6 Sexual Violence in the Nazi Genocide

Gender, Law, and Ideology

Franziska Karpiński & Elysia Ruvinsky

Introduction

[My mother and I found at the foot of the stairs] a young [Jewish] girl. She was dead. Her dress lifted and pants torn off her body. She was raped, illegally, and then killed, legally, by the representatives [...] of the ‘high race’. She was shot directly in the face.¹

This excerpt from a Krakow ghetto survivor’s testimony in a post-war trial illustrates the scope of the use of sexual violence prevalent during the Nazi regime. It makes apparent the fact that violence, death, and sex were closely intertwined and seemingly dependent on each other. Wehrmacht doctors suggested as much in a medical study about their soldiers’ sexual drive in 1943. They found that while many soldiers felt sexual sensation during combat, these same men complained about impotence while at home on leave of absence from the front.² Indeed, sex is a key weapon at the disposal of individuals acting in accordance with the new societal understandings that accompany genocide. As gender and nation fuse, masculinities and femininities are reshaped and sexualized. Sexual violence is a result of militarized, hetero-nationalist hegemonic masculinity and acts as an expression of supreme dominance. It is also a result of increasing tensions of motherhood and sexuality of feminine identities between perpetrator and victim groups. Unfortunately, the limited nature of this project precludes us from addressing the variety of functions that sexual violence plays in genocide, a topic that continues to be investigated and analyzed by many talented academics.³

³ For a comprehensive discussion as to the functions of sexual violence against women in wartime, including genocidal rape and sexual torture, perhaps the most influential works are: Allen, Beverly. Rape Warfare: The Hidden Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia.
Instead, this essay will explore the causes and forms of sexual violence in the Nazi genocide, focusing in the second section on the occurrence of sexual violence as perpetrated by SS and Wehrmacht men against Jewish women and other women the Nazis deemed ‘racially inferior’ within the framework of the military campaigns against the USSR and Poland.\(^4\) In this perpetrator-focused approach, Nazi jurisdiction – with particular focus on the ‘criminal offence’ of race defilement – conceptions of masculinity, camaraderie, and soldiery brutality (Härte) will be explored. Conceptions of femininity and female sexual integrity (weibliche Geschlechtsehre) will also be discussed, as it is only within these ideological frameworks that one can properly analyze the perpetration of sexual crimes by Nazi men and the perpetrator- and regime-internal reactions to them.

**Defining the Theoretical Paradigms**

**Defining Sexual Violence**

Despite legal advancements and academic interest in the subject, there is no generally accepted definition of sexual violence in international law to date.\(^5\) For the purpose of this discussion, we will refer to the definition used by the Special Rapporteur on Systematic Rape, Sexual Slavery and Slave-like Practices During Armed Conflict, which states that sexual violence is ‘any violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality... both physical and psychological attacks directed at a person’s sexual characteristics, such as forcing a person to strip naked in public, mutilating a person’s genitals, or slicing off a woman’s breasts’ and ‘situations in which two victims are forced to perform sexual acts on

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\(^4\) We will not include sexual crimes and forced prostitution in the concentration camps, because it would go beyond the scope of this article. In addition, analyzing the crime of race defilement in the camps ends up being rather inconclusive due to a severe lack of sources and witnesses.

one another or to harm one another in a sexual manner. The inclusion of psychological sexual violence is particularly valuable, as it expands understandings of sexual violence beyond the physical realm. The list of acts is far from exhaustive, but provides examples of what may fall under this definition.

**Defining Masculinity and Femininity**

Present in both the above and the following discussion are the twin concepts of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. R. Charlie Carpenter defined gender as “social beliefs and interactions that direct our awareness to sex differentiation and regulate human interaction on that basis” as opposed to sex, which “adheres biologically rather than being socially ascribed.” This differentiation between gender and sex is important, as the following discussion involves the interplay between biological sex, gender, and changing societal beliefs. The fluidity in this definition is key, and it is this definition of gender upon which the following discussion will be based. It is also important to note that there is no one ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. Instead, these constructs cover a variety of differing forms of masculine


7 The concept of gender and the analysis of gender roles originates from Simone Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949). Contradicting widely held beliefs that men’s and women’s behaviors resulted from ingrained and innate differences between the sexes, de Beauvoir instead argued that masculine and feminine identities were a product of social construction. So called ‘second-wave’ feminists in the 1970s and 1980s distinguished between: “Sex as the anatomical and physiological characteristics, which signify biological maleness and femaleness, and gender as socially constructed masculinity and femininity. Masculinity and femininity are defined not by biology but by social, cultural and psychological attributes, which are acquired through becoming a man or a woman in a particular society at a particular time. The term gender was hence used to describe those characteristics of men and women, which are socially defined, in contrast to those which are biologically determined.” From Kanchan Mathur, *Countering Gender Violence: Initiatives Towards Collective Action in Rajasthan* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2004), 25 cited in Adam Jones, “Feminism, Gender Analysis and Mass Violence: A Historiography,” in *Gender Inclusive: Essays on Violence, Men and Feminist International Relations*, ed. Adam Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 139.

8 Ibid.
and feminine manifestations in societies and should be explored with a broad understanding of gender expression.⁹

**Causes of Sexual Violence**

Until recently, academic and empirical explanations as to the causes of sexual violence both in civilian life and in war had centered around sexual violence against women and the inability of men to control ‘sexual urges’. However, rape is committed regardless of whether or not sexual needs can be met by other means.¹⁰ According to contemporary understandings of the dynamics of rape and sexual violence, assaults are driven by the exercise of dominance and power of the perpetrator.¹¹ It is an aggressive act and does not fulfill sexual functions in the perpetrator’s psyche.¹² Rather, “humiliation and abasement of his victim and the sense of power and dominance over a women” gives fulfillment.¹³

Sandesh Sivakumaran argues that military and civilian groups commit sexual violence as a result of power vacuums and competing dominance.¹⁴ He claims that, in a violent atmosphere and a vacuum of stable societal structures, previously unacceptable acts become tolerable.¹⁵ Sivakumaran’s explanation addresses armed conflict in which it is appropriate to say that society is in flux. In genocidal situations, however, power balances are not being maintained or restored but completely restructured. Balance has been thrown so completely off tilt by the time that genocide is occurring that there is no longer a question of preserving power balances. Instead, the focus is on creating and enforcing new societal hierarchies based on ethno-national lines.

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¹⁵ Ibid.
Perhaps the most useful way to approach the causes of sexual violence in the Nazi genocide is to adopt an expanded version of Sivakumarn’s explanation. If we understand sexual violence during war as the result of the radical reshaping of societal norms and extend it to encompass the complete restructuring of society during genocide, then sexual violence during the Holocaust occurred as a result of the complete restructuring of gender norms in accordance with new societal and racial identities. During the Nazi genocide, men became associated with hyper-militarized and hetero-national hegemonic masculinity, while women were characterized by ideas of appropriate mothering and sexual behaviors.

Hegemonic Masculinity
Outlined by R. W. Connell, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is the notion of a standard-setting male to which all women and other males are to be compared.¹⁶ Hegemonic masculinity maintains several enduring attributes including physical strength, practical competence, sexual performance, and protecting and supporting women.¹⁷ Furthermore, a certain level of aggression is tied to expectations of physical strength and sexual performance. This aspect creates the ‘Other’¹⁸ as anything that is not physically or sexually aggressive and as an enduring element of femininity.¹⁹ These two components of hegemonic masculinity were emphasized in Nazi ideology, which respectively translated to militarized masculinity and hetero-nationalism.²⁰

¹⁷ Tosh, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 43.
¹⁸ The term “Other” was first coined by philosopher Emmanuel Levinas and is used to describe a group that is fundamentally not the same. This process of “othering” is perhaps best described by Edward Said as the process of emphasizing the marginalizing groups as weak in order to stress the alleged strength of those in positions of power. See: Said, Edward. Orientalism. New York: Vintage, 1979.
²⁰ Following ‘social constructionist conceptualization’, we can understand this process as depending on the fluid definitions of masculine and feminine and thus a fluid definition of hegemonic masculinity. For many, Connell’s definition of hegemonic masculinity is inherently a white man of European decent. But the bar is reset according to the reshaping of societal expectations and reflects new hegemonic identities. This is not to say that in Rwanda, for example, the colonial white male did not represent the hegemonic masculinity in that state. But it does mean that the Hutu nationalist movement attempted to depose the European white hegemonic male and replace him with a new Hutu male hegemonic masculine identity.
It is important to note that hegemonic masculinity is not exclusive to all men. Though it encompasses masculine qualities, women such as Irma Grese and Ilse Kocha, as well as countless other Nazi women, broke into the male-dominated arena of hyper-militarization and hetero-nationality. Hegemonic masculinity is an explanation for the process and its associated gender qualities that ultimately lead to sexual violence, not the specific gender that embraces it.

Physical Aggression: Hyper-Militarization

Norwegian sociologist Øystein Gullvåg Holter argues that the gender system became galvanized in mid-industrial Europe and came to imply that every man is a soldier and that the nation is the nurturing article to protect. Holter argues that the European sense of a ‘gendered self’ was formed in conjunction with European nationalist movements and spread in accordance with European influence. Men became the “universal soldier”, the women the “universal parent-mother”, and the homeland the embodiment of the collective parent-mothers. With men disciplined for protection (war), men in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century transitioned from ‘fatherly’ to ‘leaderlike’ figures. Thus, we can understand the historical gendering of the national male as intrinsically tied to the masculine, dominant male.

In Nazi Germany, the universal soldier was both amplified and tied to racial identity. The ‘Aryan’ male was, in essence, the ideal soldier, portrayed as physically fit, attractive, active, and loyal to the Reich and the Führer. Militant organizations were set up to train children to be future men-soldiers for their ‘nation.’ Continued references to strength and masculinity were pervasive in Nazi propaganda. But not only was Nazi propaganda and the Nazi male self-image fused with frequent references to extreme masculinity and being a tough, battle-hardened soldier, but ‘masculine’

22 Ibid., 71.
23 Ibid., 70.
24 Though this transition to ‘motherland’ may at first appear Eurocentric, it is important to consider the substantial European contact with the rest of the world via colonialism at the time of this transition.
26 Ibid.
and ‘soldierly’ became synonymous.27 ‘Soldierly masculinity’ became the norm against which every German man was measured.28

This creation of hyper-militarized and racialized masculine identities is perhaps most vividly illustrated in the adoption of Härte.29 Indeed, Härte became an integral part of a distinctly masculine cultural identity (‘Leitkultur’).30 By fusing radical nationalism with racism, it was assumed that the soldierly character trait was innate to the Aryan man, that it ran in his blood.31

The masculinity of the Nazi group thus fused with the ideal of a superior national soldier. It is racial fusion, as the male members of the perpetrator group are mobilized en masse against the imagined threat. This mobilization is inherently violent. The military is “the clearest arena of social power and of course, violence and killing in their many guises.”32 As masculinities militarize, so do men and their expressions of the new hegemonic masculinity.

Sexual Aggression: Hetero-Nationality
Aggression and sexuality are interrelated, as the militarization of men is, at its core, a highly sexual process. It is no coincidence that men of ‘battle age’ are also of ‘reproductive age.’33 In addition to militarizing men by turning every male civilian into the national race-soldier, hegemonic masculinity in National Socialism emphasized the sexual expression of violence.

According to R. W. Connell, heterosexuality became “a required part of manliness” in the second half of the nineteenth century, when homosexuality became a distinct identity and social component in Western societies.34

28 Ibid., 8.
29 The German term Härte can be translated as “hardness”, “relentlessness”, “cruelty”, and/or “strength”, but in the National Socialist sense, none of these words suffice to capture its precise meaning. In any case, the consequences that resulted from the attribute of Härte were only negative; the implementation of this Härtekonzept led to unparalleled cruelties committed by the SS, the Einsatzgruppen and the Wehrmacht. The Nazis, however, saw Härte as the most distinguishing characteristic in a man (soldier).
30 Werner, “Hart müssen wir sein...,” 11-12.
31 Quoted in: Ibid., 9.
Miranda Alison argues that since then, ‘hetero-normativity’ has become an integral part of hegemonic masculinity. During National Socialism, hetero-normativity became fused with ‘Aryan’ national identity. Consequently, homosexuality was rejected as a legitimate form of ‘Aryan’ national identity and thus became a threat. The most striking example of this is the persecution of homosexuals. In Nazi Germany, homosexuality was not only illegal, it was punished via incarceration and excessive persecution.

The concept of hetero-normativity was also transferred from relating solely from the individual to the collective, where heterosexuality of the nation is represented in ‘hetero-nationality.’ Coined by Euan Hague, this term describes the process by which hetero-normativity is applied to a national group identity. In reference to the mass rapes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Hague argues that hetero-nationality describes a perpetrator that is “a different nationality from the rape victim: By raping and impregnating women and girls, watching men rape each other in prison camps and assuming the power positions of “masculine” in all rapes, the Bosnian Serb military and its allied irregulars proved themselves their own identities as powerful, manly and crucially Serbs.” This explanation refers specifically to rape in Bosnia but can be expanded to understand sexual violence during the Nazi Genocide.

Hetero-nationality can also aid in understanding sexual violence against men. Through sexual violence, the perpetrator asserts his or her hetero-nationality, expressing their “different and superior national identity from that of the victim, who in turn has her or his national identity forced through the [sexual violence] into an inferior position as feminine.” Sexual victimization is thus a feminine characterization.

The assertion of hetero-nationality is manifested both through the sexual dominance of one group and the assigning of inferior sexual qualities to the other group. This is particularly evident in the homosexualization of ‘opponents’. The charge of homosexuality was frequently employed as a means to eliminate political opponents and was leveled against a large number of SA during the Night of Long Knives in 1934, and “against Army Chief of Staff, Werner von Fritsch, who would not comply with Nazi policies, against Catholic clerics in order to bring the church into disrepute[...],

35 Ibid.
and against branches of the independent youth movement.”

Some of these men were “known homosexuals”, including the Chief of Staff Ernst Röhm, but the propaganda “highlighted Röhm’s sexual predilection”. By homosexualizing party enemies, the Nationalist Socialists equated them with inferior masculinities.

Motherhood and Sexuality

While masculine identities underwent transformation, Nazi female identities were similarly altered. Women’s roles as mothers and sexual beings were accentuated, which required the corresponding disempowerment of ‘Other’ female identities. By doing so, the perpetrator group destroyed the attraction of the ‘Other’ females as mothers and sexual beings. As the women were associated with national motherhood, by raping and violating the women of the enemy, perpetrators also attacked the “symbolic representation of the national body”.

As discussed above, the European nationalist movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century guided the gendering of the homeland into the Motherland, or the collection of national mothers. On the cusp of conflicts, there is a tangible radicalization of discourse into:

[...] a renewal of a patriarchal familial ideology, deepening the differentiation of men and women, masculinity and femininity[...]

Women are reminded that by biology and by tradition they are the keepers of hearth and home, to nurture and teach children ‘our ways’. Men, by physique and tradition, are there to protect women and children and the nation, often referred to as the ‘motherland’.


39 Ibíd.


When the Nationalist Socialist movement refurbished traditional gender roles, these revived roles became the norm.42

These traditional roles became central to ‘Aryan’ identity. Hitler’s opposition to the political participation of women and his low estimation of women’s abilities were based on the separate spheres of the sexes.43 Accordingly, the state was man’s realm, while the home was the realm of women.44 As Joseph Goebbels argued in 1934, “Women’s proper sphere is the family. There she is a sovereign queen.”45 According to Leila Rupp, “Nazi leaders urged women [...] to bear numerous children in response to the call for a vigorously growing ‘Aryan’ population. Just as men served the state by fighting, so women served by bearing children.”46 This notion of their role of Aryan child-bearer clashed with the growing feminist movement of the 1920s and 1930s as well as female Nazi militants.47 In the early years of the party, some Nazi militant argued in dialogue, arguing that while different from men, “women were as capable and intelligent and could contribute to the German people in ways other than through motherhood.”48 These early attempts were not fruitful, however, as the government soon outlawed abortion and the sale or advertisement of contraceptives for healthy ‘Aryans’.49 Measures to promote marriage and reduce the number of women in the labor force were enforced.50 Appropriate sexual partners were designated through extensive propaganda and eventually Rassenschande, laws against ‘race defilement’ through sexual activity with non-‘Aryans’. Thus, in Nazi Germany, femininity had reverted to motherhood and keepers of the home and ‘appropriate’ sexual behavior.

At the same time, ‘Other’ female identities threatened to do exactly what Aryan women were supposed to do: make and raise racial children. Jewish, Roma, Sinti, Black, and other ‘undesirable’ women threatened, in the Nazi mind, to create racially inferior children who would impede Aryan supremacy. Thus, the Nazi obsession with motherhood and sexuality resulted in an attack on Jewish motherhood. Sterilization of both men

42 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Quoted in Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 371.
50 Ibid.
and women as well as the highly regulated sexuality through race laws, gender, and family separation all aided in the prevention of births. Forced abortions of Jewish, Roma, Sinti, and ‘asocial’ women were performed. Sexual violence in the form of sterilization, gender and family separation, abortion, rape, beatings of genitalia and buttocks, and sexual enslavement in brothels in camps served to ‘check’ competing mothering and sexual femininities. Furthermore, the separation of sexes of persecuted peoples in camps epitomized the suppression of childbearing and motherhood.

**Sexual Violence Against “Racially Inferior” Women in the War of Annihilation**

Sexual violence was common in the Nazi genocide, although all forms of it were considered grave crimes, both in civilian and military jurisdiction. This, however, did not deter the perpetration of sexual crimes. Rape within the framework of the Nazi genocide is not considered to have been an active genocidal tool (unlike in the Bosnian Wars or Rwanda), but it did have a racial dimension to it, as intimate contacts with Jews were either explicitly sought or explicitly eschewed by the perpetrators, simply because of the victims’ racial belonging.

**The Nazi Conception of Race Defilement**

When analyzing sexual violence within the framework of the Nazi genocide, one major cornerstone to examine is the Nazi law that regulated sexuality between Jews and ‘Aryans’, as its observance or non-observance had an impact on how sexual crimes were perpetrated.

Pre-existing concepts that linked race and sexuality were driven to extremes when the Nazis came to power in 1933. The term *Rassenschande* was embedded into the NS criminal code on September 15, 1935, when the Nuremberg Laws were passed. As Alexandra Przyrembel remarks,
“intimacy, sexual pleasure, [...] and even ‘normal’ contacts between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans were now punishable by law [...].” In that sense, ‘Jewish’ and ‘German’ became two mutually exclusive identities; a mixing of these two ‘races’ was now heavily penalized and marked the beginning of an unparalleled genocide in the twentieth century. The judicial definition of race defilement was encoded in the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor. The decree outlawed any kind of sexual, therefore pro-creational, contact between Jews and Germans, since both marital and extra-marital sexual encounters between these two groups were forbidden.

Committing race defilement was interpreted as a grave injury to the integrity of the national community, since racial segregation would prevent the mixing of German and ‘impure’ blood, re-enforcing the National Socialist ‘utopia’ of a racially pure Volksgemeinschaft. The offence of race defilement became a tool of persecution that often had fatal consequences for the accused. This was all the more the case since race defilement was a concept that was socially accepted by the general German populace. Often, someone accused of having engaged in race defilement was branded and ostracized for life.

Within the Reich’s borders, charges and actual convictions made against both male and female race defilers were frequent. The Gestapo and the

58 Przyrembel, Rassenschande, 11.
59 Ibid., 12.
60 The National Socialist concept of race (in German, Rasse) was embedded in the belief that there were, in fact, different races in the world and that some of these races were more valuable (in German, wertvoll, which in the Nazi sense meant also more able, more productive, more honorable – in short, more eligible to simply live) than others; the latter ones were branded as “racially inferior” and were ascribed all kinds of deeply insulting and often times ridiculous stereotypes. The Nazis, however, took these stereotypes literally dead serious; the genocidal process was initiated under the premises of such racial categorizations. For a contemporary Nazi work on Rassen (deeply racist and, in terms of Nazi “logic”, often inconsistent and confusing), see: Rüdin, Ernst. Rassenhygiene im völkischen Staat. Munich: J.F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1934.
61 The artificial creation of these two identities was accompanied by an almost obsessive need to meticulously define who was of “German blood” (“deutschblütig”) and who was Jewish, half Jewish, one-quarter Jewish, etc. (Przyrembel, Rassenschande, 12).
62 The full text of the Gesetz zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre from 15 September 1935 is printed in Przyrembel, Rassenschande, 509. The general usage of race defilement was further defined as “[...] sexual intercourse with racially different people and people of color.” (Przyrembel, Rassenschande, 12).
63 Ibid., 13-14. For a more detailed analysis of racial hygiene and racial science as it was conceptualized and practiced during the Third Reich, see: Michael H. Kater, Doctors under Hitler (Chapel Hill/ London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 111ff.
64 Przyrembel, Rassenschande, 12.
Criminal Police targeted these people; arrests and interrogations were often opportunities for the executive to humiliate and abuse the ‘accused’. Outside of the Reich’s borders, the racial laws were less strictly implemented, partly to be explained by the fact that the environment at the front was much more brutal and violent, resulting in the dissolution of commonly accepted customs and laws.

**Nazi Conceptions of Masculinity**

As has been outlined above, masculinity is an essential category in defining self. The masculine self standardizes patterns of behavior and assigns to a person their social standing. Binary oppositions such as male and female are much more easily naturalized and accepted as ‘normal’. Since their definition is inevitably linked to the biological body and gender, they undergo a ‘natural legitimation’. During National Socialism, conceptions of masculinity reached a new extreme, fuelled by the ‘Front Fighter Experience’ which had found new support after the defeat in World War I.

After the National Socialists came to power in 1933, the soldierly ideal of a strong man was radicalized and would be linked to nationalistic and racist ideas; Social-Darwinist conceptions of the ‘survival of the fittest’ reached more extremes, as ‘aggressive masculinity’ became an asset in the deeply racist selection process. Male Härte now was the new ideal that was ever more aggressively directed against external enemies. After 1933, ‘soldierly’ and ‘masculine’ were used almost interchangeably, and the soldier at the front became an expression of the “manliness of [the German] race”. In defining the German man as a soldier, character traits such as Härte, which was to condition “emotionally controlled executers,” became all the more distinguishing an attribute. Feeling empathy with the victims, fearing the enemy, and hiding during attacks were prohibited.

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65 For a detailed analysis of race defilement, “mixed” marriages, children of “mixed blood”, and the theory and implementation of the Nuremberg Laws and what consequences this had for the German judicial system as well as the medical profession and academia, please refer to the entire work of Alexandra Przyrembel. For the purpose of this article, the book’s focus on race defilement within the Reich alone did not prove to be very conclusive about race defilement committed outside the Reich borders, i.e. at the Western or Eastern front, and the German occupation zones all over Europe.


67 Ibid.

68 Ibid., 8.

69 Ibid., 9.

70 Ibid., 10.

71 Ibid., 11.
“verdict of weakness”72 ridiculed a man. The codex of Härte coupled with deadly determination, lethal action, and backed up by a strict military chain of command led to an ever more aggressive conception of masculinity. Ultimately, all restraint was given up, especially at the Eastern front where the killing sprees reached a climax. Although the upholding of a strict military order and sexual restraint (Manneszucht) was of great concern for the military leaders, along with reminders that a German soldier would not wage war against women and children due to the Wehrmacht’s code of ethics, these claims soon became nothing but statements.73

Although masculine Härte was viewed as a means to an end, it soon became clear that it was an end in itself. Brutal violence was unleashed on the locals, regardless of military necessity. There are numerous examples that illustrate how the form, duration, and intensity of violence went far beyond what was militarily and strategically ‘appropriate’.74

Due to the harsh conditions, the war in the East was elevated to the status of a true ‘proving ground’ for a man to prove his own masculinity in combat.75 It was here that concepts of masculinity were translated into soldierly camaraderie: the individual had to undergo a process of de-individuation and be re-socialized in the midst of his comrades-in-arms.76 Camaraderie was the only bond that could withstand the horrors of war; every soldier had to submit himself to it. Those who excluded themselves were shamed and lost the in-group’s protection.77 The obligation to display Härte and virtues of camaraderie became an inescapable control mechanism, leading to a decrease in empathy and scruples and then to a profound shift of the generic system of morality, often within weeks after soldiers had started their frontline duty.78 Drills, violence, and mortal danger were experienced by the soldiers, along with certain rituals of masculinity such as excessive drinking, visits to brothels, boasting about sexual escapades, and the exchange of pornographic pictures; these experiences welded them together.79 Moreover, “peer pressure, conformity, obedience

72 Ibid., 12.
73 Ibid., 13.
74 Ibid., 35.
75 Ibid., 19.
77 Ibid., 84.
78 Werner, “Hart müssen wir sein...,” 22 and 25.
79 Mühlhäuser, Eroberungen, 33.
[and] the experience of violence quickly [led] to the desensitization and brutalization of the men.

The outward-directed self-image of a hard and merciless soldier was accompanied by an inward-directed expression of a male-masculine relationship among the soldiers which included caring for one another, having meals together, and washing clothes together. The following excerpt taken from an artillery general who served at the Eastern front perfectly illustrates this binary opposition. “It is very hot. We bathe [...] [;] the matkas [derogative term for elderly Russian women], full of amazement and giggling, look on as we soap ourselves, standing in the court yard, stark naked [...].” This quote further shows how little the invading soldiers cared what the (female) native population thought of them. Soldiers took pride in their muscular bodies, parading them in front of women, without any regard for their sense of shame. The witnessing women were angered and felt insulted by these displays of nakedness, because it made them aware of the fact that they were very vulnerable to sexual assaults.

While outward-directed camaraderie collectively rejected enemy women as a group, they became an outlet for the soldiers’ frustrations. As a result, killing and raping were much easier to do. Although both the Wehrmacht and the SS officially did not condone sexual assaults by their members against civilians, it seems that the quest for masculinity and Härtle

80 Ibid.
81 Regina Mühlhäuser has included in her study many diary entries and personal photos from soldiers at the Eastern front. The above quote is taken from Jürgen W.’s war diary and is dated 9 July 1942.
82 Mühlhäuser, Eroberungen, 35. Translation provided by me. The original quote reads: “Es ist sehr heiß. Wir machen große Wäsche, staunend und kichernd sehen die Matkas zu, wie wir uns splitternackt auf dem Hof stehend abseifen.”
83 Ibid., 36.
84 Ibid., 35.
85 In a memorandum from 20 November 1941, Supreme Commander Erich von Manstein expressed that the soldiers should display “restraint in their behavior towards the other sex” and that “unruliness and the lack of discipline within the troops” had to be dealt with in a decisive manner by the commanding officers (for the German quote, see: Mühlhäuser, Eroberungen, 144).
manifested itself also in sexual crimes. Thomas Kühne argues that “[the] cult of masculinity found its incarnation in the virile Übermensch and its social home in the misogynistic band of brothers.”

Race Defilement on the Eastern Front: The View of the Perpetrators

The war against the USSR was planned from the beginning as a war of annihilation; thus, it was waged in a radically different manner than the war on the Western front. Conquering ‘living space’ for the Aryan race, total economic exploitation, the enslavement of the local population in forced labor, and the eradication of Jews and the ‘Jewish-Bolshevist’ leadership were the cornerstones of the Barbarossa campaign. The ‘criminal orders’ of 1941 legitimized these pre-conceptions and resulted in the total disregard for the rules of war.

German soldiers reacted to this reality of war differently. Despite relative impunity, one cannot generalize about the soldiers’ sexual behavior: some lived up to the NS ideal of a ‘race-conscious warrior’, while others realized their sexual fantasies in a cruel and violent manner. Military order and personal disposition played a crucial role in determining soldierly behavior; nevertheless, war does facilitate the violent expression of inner desires and urges.

Likewise, sexual crimes are multiplied in war. As sexual attacks mirror the entire war dynamic where the unarmed female civilian is left at the

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89 Ibid., 169.
90 The “Guidelines for the Behavior of the Troops in Russia” from 19 May 1941 clearly stated that Bolshevism was considered by the Nazis to be “the mortal enemy of the National Socialist German people” and that therefore, one of Germany’s purposes was to fight this “subversive world view”. In addition, the guidelines stated that this called for a “ruthless and vigorous fight against Bolshevist agitators […], saboteurs, Jews and for the total elimination of both active and passive resistance [against the Germans].” Translation provided by me. For this excerpt and the full text of the “Richtlinien für das Verhalten der Truppe in Rußland”, see: Beck, *Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt*, 179.
91 Ibid.
mercy of the armed, male, and powerful soldier, these are never solitary crimes. Nomi Levenkron remarks, “[t]he soldier invades the woman’s body just as he invades her country; he crushes her body as well as her right to autonomy and control over her life.”

Sexual Violence Other Than Rape and the “Observance” of the Racial Laws

Opportunities for sexual assaults by members of the Wehrmacht and the SS against civilians were manifold. Most sexual crimes were perpetrated within the framework of the mass shootings, the fight against real or alleged partisans, during requisitions and lootings, as well as the recruiting of forced laborers, and the quartering of German soldiers in Soviet houses. Having consulted eyewitness reports of survivors, historian Regina Mühlhäusler shows that, despite the Nazi racial laws, it was often especially Jewish women who were picked out to be sexually assaulted by Germans; for the attacking soldiers, these proved to be opportunities to demonstrate their boundless power and their hatred for their victims as well as further degrading and humiliating them. The racial laws made enemy women all the more desirable. In raping them, the woman’s humanity became even less visible to the perpetrator and her insignificance was augmented, which “engendered complete indifference with [her] suffering.” In that sense, the Nazis saw Jewish women both as an object of sexual pleasure and as a grave biological danger because a woman’s body is the bearer of future generations and had to be eliminated at all costs.

Despite strict regulations, it seems evident that rules were overstepped on countless occasions, especially when the perpetrators were sure their immediate superiors had no knowledge of them breaching the racial laws. Mühlhäusler shows that members of the SS and the Wehrmacht held the view that the racial laws on the front were not to be obeyed as strictly as back home: For instance, an SS man publicly declared in early 1943 upon

93 Ibid.
94 Beck, Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt, 221ff.
95 Ibid., 225.
96 Ibid., 226.
97 Ibid., 229.
100 Ibid., 15.
101 In mid-1942, Himmler ordered every SS and police member to be tried in court if they disobeyed military rules and had sexual intercourse with racially different Russian women. See: Mühlhäuser, Eroberungen, 150.
arriving in Minsk that the race defilement rules were only applicable within the Reich borders and were abrogated in the East. Apparently his public declaration did not have any consequences for him.102 Also, SS men repeatedly raped Jewish women in the ghetto of Pinsk, and none of them were ever charged in court.103 Patterns of order and obedience were upset under the impressions of the war’s brutality. For soldiers individually, this meant that their violent actions were either inhibited or disinhibited but in either case dangerously directed against their victims.104

In this respect, the eyewitness report of the Polish survivor Sala Pawlowicz is exemplary. As a fifteen-year-old in 1939, she had been a forced laborer in an SS barrack in the Polish city of Lask. After having finished her day’s work she got held up by the Germans. She was forced to undress, whereupon one of the Germans remarked: “You are nothing special, but I like you.” When she was nude, he forcefully turned her around to show off her body to his comrades. He then touched her inappropriately and abused her with a riding crop, commenting: “You do not know how to obey… I will show you. But I cannot have you, you scum, because you are Jewish and you are dirty. What a shame! [...] This is what you will get instead of me, because you are a dirty Jewess!” He then beats her unconscious with the crop.

This instance of sexual violence in the absence of the actual act of penetration serves to underline the racial hatred the perpetrators were motivated by. In this case, the attacker does obey the racial laws, but he channels his anger about the fact that he desires her but is prohibited by law to ‘have’ her into cruel violence whereby he abuses the girl’s breasts and intimate parts with a whip. The obedience of the racial laws, therefore, did not mean that they were a deterrent for sexual offenders but rather spurred them on to find other ways to abuse their victims.107 Germans who wanted to ‘obey’ the racial laws often used sticks, crops,

102 Ibid., 151.
103 Ibid.
105 Mühlhäuser, Eroberungen, 89.
106 Ibid. Translation provided by me. The original quote reads: “Du weißt nicht, wie man gehorcht. … Ich werd's dir zeigen. Aber ich kann dich nicht haben, du Abschaum, weil du jüdisch und dreckig bist. Was für eine Schande! [...] Das ist es, was du statt meiner bekommst, dafür, dass du eine dreckige Jüdin bist!”
107 Many eyewitness accounts of survivors make apparent that these kind of sexual assaults were rather common.
and firearms to torture the intimate parts of their victims.\textsuperscript{108} Political scientist Sheila Meintjes remarks that through these ‘well-aimed’ beatings, perpetrators seek to ‘activate’ a woman’s sexuality and thereby further degrade the victims by forcing them into a ‘position of a readily-available sexual object’.\textsuperscript{109} These attacks are a means of non-verbal communication whereby the attacker establishes his dominance as an ‘Aryan’ occupier over a ‘racially inferior’, occupied woman.\textsuperscript{110}

**Rape and “Non-Compliance” with the Racial Laws**

Although charges could be raised against Wehrmacht and SS members in the USSR acting in violation of other race-based decrees,\textsuperscript{111} historian Birgit Beck has shown that in military court verdicts against sexual offenders, race defilement as an offence (although considered a problem amongst the commanding staff) did not play a role.\textsuperscript{112} This can partly be explained by the sheer lack of witnesses in cases of race defilement, since the assaulted Jewish women were almost always killed after the deed, either directly afterwards or in the all-devouring process of genocide.\textsuperscript{113}

The proximity of sex, death, and the routinization of killing that accompanied the mass shootings in the East is perfectly illustrated by excerpts of the following conversation between 21-year-old submarine sailor Horst Minnieur (H.M.) and his 23-year-old comrade Helmut Hartelt (H.H.).\textsuperscript{114} Their

\textsuperscript{108} Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*, 90.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 92.

\textsuperscript{111} The Wehrmacht Supreme Command passed a decree for the Wehrmacht in May 1941, in which the racial tenor was used to link it to the danger of espionage and sabotage (when German soldiers had intimate contact with Russian women), because many Russians understood the German language quite well (Beck, *Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt*, 280). The SS linked racial ideology and military aims much more strictly in their fight in the USSR. Therefore, a decree by Himmler, dated April 1939, prohibited all SS and police members from “every form of sexual contact with women and girls of a racially different people” (Ibid., 279). Translation provided by me. Another explanatory leaflet for soldiers that was issued by the Army Supreme Command on 26 June 1942 further re-enforces the prohibition of “inter-racial” sexual contact, stating that “sexual intercourse with Jewish women violates the racial laws and will result in criminal prosecution” (Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*, 148). Translation provided by me.

\textsuperscript{112} Beck, *Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt*, 277.

\textsuperscript{113} Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*, 148.

\textsuperscript{114} The conversation was recorded in Latimer House, where British intelligence eavesdropped on German POWs. The language that the soldiers use in this conversation is very vulgar; the words they use are derived from sexually explicit and very racist terminology, exposing their severe lack of respect for their victims. I assert that their choice of words was deliberate; it conveys the extreme racial hatred that informed their behavior.
talk revolves around a mass shooting of Jews in Wilna, Lithuania, probably in 1942.

H.M.: They all had to undress, all the way down to their shirts and the women down to their [underwear] and then they were shot by the Gestapo. [...] Once, we watched [one of these] mass shootings. [...] They [the Jews] were shot with an MP. [At that day,] we were present when a pretty girl was shot.

H.H.: That’s too bad.

H.M.: All of them shot! [The girl] knew that she was going to be shot. We drove by with a motorcycle [...] and suddenly she called out our names [...] [and we asked her] where they were going. [And the girl said], yes, they are going to the shooting site. At first we thought she was joking [...] [but] [...] she was, in fact, shot.

H.H.: Was she still dressed then?

H.M.: Yes, she was dressed very elegantly. Very pretty girl.

H.H.: Whoever aimed at her, surely missed her on purpose.

H.M.: Well, no, you couldn’t do that, [...] nobody missed. [...]¹¹⁶

H.H.: Have you seen whether [at the time of the shooting] that pretty Jewess was still among [the others]?

H.M.: No, we were gone by then. [...] And she did not say anything beforehand? Have you met with her again [in the days leading up to the execution]?

H.M.: Yes, we had been together two days before, and then the next day we were wondering why she did not show up [for work]. [...] She surely let herself get fucked?¹¹⁷

H.M.: Yes, she let herself get fucked, but you had to be careful not to get caught. Everybody knew that these Jewish bitches¹¹⁸ were getting laid like nobody’s business.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ This refers to a group of Jews who had been herded together by the Gestapo and transported by train to the execution site.

¹¹⁶ This refers to the fact that, during mass shootings, every single shooter had to do his share of the killings, and that every fired shot inevitably hit somebody as the victims were herded together in groups or rows in front of the shooters.

¹¹⁷ The original German phrase reads “Da hat sie sich auch gewiss hacken lassen noch?” The jargon expression “hacken lassen” was a vulgar term to denote sexual intercourse.

¹¹⁸ In German, Minnieuer uses the term “Judenweiber”, which is a very pejorative and racist term for Jewish women. Moreover, such phrasing exposes a whole set of racist and sexist assumptions the speaker had about Jewish women as a group.

¹¹⁹ It is very difficult to adequately translate this into English, because “umlegen” in German refers both to the act of killing someone and, in the 1930s and 1940s, could also denote the act
H.H.: What did she say, that she ---?

H.M.: Nothing at all. Ah, we talked a couple of times, [...] she went to university in Göttingen.

H.H.: [And yet] she let herself be used as a whore!

H.M.: Yes. They did not realize that she was Jewish, she was a decent [girl] and all. Well, too bad for her that she also had to kick the bucket! Some 75,000 Jews were shot then.

The conversation is revealing about how both sex and race defilement were understood by the soldiers themselves. First, one of the major concerns of the men seems to be that the victim was a ‘pretty Jewess’, which buys into the then common stereotype that only pretty and young Jewish women became victims of sexual violence. For Minnieur and his comrade, her beauty is the one aspect most worthy of discussion, whereas the girl’s intellectual capacities seem to surprise both. Hartl goes on to exclaim that, despite her university education, she let herself be turned into a prostitute, whereby he makes use of the racist and sexist stereotype that Jewish women were essentially all prostitutes.

of sexual intercourse. In this context, it cannot be ascertained for sure which of these two meanings Minnieur uses, but probably both. In that sense, “umlegen” illustrates even more clearly the proximity of death and sex and underlines the normalcy the soldiers ascribed to both processes (mass executions and forced sexual encounters before that).

120 Refers to the question of whether the Jewish girl identified herself as such in front of Minnieur.

121 As an excuse for having had sexual relations with the Jewish girl, Minnieur states that she did not identify herself as a Jew. In fact, for the Nazi judiciary, these occurrences proved to be somewhat of a difficulty, because people accused of race defilement tended to stress as a defense strategy that the Jewish person they had intimate contact with did not make it visible (Przyrembel, Rassenschande, 460f).

122 The entire conversation is quoted in: Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer, Soldaten. Protokolle vom Kämpfen, Töten und Sterben (Frankfurt/M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 2011), 162-165. I have provided here a shortened version of the entire conversation. The translation has been provided by me.

123 Such conceptions were, of course, not true. During the Russian campaign alone, women of all ages became victims of sexual crimes. Of those crimes that were recorded, the youngest victim was five years of age and the oldest ninety years of age. However, when in August 1941, a soldier stationed in France had raped and later killed a woman over sixty years of age, the judges felt compelled to comment in their verdict that the accused had raped “an ugly woman of more than sixty years” and took this partly as an argument to justify their assessment that the accused was driven entirely by his physical urges and had not been able to control himself and was thus to be seen as a very dangerous violent criminal. For more details about this case, see: Beck, Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt, 198.

124 Ibid., 244.
Such an assessment buys into more elaborate Nazi conceptions about a woman's sexuality, especially when she was of non-German nationality. Even Wehrmacht courts took into account the victim’s nationality whilst trying to find a verdict for the accused. Contemporaries believed that a woman’s social status and identity determined her sexual behavior. Sexual integrity existed when a girl was a virgin and when a young woman engaged in extra-marital abstinence. Therefore, the act of rape deprived a woman of her sexual integrity and her honor. Based on patriarchal conceptions of society, rape was, thus, the loss of honor. Furthermore, ‘dishonorable women’\textsuperscript{125} could not be robbed of their sexual integrity and honor, something the Nazis termed \textit{Geschlechtsehre}, and in these cases most sexual offenders often went unpunished.\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Geschlechtsehre} in the Nazi sense meant that a German woman was to behave honorably and that she was aware of her status as the ‘preserver of the race’ and her duty to keep the ‘völkisch body pure’.\textsuperscript{127}

Racist Nazi conceptions subjected women to hierarchization: military court verdicts did recognize the existence of a woman’s \textit{Geschlechtsehre} in the traditional way when sexual crimes were committed against Western European women,\textsuperscript{128} whereas Russian women were considered to belong to a people “who have almost no understanding at all of female \textit{Geschlechtsehre}”,\textsuperscript{129} thus resulting in less severe sentences for the accused.

The soldiers’ conversation above shows that racial laws were not as strictly observed by the troops as would have been desirable by the military leadership. Minneur is well aware of the racial laws and possibly feared

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{125} Women who were prostitutes, who had a polygamous sex life, who had extra-marital sex, etc.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Beck, \textit{Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt}, 285.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 286.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 287.
\item \textsuperscript{129} This particular case refers to a soldier who had, together with a comrade, threatened a Russian woman with his weapon and raped her behind a house. During his trial, he claimed that he had pointed the pistol at her but had put it back in his holster, and only afterwards did the woman follow him behind the house. Therefore, he claimed, he had not been aware of the threat he had subjected the woman to and claimed she had had sex with him voluntarily. His strategy was successful, because he was sentenced only to eight months in jail. The judge wrote in his verdict that he recognized the soldier’s otherwise good reputation and that he was conscientiously doing his duty on the front; moreover, it was a mitigating circumstance that he had raped a Russian woman of almost no “\textit{Geschlechtsehre}”, as opposed to raping a German woman which would have been a grave crime (Ibid., 288). Following this contemptuous line of arguments, a judge in another verdict (October 1943) – against a soldier who had forced Russian women and girls with his weapon to undress and had inappropriately touched them afterwards – stated that “[\textit{der Schutz der Frauenlehre}] fällt bei Vorgehen gegenüber russischen Frauen fort. Sie sind nicht so zart, dass durch ein Erlebnis, wie der Angeklagte es ihnen bereitet hat, dauernder seelischer Schaden entstehen könnte.” (Ibid., 290).
\end{itemize}
the consequences (“one had to be careful not to get caught”). One of the consequences he alludes to is that delinquent soldiers could be divested of the right to serve as a soldier.⁵³⁰ Since the soldierly male was part of the ‘fighter's community', the soldier's status was elevated to that of a ‘status of honor’.¹³¹ If a soldier was declared as ‘unworthy of being a soldier’,¹³² he was expelled from the soldierly community and lost his honor. Nevertheless, the deterring effect of such punishment remained minimal.¹³³

Nowhere in the above quote does Minnieur allude to the fact that the Jewish woman he had been intimate with on numerous occasions was really used as a sex slave. Moreover, he generalizes perceived sexual attitudes of Jewish women as prostitutes: by stating that the girl ‘let herself get fucked', he takes away from the victim any kind of active agent, degrading her to the point where she becomes a passive object who does not protest to the sexual encounter that is forced upon her; the attackers use women as a means to satisfy their sexual desires.¹³⁴ Using the passive construction to describe the fact that there were numerous sexual encounters between Jewish women and German men, Minnieur shows that he thinks these women were even willing to engage in sexual intercourse with these men. Hartl, too, assumes that as a forced laborer (and as someone who is marked for destruction anyway), the girl was automatically at the men’s disposal to use her sexually.¹³⁵ His comment is exemplary for how soldiers and SS members interpreted forced sexual intercourse. For instance, many soldiers who stood trial for sexual assaults would state that they had not perceived the sexual act as rape because the women had not fended them off.¹³⁶ In saying this, they made use of the contemporary conception that

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¹³⁰ In German: Aberkennung der Wehrwürdigkeit.
¹³¹ Werner, “Hart müssen wir sein....,” 15.
¹³² In her extremely valuable study about sexual crimes and the Wehrmacht, Birgit Beck cites countless examples where the accused were sentenced to go to jail in addition to the “Verlust der Wehrunwürdigkeit.” It would go beyond the scope of this paper to cite all of these examples but for matters of illustration, I would like to quote two examples here. Within the framework of the Wehrmacht fight against Russian partisans, in May 1944, a soldier had tried to rape a young Russian woman and had shot her dead when she had put up a fight. Next to ten years in jail, he was also punished with the “Verlust der Wehrwürdigkeit.” (Beck, Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt, 232). In another case from June 1940, a soldier had brutally raped a French woman several times in her own house. He was sentenced to six years in jail and also to “Verlust der Wehrwürdigkeit.” The judges had especially reprimanded the defendant’s utter brutality and the fact that he had raped a middle-aged woman, who was married to a reserve officer (Ibid., 248).
¹³⁴ Beck, Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt, 246.
¹³⁵ Neitzel, Soldaten, 165.
rape had to be provable by recognizable efforts of resistance on the part of the woman.\textsuperscript{137} Many accused would say in court that, “[t]he woman had only put up resistance at the beginning in \textit{the usual manner}\textsuperscript{138} but then had voluntarily allowed sexual intercourse.

The conversation above shows how common and normal the issue of sex and sexuality was among soldiers. They talk openly about ‘fucking’ despite the fact that they are not close acquaintances or friends. As Neitzel correctly remarks, “stories about [sex] belong to the normal inventory of soldierly conversations and do not cause any kind of irritation.”\textsuperscript{139} The soldiers’ conversational attitude again reveals more general and firmly established trends about male sexuality, which was an essential part in the daily life of a soldier at the front.\textsuperscript{140} Just like in peacetime, escapisms from reality were part of the everyday lives of frontline soldiers; therefore, sexuality amidst extreme violence cannot be understood as something ‘exotic’.\textsuperscript{141} SS and Wehrmacht officials held the view that only a controlled sex drive was helping to optimize a soldier’s performance in combat,\textsuperscript{142} as love and combat were seen as the essential experiences of male existence. Soldierly sexuality was interpreted as being ‘the fuel of the military apparatus’ as a whole.\textsuperscript{143} Sexuality is militarily exploited and becomes combat-effective.\textsuperscript{144}

Within the context of the long front duty tours\textsuperscript{145} that soldiers had to take, questions about sexual abstinence became important for the leadership and military judges. The basis for this was the view that the male sexual drive could not be suppressed endlessly and needed an adequate outlet. Military judges would recognize long sexual abstinence of the perpetrator

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 242.
\textsuperscript{138} The original quote reads: “[…] Die betreffende Frau habe sich nur am Anfang \textit{in der üblichen Weise} gewehrt.” This refers to the fact that women allegedly always at first protest against sexual intercourse so as not to appear as “easy.” The above quote is taken from: Beck, \textit{Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt}, 242. Emphasis added by me.
\textsuperscript{139} Neitzel, \textit{Soldaten}, 165. Translation provided by me. See also: Mühlhäuser, \textit{Eroberungen}, 37.
\textsuperscript{140} Neitzel, \textit{Soldaten}, 218.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{142} In fact, Hitler himself declared in April 1942: “Wenn der deutsche Soldat bereit sein soll, bedingungslos zu sterben, dann muss er auch die Freiheit haben, bedingungslos zu lieben.” (Mühlhäuser, \textit{Eroberungen}, 39).
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{144} Zipfel, “Ausnahmezustand Krieg?,” 59. The important attributes here are “controlled” and “effective.” The sex drive of men at the front was not be left to run freely. For instance, rape and subsequent killing was, according to the SS and Wehrmacht leadership, a grave breach of a taboo (Mühlhäuser, \textit{Eroberungen}, 42).
\textsuperscript{145} At the Eastern front, soldiers were sometimes denied leave of absence for as long as two years.
as a mitigating circumstance because they themselves had been victims to their body's needs. Sexual violence against women was thereby trivialized; it was normalized as being an inevitable by-product of war. As exemplified by Minnieur’s and Hartelt’s comments, the perpetration of sexual violence was even blamed on the women themselves.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, we can conclude that sexual violence during the Nazi genocide occurred when concepts of masculinity and femininity were reconstructed. For men, new racial and ethnic hegemonic masculinities required the hyper-militarization of all men, while it emphasized the heterosexuality and vitality of their nation through hetero-nationality. Sexual violence was an expression of these transforming masculinities. Femininity also underwent drastic changes. Traditional roles of motherhood and sexuality were celebrated, while sexual violence symbolically violated the motherhood and attractiveness of the racial ‘Others’. Hence, sexual violence was the product of shifts in – and the reconstruction of – identity that occurred during the Holocaust. Sex and killing are, in essence, part of the same process of destruction.

Specifically, this meant that being a man and being a soldier became interchangeable concepts. The Nazi soldier had to live up to these concepts by displaying extreme soldierly Härte directed against his enemy and the enemy’s women. In the war of annihilation on the Eastern front, soldiers had numerous opportunities to demonstrate the implementation of this concept of Härte. In this framework, sexual violence was a common occurrence. Although the Nazi racial laws and similar decrees prohibited both sexual contact with ‘racially inferior’ women and sexual assaults, the deterring effect for the perpetrators remained minimal, as both the observance and the non-observance of these laws resulted in racially motivated attacks. The Nazi view of the racial inferiority of Eastern European peoples was also mirrored in verdicts by SS and Wehrmacht judges: the sentences they handed out against sexual offenders tended to be less severe for sexual crimes committed on the Eastern front, as Eastern European women were considered persons lacking sexual integrity and honor, whereas German women served as bearers of the future of the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft.
