortion.

“A socialist society condemns the Malthusian slogans, does not allow the breakdown of morals in families and individuals, and by putting man first, takes care of the child, does not allow the spreading of the cult of sexualization, which slowly but steadily undermines Western societies with America at the forefront”,

the Supreme Court Prosecutor wrote a few months later in response to – as he himself stressed – trials against doctors performing abortions which had been multiplying in a frightening way. His article meant to familiarize judges and prosecutors with the problem in the face of insufficient or unavailable literature.<sup>48</sup> One can surmise that it was to give a clear and unambiguous interpretation of the law in response to the current needs of the courts.

The work on the amendment, and furthermore, on the new penal code, dragged on. Although the ministry had been collecting material regarding this issue, the proposed amendment tightening the criminal law never saw the light of day.<sup>49</sup> But the modification of the law on practicing doctors was issued in the late 1950. Since then the doctors’ committee evaluated the

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<sup>45</sup> Stanisław Chrepiński, ‘Uwagi w sprawie nowelizacji art. 231-234 k.k.’ [‘Remarks regarding the Amendment of art. 231-234’], *Demokratyczny Przegląd Prawniczy*, 4 (1949), 46-7. Thereafter Chrepiński, ‘Uwagi’.

<sup>46</sup> Chrepiński, ‘Uwagi’, 46-47.

<sup>47</sup> Chrepiński, ‘Uwagi’, 48.

<sup>48</sup> Tadeusz Cyprian, ‘Odpowiedzialność lekarza za spędzenie płodu’ [‘Doctor’s (Criminal) Responsibility for Termination of Pregnancy’], *Demokratyczny Przegląd Prawniczy*, 8-9 (1949), 50-51.

<sup>49</sup> Archiwum Akt Nowych [hereafter abbreviated AAN] Warszawa, Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości [MS] 285, 1827 *Kodeks karny. Część szczególna. Spędzenie płodu*.

“threat to life” and the prosecutor confirmed that the pregnancy resulted from crime.<sup>50</sup>

The satisfaction of Catholic groups with the proposed legal changes was openly demonstrated in 1949 by a journalist of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, a Catholic socio-cultural magazine, which enjoyed a significant intellectual independence in post-war Poland. The weekly emphasized that this issue should not solely and exclusively belong to the private initiative of citizens, but is closely connected with the functions of the state. And if the Catholic Church should take responsibility for the morality of society, then it is the responsibility of the state to modify legislation.<sup>51</sup>

The bishops openly urged people to stop “criminal dealings”, “criminal behaviour”, “suicidal practices”, “killing their own children”, “murder of the unborn” under the penalty of deprivation of rights acquired in the Church, which could only be restored to those repenting their sins to the Diocesan Bishop or to a priest authorized by him. However, the dominant argument which was meant to appeal to the faithful, was, just like in the legal policy of the state, the power of large numbers:

[...] [E]ven before the war there were articles stating that the number of newborn children had sharply decreased [...] hundreds of thousands of citizens, future workers and defenders of the borders have died [...] today unborn children of the Nation are dying, and talented ones among them, perhaps geniuses, masters of spirit, perhaps future teachers, doctors, benefactors and builders of the reborn homeland are put to death.”<sup>52</sup>

The pastoral letters were probably the only open public statements on abortion of that time. Despite the political importance, the issue of abortion was no longer part of a wider public debate. A few articles on medical or legal matters quoted above are the exceptions. The abortion issue showed up again back in the newspapers and radio only in connection with the amnesty in the USSR in the November of 1955. In the discussion, a reference was made to the inter-war campaign fought by Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński in parts of his “The Women’s Hell”. Finally, the liberalization of the law took place on April 27, 1956.

The anti-abortion actions would become a symbol of the reproduction policy of Stalinist Poland in the name of rebuilding the nation after World

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<sup>50</sup> ‘Ustawa z dnia 28 października 1950 o zawodzie lekarza’, *Dziennik Ustaw*, 50 (1950), article 16.

<sup>51</sup> Jakub Zdrój, ‘Krok na przód’ [‘Step forwards’], *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 3 July 1949, 3.

<sup>52</sup> ‘List pasterski Episkopatu Polski w obronie życia nienarodzonych 2.12.1952’ [‘Pastoral Letter of Polish Episcopacy defending Life of the Unborn, 2.12.1952’], in *Listy pasterskie*, 117-24.

War II, as the liberalization of the law of 1956 is widely regarded as the symbolic end of an era of Stalinist pro-natalist policy in Poland.

### Conclusion

The analysis of the social discourse: the promotion of large families, the development of mother and child care in rural areas, and the policy of elimination of underground abortion market, indicates that the authorities may have consciously paid special attention to peasant women. The traditionally large village families were seen an opportunity to quickly increase the size of the Polish population.

Taking this into account, the answer to the question why the abortion trials did not take place in Nowa Huta – the symbol of Stalinist industrialization (the knowledge about the abortions committed in the city was quite common), but rather in the country side, seems to be obvious.

Despite official assurances about the possibility of reconciling the role of mothers and workers on a large-scale, the authorities must have been aware that in the contemporary social realities, being a worker and having a large family at the same time was quite impossible. Therefore, the only way to reconcile the idea of productivization of women and achieving the highest number of births was to reduce operations to a group which promised the best, that is, to rural women. Of course, the theme requires further detailed research, but already at this stage we can conclude that the state reproduction policy was diverse, and the expectations of women differed and depended on their class affiliation.

It is worth emphasizing that women were not just passive objects of social policy of the time. The midwife is particularly noteworthy as a very important and still under-appreciated element of the modernization processes of Stalinist days at the micro level.

### Appendix

#### Testimony of Maria of Bochnia

On February 21st of 1949, Sergeant Jan Cholewa of the investigation department of militia in Bochnia, received information about a crime committed within his territory. *“By way of confidential information provided by a trusted person”* he learned that one of the residents of his district – nineteen-year-old Maria of one of the villages around Bochnia – had

committed an abortion.<sup>53</sup> On the same day, Maria provided extensive testimony on this issue at the militia station in Bochnia.<sup>54</sup>

I do not recall the exact date. What I do know is that it was summer of 1948, and I, while being pregnant in the first month or even first half of the second, did not want my mother to find out as she would make a scene about it so while visiting my friend Anna Baran of Bochnia I admitted to her that I was pregnant and was already in the second month. She, after hearing me out, told me there was a woman in Bochnia who can expel a foetus, so she advised me to visit this woman who will do it for 3.000 zlotys. I, being afraid of my mother finding out about this, went to this woman whose name I later found out was Komenda of Bochnia [...] and started talking to her asking her advice told her I thought I was pregnant and also asked her to examine me. The aforementioned woman told me she would make me not pregnant, meaning she would get rid /terminate/ of the pregnancy I was to come the next day because her husband was there and she was afraid of him because she would get five years in prison for this sort of thing. The aforementioned woman told me this whole business would cost 3.000 zlotys. Not having this amount on me I gave her 2.400 and I was to give her the rest later on. The next day I came to the aforementioned woman, I found her at the house to terminate the pregnancy, I mean to carry out the procedure. The aforementioned woman kicked the children who were there out of the house so there was only two of us left, she took some instruments out of the closet such as: two bottles, one with spirit, and the other one with some kind on fluid, something that looked like a syringe for injections, and other instruments, which I cannot identify. The woman told me to lie down on the ottoman, undress, and she washed her hands with spirit and took an instrument that looked like a syringe, put it into my vagina, then took a second instrument which she put in the middle of the previous instrument and pushed it into my vagina, asking if it hurt me. I kept telling her I was in pain and she was scared and then blood burst out and I felt weak, but she told me to go home and have a bath in hot water. After leaving the aforementioned woman I went towards home but was already very weak and barely made it home. When at home I did not come out clean to my mother but followed the aforementioned woman's advice i.e. I had a bath in hot water, and then took one aspirin and went to bed. Lying in bed I got a big pain, at night, curdled blood poured out of my vagina and I felt big pain in the back. The next day I got worse and my mother and brother-in-law were about to take me to the hospital in Bochnia, but I asked them not to because I did not want to betray the woman that got rid of the foetus / pregnancy /. I spent the next days lying at home, was very weak

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<sup>53</sup> Confidential information and denunciations were, statistically speaking, an inferior source of information about illegal procedures. According to lawyers' estimates, 98% of proceedings were initiated by notifications received from hospitals, see Leszek Bogunia, *Przerywanie ciąży. Problemy prawnekarne i kryminologiczne* [Abortion. Issues in Penal Law and Criminology] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1980), 14.

<sup>54</sup> Original spelling retained.



because of a draft, 7 days with a high fever, even unconscious. After one week I started to recover and after two weeks I started to slowly walk. During severe pains, seeing that my health was deteriorating I confessed to my mother what I have done and explained to her the entire course of the incident but asked her not to tell anyone because this woman would face a big punishment for getting rid of this. Once I recovered I went to town and met with the aforementioned woman on a street who immediately began to question me and also started shouting at me that my brother-in-law at the time of my illness was at her house and shouted at her about what she had done to me. [...] I can not add anything on the subject. The interrogation protocol was thus completed and read before signing.

Interrogator: Sergeant Jan Cholewa, recorded by: Sergeant Stefan Kowalik.

Additional testimony: I state that the name of the man who made me pregnant is Stanisław Mieczko of [...], when I told him I was pregnant, he told me not to worry and suggested expelling the foetus, and gave me two thousand zlotys to sort this issue out. I agreed to do this and with his consent went to the aforementioned woman through Anna Baran from Bochnia.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> APKr, SOKr, 29/1989/0/5367, Akta w sprawie karnej art. 27 w zw. z art. 232 kk i art. 231 i 232, *Protokół przesłuchania podejrzanego*, 21.02.1949. Original spelling retained.

## CONTRIBUTORS

KERSTIN BISCHL is at present a research fellow and Ph.D. student at the Humboldt University Berlin. Prior to this, she studied history, political science and philosophy in Berlin and Voronezh, Russia. Her current project analyzes gender relationships and the dynamics of violence in the everyday life of Red Army soldiers during World War II and is financed by the *Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung* (Hamburg Institute for Social Research).

ELIZABETH HARVEY is Professor of History at the University of Nottingham. She has research interests in gender history and the history of twentieth-century Germany, particularly National Socialism and the period of the Second World War. Among her publications are *Zwischen Kriegen: Nationen, Nationalismen und Geschlechterverhältnisse in Mittel- und Osteuropa 1918-1939* [*Between the Wars: Nations, Nationalism, and Gender Relations in Central and Eastern Europe 1918-1939*], co-edited with Johanna Gehmacher und Sophia Kemlein (Osnabrück: fibre 2004), and *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven and London, 2003). Her current research seeks to develop broader comparative perspectives on the mobilization of women for the National Socialist ‘new order’ in wartime Europe.

LUKASZ KIELBAN is a Ph.D. student at the Institute of History, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Previously he has studied history and the history of art in Poznań, Poland and Valladolid, Spain. He received a scholarship from the De Brzezie Lanckoronski Foundation in 2010. He is interested in the history of masculinity, especially in the process of the construction of the identity of male elites in the inter-war Poland. Recently he examined the model contained in the ethos of the Polish officers between 1918 and 1939 as one of the dominant patterns of masculinity during this period. He has lectured on gender history at the postgraduate Gender Studies department at AMU. He writes a blog about the history of men: “Czas Gentlemanów” (<http://czasgentlemanow.pl/>).

BARBARA KLICH-KLUCZEWSKA is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of History, Jagiellonian University in Cracow, and a member of the research network “Physical Violence and State Legitimacy in Late Socialism”. She

was a Visiting Fellow in Prague and a Visiting Professor at Rochester University. Her fields of expertise include the anthropological history of modern East-Central Europe, urban history, gender and sexuality, oral history, the methodology of private life and everyday life. She is an author of a number of Polish, German and English articles in these fields. Her Ph.D. thesis *Przez dziurkę od klucza. Życie prywatne w Krakowie 1945-1989* [Through the Keyhole: Private life in Cracow 1945- 1989] was published in 2005 (Warszawa: Trio).

MARA LAZDA is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Bronx Community College of the City University of New York. She received her Ph.D. in history from Indiana University. Her research interests include gender and wartime occupation, masculinity and the military, oral history and memory, nationalism, and film. She has published articles on gender and World War II in Latvia. Her current manuscript project is called “The Discourse of Occupation: Gender in World War II Latvia.”

RUTH LEISEROWITZ has been since 2009 Deputy Director at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw. She earned her Ph.D. in history from the Humboldt University of Berlin. Prior to that, she studied history, Polish language and culture in Berlin and Vilnius. She was a post-doctoral research fellow at the Berlin School for European Comparative History at the Free University of Berlin. Her research is focused on European history of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century with a focus on transnational history, Jewish history, and the history of memory and border regions. Her recent book, *Sabbatleuchter und Kriegerverein. Juden in der ostpreußisch-litauischen Grenzregion 1812-1942* [Sabbath Candlesticks and Veterans’ Association. Jews in the East Prussian-Lithuanian Border Region 1812-1942] (published in 2010, Osnabrück: fibre) dealt with Jewish life in a border region emphasizing the transnational character of their existence.

FRANKA MAUBACH is working as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Göttingen, at the graduate school entitled “Generation History. Generational Dynamics and Historical Change in the 19th and 20th Century”. She has studied history, political science, and Slavic studies at the university of Freiburg, earned her Ph.D. in history from the university of Jena in 2007, and published her book on experiences and memories of female auxiliaries in World War II in 2009 (*Stellung halten. Kriegserfahrungen und Lebensgeschichten von Wehrmachthelferinnen* [Hold the Line: War Experiences and Life Stories from Female Wehrmacht Auxiliaries] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht). In 2011, she co-edited a volume on women soldiers throughout history (together with Klaus Latzel and Silke Satjukow). She is

interested as well in the history of generations and the history of historiography, and is working currently on an intellectual history of the so-called 45ers in eastern and western Germany after 1945.

GEORGETA NAZARSKA is Associate Professor of Cultural and Social History at the State University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Sofia. She received her master's degree in History (1993) and her Ph.D. in Modern and Contemporary History (1996) from the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". She specialized in migration theory, nationalism, religious diversity and minority history in the U.S.A., Hungary and France. Her research interests are in the fields of: social history, sociology of religion, gender and women's history, ethnic and religious minorities. Her main publications are: *The Bulgarian State and its Minorities, 1879-1885* (1999), *The University Education and Bulgarian Women, 1879-1944* (2003), *History of Religious Denominations in Bulgaria* (2009).

ANDREA PETŐ is an Associate Professor at the Department of Gender Studies at the Central European University Budapest. She has also been a guest professor at the universities of Toronto, Buenos Aires, Stockholm and Frankfurt am Main. She has edited almost twenty volumes in English, Hungarian, and Russian. Her works have appeared in different languages. Her books include: *Women in Hungarian Politics 1945-1951* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), *Geschlecht, Politik und Stalinismus in Ungarn. Eine Biographie von Júlia Rajk [Gender, Politics, and Stalinism in Hungary. A Biography of Júlia Rajk]* (Herne: Schäfer, 2007). Presently she is working on gendered memory of WWII and political extremisms. She was awarded the Officer's Cross Order of Merit of The Republic of Hungary in 2005 by the President of the Hungarian Republic and the Bolyai Prize by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2006. She is serving as co-president for AtGender, European Association for Gender Research, Education and Documentation.

OLENA PETRENKO is a Ph.D. Candidate at the Ruhr University, Bochum. She has studied history in Kyiv, Ukraine und Bochum, Germany. Her dissertation is entitled *Women in the Armed Ukrainian Underground, 1942-1954*.

IRINA REBROVA is an Assistant Professor at the Department of History, Political Science and Social Communications, Kuban State Technological University, Krasnodar, Russia. She completed her Ph.D. paper (candidate dissertation) at North-West Academy of State Affairs in St. Petersburg, Russia, in June 2005. Her thesis discussed the historical and psychological

aspects of written memoirs in World War II. Upon completion of her degree she received a qualification relevant to two areas: Russian History and Historiography, Sources and Methods of History Science. She has also received an M.A. degree in gender studies (“Gender. Society. Culture” program of the European University in Vilnius) in 2008. Since 2006 she has studied the oral history and social memory of World War II. She has conducted several research projects on everyday life behind the front line, the experience of women at war, children and war, and the social memory of the war period. She is an author of more than 50 articles, 1 collective monograph on oral history and collective memory on World War II, and 2 edited volumes of articles on social memory.

MAREN RÖGER is a research fellow at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw. She earned her Ph.D. in history from the University of Gießen, Germany, in 2010. Previously she has studied history, media and cultural studies in Lüneburg, Germany, and Wrocław, Poland. Her current research project deals with sexual violence, prostitution, and love affairs between German occupiers and Polish locals during World War II. In general, her research is focused on European history of the 20th century with a focus on World War II, gender history, media history and history of memory. Her recent book, *Flucht, Vertreibung und Umsiedlung. Mediale Erinnerungen und Debatten in Deutschland und Polen seit 1989* [*Flight, Forced Expulsion, Medial Memories and Debates in Germany and Poland Since 1989*] (Marburg: Herder, 2011) dealt with German and Polish memories regarding the expulsion of the Germans.

BARBARA N. WIESINGER is a history editor and independent scholar based in Vienna. After earning her Ph.D. from the University of Salzburg with a thesis on Yugoslav women partisans in World War II, she contributed to the project “Documentation of Life Story Interviews with former Slave and Forced Labourers”, conducted research on remembering World War II in socialist Yugoslavia and participated in the “Mauthausen Survivors Research Project”. She has published widely in the fields of gender history, oral history and memory studies.

SEVO YAVASHCHEV is Full Professor in Military Heritage and Balkan History at the State University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Sofia. He received his master’s degree in Military Studies from the Military Defense Academy, Sofia. He defended his Ph.D. thesis in Military History (1989) at the Military Defense Academy, Sofia, and became D.Sc. in Philosophy (2008). He has wide experience in teaching and in research work as a lecturer at the Military Defense Academy, Sofia, and as a re-

searcher and head of the Center of Military History, Sofia. His research interests are in the field of Bulgarian military history, military science history, history of local conflicts. He is a *retired colonel* in the Bulgarian Army. Main publications: *Development of the Military Theoretical Ideas in Bulgaria, 1919-1944* (1990), *Bulgarian Military Theoretical Ideas about Education and Training in the Army, 1919-1944* (1994), *Sergeant's Corps in Bulgaria, 1878-1945* (2005), *Problems of Military Economy, 1878-1945* (2008), *Military Ethics in Bulgaria, 1878-1944* (2011).

VITA ZELČE is Professor at the Department of Communication Studies and senior researcher at the Advanced Social and Political Research Institute, University of Latvia. She has published on social memory, commemoration, media history, Russian and Baltic historiography, and the history of women. She is the author and editor of 12 books.



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAN	Archiwum Akt Nowych [Central Archive of Modern Records in Warsaw]
ÁBTL	Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security
AFŽ	Antifašistički front žena [Antifascist Front of Women]
AIPN	Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej [Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance]
AK	Armia Krajowa [Home Army]
AKO	Anti-Fascist Fighting Organization
AMU	Adam Mickiewicz University [UAM – Uniwersytet Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu]
AP	Archiwum Państwowe [State Archive]
APKr	Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie [State Archive of Krakow]
BArch B	Bundesarchiv Berlin [Federal Archives Berlin]
BArch MA	Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv [Federal Archive, Department Military Archives]
BDM	Bund Deutscher Mädel [League of German Girls]
BKP	Bulgarian Communist Party
BNWU	Bulgarian National Women's Union
CAW	Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe w Warszawie [Central Military Archive in Warsaw]
CDMHKK	Center of Documentation of Modern History in Krasnodarskij Kray
ch.	chapter
CoHfG	Court of Honour for the Generals
Col.	Colonel
Cpt.	Captain
CPY	Communist Party of Yugoslavia [Komunistička partija Jugoslavije]
CSA	Central State Archives (of Bulgaria)
DAF	Deutsche Arbeitsfront [German Labor Front]
DFO	Deutscher Frauenorden [Order of German Women]
DVL	Deutsche Volksliste [German Ethnic Classification List]
e.g.	for example
ed.	edition



eds.	editions / editors
FF	Red Army Fatherland Front
FPO	Fareinigte Partisaner Organisatzije [United Partisan Organization]
GARF	State Archive of the Russian Federation
GDA SBU	Security Service Archive of Ukraine
Gen.	General
GHI	German Historical Institute [Deutsches Historisches Institut]
Ibid.	ibidem [in the same place]
KdG	Kommandeur der Gendarmerie [Commander of Gendarmerie]
KGB	Committee for State Security
KubSTU	Kuban State University
LCP	Latvian Communist Party
LiSSR	Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic
Lt.	Lieutenant
LVVA	Latvian State Historical Archive
MGB	Ministry for State Security
MPW	Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego [Museum of Warsaw Uprising]
MS	Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości [Ministry of Justice]
NGO	Non Government Organization
NKVD	People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs
NLA	National Liberation Movement [Narodno-oslobodilački pokret]
NLA	Narodnooslobodilačka vojska [Yugoslav National Liberation Army]
NMV	Nacionālā mutvārdū vēstures arhīvs [National Oral History Project (at the University of Latvia)]
NOHP	National Oral History Project [at the University of Latvia]
NOVJ	Yugoslav National Liberation Army
NS	National Socialist
NSKK	Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrerkorps [NS motorcycle corps]
Oflag	Offizierslager für kriegsgefangene Offiziere [German prisoner of war camp for officers]
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht [High Command of the Armed Forces]
OMF	Okupācijas Muzeja Fonds [Museum of the Occupation of Latvia]
OUN	Orhanizatsiya Ukrayins'kykh Natsionalistiv [Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists]
p.	page
PISML	The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum London
POW	Prisoner of War

PPZh	Pokhodno-Polevaya Zhena [marching field wife]
RADwJ	Reichsarbeitsdienst für die weibliche Jugend [State Labor Service for female youth]
rev. ed.	revised edition
RKF	Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums [Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germanism]
RMI	Reichsminister des Inneren [Reich Ministry of the Interior]
RMS	Youth Organization of the Bulgarian Communist Party
RSA	Reichssicherheitshauptamt [Reich Security Head Office]
SA	Sturmabteilung [Storm Division/ Brownshirts]
SB	Ukrainian insurgent security service
SD	Sicherheitsdienst [Security Service]
SKOJ	Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije [Communist Youth Organization]
SmerSh	Smert Shpionam [Death to Spies]
SOKr	Sąd Okręgowy w Krakowie [District Court of Cracow]
SS	Schutzstaffel [Protective Squadron]
SSPF	SS- und Polizei-Führer [SS and Police Leader]
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
trans.	translated
TsDAHOU	Central State Archive of Public Organizations of Ukraine
TsDAVO	Central State Archives of Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of Ukraine
UPA	Ukrayins'ka Povstans'ka Armiya [Ukrainian Insurgent Army]
US	United States
USHMM	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UVO	Ukrainian Military Organization
VAPP	Vserossiiskaia assotsiatsia proletarskikh pisatelei [All-union Association of Proletarian Writers]
VDA	Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland [Society for Germanism Abroad]
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II



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