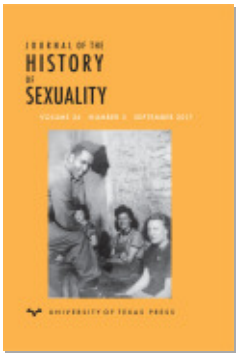
Making Sense of a Rape Photograph: Sexual Violence as Social Performance on the Eastern Front, 1939–1944



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Making Sense of a Rape Photograph: Sexual Violence as Social Performance on the Eastern Front, 1939–1944

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This article begins with a disturbing image that has a no-less-unsettling provenance. It shows a group of fifteen young German soldiers standing in a semicircle, carousing and laughing as one of their comrades emulates a sex act with an unidentified woman who may or may not be dead. The laughter of his comrades suggests approval for the actions of the man on the ground. Although it is not clear if the photograph depicts an act of actual rape, its aftermath, or mere mimicry, what is certain is that the depicted scene ascribes the woman only one function: she is an object of amusement that mediates coercion and asymmetric power relations.[1]

Figure 1. Undated photo in the collection of the National Archives of Romania.

It is very possible that this picture was taken before or after the soldiers raped the woman. However, irrespective of whether any penetration actually occurred, the men imitated a rape scene showcasing the woman's body as a sexualized object of ridicule and

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[1] In the following I refer to this photograph as a rape as well as a rape-joke image.

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subjugation. Sexual subordination cannot be defined solely in terms of physical assault; it is also (or even largely) carried out through seemingly more pedestrian social practices such as rape talk or rape gestures.[2] The casualness with which the photograph(er) puts oppressive misogyny and sexism on display is disturbing. What makes the scene even more offensive to contemporary viewers is that we find ourselves drawn into the logic of the male harassers and the comedic antics. Why are these men laughing? More precisely, what is so funny about this rape scene, whether real or imagined? Precisely because nothing is obvious about this picture, the explicit—and elusive—image raises fundamental epistemological questions: What does the photograph communicate to the viewer? What remains silent and unseen? How can one grasp the overarching cultural, social, and political meanings of this image? And finally, what does it tell us about the connections between gender, sexuality, and war?

Romanian historian Adrian Cioflanca discovered this photo in the National Archives of Romania, and it carried no caption or indication of the specific context in which it was taken.[3] The photograph is part of a larger corpus of sixty reprinted—not original—photographs. They are named after their collector, Karoly Francisc-Iosif, who, it appears, was a member of the Tudor Vladimirescu Division, which was formed in the summer of 1944 after the Soviet invasion of Romania and which fought alongside the Red Army.[4] During the final stages of World War II, Francisc-Iosif traveled widely across Eastern Europe, which gave him the unique opportunity to gather photographic evidence of German crimes. However, he is unlikely to have been the photographer, because his collection constitutes a very eclectic mix of atrocity images. Certain photographs seem to have been taken with the clear purpose of documenting mass crimes, such as images of crematoria, concentration camp inmates, and boxes of Zyklon B, the cyanide-based pesticide used in the gas chambers. These bear an odd resemblance to the photos taken by the Red Army at the liberation of the Majdanek and Auschwitz camps. Yet other photographs have a more private, voyeuristic perspective, depicting public executions, mass graves, and images taken from the perspective of the German occupiers, like the rape scenario

[2] Lindy West, "How to Make a Rape Joke," *Jezebel*, 12 July 2012, http://jezebel.com/5925186/how-to-make-a-rape-joke.

[3] I first encountered the photo when Adrian Cioflanca included it in his presentation "Destruction and Anonymisation: Holocaust-Era Mass Graves in Romania" at the conference "Corpses and Destruction" held in Paris, 12–14 September 2012, http://www.corpsesofmassviolence.eu/calendar/year-2012/our-annual-conference/. He kindly provided me a digital copy and this citation to the location of the original: National Archives of Romania, Photo Section, File Horrors of the Second World War, F I, 7789 (18).

[4] Website of the National Archives of Romania, http://cautare-b.arhivelenationale.ro/cautare-b/detail.aspx?ID=218580. For the history of Romania during World War II, see Diana Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

I have described.[5] It is thus very likely that Francisc-Iosif seized some of these private photographs from German soldiers who had been captured by the Red Army. It is also possible that he simply found them among the objects left behind during the Wehrmacht's hasty retreat.

The Eastern European style of the rustic wooden house looming in the background suggests that the photograph was taken in the countryside or in a rural town somewhere in the Nazi-occupied Eastern territories.[6] The image's chronological provenance could lie anywhere between the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, now considered the prelude to the war of extermination, and the Red Army's westward push in the summer of 1944, which ultimately led to the liberation of the Ukraine, Belarus, Romania, and Nazi-occupied Eastern Poland.[7] Only one thing is certain about this image: the fifteen young men wear the typical Wehrmacht cap, boots, and trousers, indicating that a Wehrmacht soldier took the picture. Because none of the soldiers appear in full regalia, it is impossible to definitively discern their individual ranks. However, based on the kneeling soldiers' armband insignias, we can assume that the men were part of the lower-ranking service personnel of the general army (Heer). By capturing a particular moment of soldiers' sociability, this photographic artifact exudes a certain degree of immediacy and veracity. Yet this does not make the picture easy to read or interpret. Indeed, the photograph raises a serious heuristic question: Does the fact that we know so little about its production, consumption, and circulation make it a less credible historical source?

[5] See, for example, the private photographs of the German foot soldier and amateur photographer Willi Rose, who documented workaday warfare, moments of leisure in the aftermath of battle, and explicit and hidden acts of violence. Willi Rose, *Shadows of War: A German Soldier's Lost Photographs of World War II*, ed. Thomas Eller and Petra Bopp (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004). Cultural scholar Barbie Zelizer has offered interesting reflections on the genre of atrocity photographs developed by the Allied liberators in the war's aftermath, arguing that they acted as a tool of documentation and proof of Nazi crimes. Through its dual function as carrier of truth-value and symbol, the atrocity photography helped bear witness to an American audience, but it partly failed to convince the German civilian population. See Barbie Zelizer, "Covering Atrocity in Image," in *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 86–140. These contributions capture two diametrically opposed ways of seeing atrocities.

[6] The fact that the photograph was deposited in the Romanian archives does not necessarily mean that it was taken in Romania. It could have been taken anywhere between Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltics, or other territories occupied by Nazi Germany. The chaos of the end of the war and immediate postwar period scattered the archival traces of the period between 1933 and 1945 across Europe, into the United States, and even to Israel.

[7] For general overviews, see Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann, *War of Extermination: The German Military in World War II 1941–1944* (New York: Berghahn, 2000); Jochen Böhler, *Auftakt zum Vernichtungskrieg: Die Wehrmacht in Polen 1939* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2006); Doris Bergen, *War & Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); and Jürgen Matthäus, "Operation Barbarossa and the Onset of the Holocaust," in *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942*, ed. Christopher Browning and Jürgen Matthäus (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 242–309.

Historians of the early modern period have long challenged the assumption that a source's value can be determined only through an analysis of its factuality. Natalie Zemon Davis, most prominently, tracked popular violence and religious massacres in the sixteenth century by drawing attention to self-presentation, storytelling, and ritual action. The history of violence, in Davis's understanding, not only asks for social framing but also cries out for cultural interpretations.[8] In a similar vein, historians working on the history of colonialism have argued that source collections in the official—and unofficial—archives not only are constructed but also must be understood as the product of historically specific subjectivities and emotional states. Only by reflecting upon the intrinsic incoherencies of the content, form, and context of their archival material can historians grasp what historical anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler terms "hidden transcripts," the many hidden stories within a source's streamlined narrative.[9] More recently, a historian of sexuality of colonial India, Anjali Arondekar, has pushed Stoler's argument even further by insisting that colonial archives must be read through the lens of sexuality studies and by convincingly arguing that uncovering the traces of attitudes toward sexuality and other taboo-charged topics in the historical sources will force scholars to rethink their methodologies.[10]

The history of sexual violence in Nazi-occupied Europe has faced similar challenges. Based on a very heterogeneous yet fragmentary corpus of sources, Regina Mühlhäuser has compellingly demonstrated the variety of motives for sexual violence and how differently it was understood by individual Wehrmacht soldiers. The perpetration of sexual violence was enabled when military authorities created a structural setting of licentiousness that allowed it.[11] Historians' access to archival evidence for these acts on the Eastern Front is certainly less than ideal. While running the gamut of military activity, from policy statements to medical reports, official documentation often fails to adequately illustrate the social practices and mentalities toward sexuality and violence as they played out on the ground.[12] There are even

[8] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 1–6; Davis, "Writing the 'Rites of Violence' and Afterwards," *Past and Present* 214, suppl. 7 (2012): 8–29.

[9] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 1–54.

[10] Anjali Arondekar, "Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. 1/2 (2005): 10–27, 11.

[11] Regina Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen: Sexuelle Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutsche Soldaten in der Sowjetunion, 1941–1945* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2010), 28–58, 73–140. See also Maren Röger, *Kriegsbeziehungen: Intimität, Gewalt und Prostitution im besetzten Polen 1939 bis 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2015), 9–26, 169–208.

[12] I follow a broad definition of sexual violence that goes beyond rape and includes forced undressing, voyeuristic display, verbal assault, body searches, and other forms of sexually coded forced bodily contact. This conception also encompasses a wide range of target groups, including women and men of Jewish, Slavic, or other origins. For discussions of definitions of sexual violence, see Elizabeth D. Heineman, "Sexuality and Nazism: The

fewer first-person accounts from victims of sexual assaults. Perpetrators' narratives, too, are quite hard to find. In fact, detailed descriptions of sexual assaults rarely exist outside of the courtroom, particularly in the context of the Eastern Front, where rapes were rarely prosecuted.[13] In general, the paucity of documentary evidence for sexual violence presents particular challenges for its historical investigation. This explains why most studies rely overwhelmingly on eyewitness testimonies.

However, it is not the fragmentary nature of the archival record that poses the biggest problems but rather historians' tendency to insist that only "hard facts," "proof," and "veracity" can be considered *the* ultimate evidentiary criteria to validate source material. Despite a critical archival consciousness and increasing openness of historians of Nazism and the Holocaust to the various turns—cultural, linguistic, and visual—that have transformed historical methodology and the history of sexuality, the discipline still struggles to free itself from what Arondekar has called the positivist "extractive" logic of the archive as a "site of endless promise."[14] My aim here is not to discredit methodological approaches that concentrate on empirical data—after all, we are dealing with mass violence and genocide.[15] Rather, I am suggesting a complementary close reading of empirical sources, a reading that, rather than peeling away these sources' uncertain and subjective elements, instead directly engages with their ambiguous and contradictory meanings.[16]

With its obvious limitations and lack of concrete provenance, the photograph I have described is an excellent case in point. Photographs insist on

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Double Unspeakable?," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1–2 (2002): 22–66; Helga Amesberger, Katrin Auer, and Birgit Halbmayr, *Sexualisierte Gewalt: Weibliche Erfahrungen in NS-Konzentrationslagern* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2004); Doris F. Bergen, "Sexual Violence in the Holocaust: Unique or Typical?," in *Lessons and Legacies VII: The Holocaust in International Perspective*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 179–200.

[13] Birgit Beck, *Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt: Sexualverbrechen vor deutsche Militärgerichten 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004), 91–104. See also Isabel Heinemann, *"Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut": Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003), 42–47.

[14] Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 1–26. For a critical reflection on the factuality of historical sources, see Saul Friedländer, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[15] The exceptional difficulty that Holocaust historians have in surrendering to the archive as the ultimate standard of veracity stems from the fact that since the 1950s they have often been called as expert witnesses in trials, and they feel a professional responsibility to counter Holocaust denial. Richard J. Evans discusses these issues in "History, Memory, and the Law: The Historian as Expert Witness," *History and Theory* 41, no. 3 (2002): 326–45. For a timeline of Holocaust denial, see the article of the online Holocaust encyclopedia of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10008003.

[16] Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*, 3. On the method of close reading, see also Terry Eagelton, *How to Read Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

interpretation; a single image always contains multiple meanings "beyond the immediate control and consciousness of its creator."[17] As a material trace of a staged moment of lived wartime reality by combatants, what I will call the "rape-joke" photograph casts a very subjective light on history. This photographic evidence requires attention to what historian Jennifer Evans has called "shifting subjectivities," or the way in which a photograph conjures the subjectively perceived social realities and fluctuating constructions of selfhood.[18] I build upon Evans's claim that it is not the "reality" or the "documentary value" the photo gestures toward that is important but rather what *the viewers see in it*.

Today's readers might first notice the striking violence and horror of the image. However, one must consider that contemporary ways of seeing and points of reference are framed by much more recent conceptualizations of the Holocaust and Nazi crimes.[19] Once we engage with the gaze of the photographer, it becomes clear that the depicted scene follows a completely different logic: despite its indisputably violent content, the photograph manages to convey the impression of fun, even as the camera captures a rape joke in a fiercely colonial context.[20]

I will begin with an exploration of the arrangement of this image. After decoding the social practices, individual agencies, and gendered group dynamics within the violent moment depicted in the photograph, I then widen the analytical lens and situate the source within the broader historical and geographical context of the Nazi occupation of the East and its embedded culture of rape. However, the relative impunity toward sexual violence by German military authorities alone does not explain the staging of this rape-joke image. Therefore, in the third section of this article, I will readjust my lens to the larger cultural and social practices of colonial and wartime

[17] Elizabeth Harvey and Maiken Umbach, "Introduction: Photography and Twentieth-Century German History," *Central European History* 48, no. 3 (2015): 289. On reading photographic images, see W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[18] Jennifer V. Evans, "Seeing Subjectivity: Erotic Photography and the Optics of Desire," *American Historical Review* 18, no. 2 (2013): 430–62, 432.

[19] There is now rich scholarship on Holocaust visual representation. See, for example, Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); and Daniel H. Magilow and Lisa Silverman, *Holocaust Representations in History: An Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

[20] On Nazi colonialism, see Wendy Lower, "A New Ordering of Race and Space: Nazi Colonial Dreams in Zhytomyr Ukraine, 1941–1944," *German Studies Review* 25, no. 2 (2002): 227–54; David Furber and Wendy Lower, "Colonialism and Genocide in Nazi-Occupied Poland and Ukraine," in *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History,* ed. Dirk Moses (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), 372–402; and Elissa Mailänder Koslov, "'Going East': Colonial Experiences and Practices of Violence among Female and Male Majdanek Camp Guards (1941–44)," *Journal of Genocide Research* 10, no. 4 (2008): 563–82.

amateur photography. Snapshots reflect how soldiers perceived themselves in relation not only to the local population of a foreign country but also to existing photographic conventions. As a self-portrayed group photo, the rape image can thus be read both as a trophy photograph and what Silvan Niedermeier calls a "colonial selfie," giving us yet another insight into the soldiers' mindset and the meaning they were making of war.[21]

Merely a Rape Joke? Creating Group Cohesion through Sexual Violence

The men in the photograph exude a light and cheerful mood; their shirts are casually unbuttoned, and two of them are even topless. The trees still have their leaves, meaning it must be late spring or summer. It appears as though the soldiers are enjoying a break. They stand together around the recumbent woman, whose legs are spread apart and skirt pulled up so high that the viewer sees her underwear. Some of the men directly face the camera, clearly aware that someone is photographing them, while another crouches on his knees, close to the center of attention. And yet another soldier, whom we see from the side, is practically on top of the body as he grinningly turns his head toward the camera. One of his comrades stands immediately behind him, pulling at his trousers as if to say, "It's my turn now." Yet this gesture of pulling him up is not so self-evident. As the man on top of the woman is clearly pushing himself up on his arm in order to avoid any bodily contact, one also wonders: Is she is alive? Is she injured or even dead? The woman at first appears unconscious, but then one realizes that her right leg is flexed. She must be alive then? The soldiers seem almost too relaxed for the photograph to be the documentation of an actual rape.

We possess neither details about this woman—her name, nationality, or religion—nor any indication of the context in which this coercive sex act and moment of collective hilarity took place. What is particularly striking about this photo is that the truly egregious aspect of the violence is not evident at first glance, as the soldiers seem so relaxed and at ease. The humorous and light tenor almost entirely obscures the rape act, and the invisible photographer's angle is such that he closes the circle, therefore dragging the spectators into the scene and forcing them to participate in the spectacle.

The most interesting aspect of this photo is arguably the insight it provides scholars into the nebulous and rarely depicted social dynamics and

[21] The term "colonial selfies" was coined by Silvan Niedermeier in an unpublished paper, "Pictures, Frames, and Silences: The Potentials and Limits of Reading U.S. Soldiers' Photographs and Photo Albums of the Philippine-American War," presented at the conference for the Netzwerk Alltagsgeschichte Transnational, "Everyday Stories: Rethinking Alltagsgeschichte from a Transnational Perspective," 12–14 June 2015, Eberhard Karls Universität, Tübingen.

cultural practices of male bonding around sexual violence at war. Historian Thomas Kühne has given a convincing reading of German military masculinities during World War II, arguing that during the Holocaust experiences of collective killing constituted a system of male bonding based on the "pleasure of belonging through terror."[22] The rape photograph allows historians to observe different levels of social interaction and agency within a single moment of violence, or, more accurately, to explore the performative dimensions of buddy culture and sexual violence. As scholars of cultural studies have demonstrated, social performances constitute rather complex interactions between performers and audiences.[23] The photograph invites us to explore violence as a stylized, self-conscious, and performative practice that occurs in a seemingly spontaneous and not fully controlled manner. However, it would be misleading to assume that the picture reflects an entirely spontaneous action: it was captured by a photographer of whom the crowd was well aware. Thus, it is precisely the communicative dimension of this violent multidirectional interaction that generates meaning and renders social norms explicit.[24]

The photograph clearly shows that one must interrogate not only the individual performing the (staged) act of sexual violence and the intended target but also a third stratum of agency and experience: the male observers. The soldiers at the center of the photograph demonstrate their profound disrespect toward a female body—likely an enemy woman—through their mimicry of the rape act and their laughter. The compliance of the buddies transcends the act of simply standing by, nodding or laughing, by actively engaging in the rape joke. As sociologist Teresa Koloma Beck astutely posits, violence is not merely a form of physical harm intentionally inflicted by one person on another; as social process, violence is embedded within a triangular web of power relations, "where it is not only exercised and suffered, but also observed and judged."[25] Hence, these onlookers are not merely impartial

[22] Thomas Kühne, "The Pleasure of Terror: Belonging through Genocide," in *Pleasure and Power in Nazi Germany*, ed. Pamela E. Swett, Corey Ross, and Fabrice d'Almeida (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 234–55. See also Thomas Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship: Hitler's Soldiers, Male Bonding and Mass Violence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 107–214. This is a revised, expanded, and updated translation of Kühne, *Kameradschaft: Die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

[23] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519–31.

[24] Ibid., 526.

[25] As the sociologist Teresa Koloma Beck argues, only in a second stage of subjectification do performers become perpetrators and targets victims. Teresa Koloma Beck, "The Eye of the Beholder: Violence as a Social Process," *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 5, no. 2 (2011): 345–56, 350. For a close reading of power dynamics, see Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 208–26.

observers; rather, they are a constitutive part of the event. Applying Koloma Beck's theory to this viscerally emotive photograph clearly demonstrates the socializing and empowering effect of sexual violence. It is exactly within such situations of violent male bonding—with the acceptance of a man's comrades—that violence demonstrates social power.[26] Furthermore, as this photo shows, this power is highly sexualized.

It is remarkable that the soldiers seem to feel socially entitled to fool around with the woman's body. Like other forms of extreme violence, such as humiliation and the intentional promotion of suffering (or death), rape is an overpowering act that strips a person of all agency.[27] In addition, rape always sexualizes violence. Feminist scholars like Catherine MacKinnon locate sexuality within a theory of asymmetrical power relations between men and women. In this understanding, sexual acts become powerful tools to mark hierarchies, understood as a constant creation of dominance/subordination, person/thing, top/bottom relations.[28] Throughout the mock rape, and irrespective of whether any penetration actually occurred, the soldiers reduced the woman to a sexual object. She becomes nothing but body. In addition, the soldiers' sexualized subjugation of the woman also sends a powerful message to the victim's community and to the enemy population more broadly.[29] This rape act thus translates into a powerful message of both Nazi domination and male power.

The viewer is likely to see the woman as a target of male domination, making her a victim with little or no capacity to act. How did she get into this situation? And what about her agency? Undoubtedly, this question represents the greatest interpretative difficulty of the photograph. If we rotate the image forty-five degrees and zoom in on the woman's face, suddenly her facial expression is not that obvious: Is a part of her face missing, or is her left cheek simply covered by her hair? Is she crying in pain, or is

[26] Koloma Beck, "Eye of the Beholder," 350. According to historian Birgit Beck, one-third of the rape cases tried by military courts in the East were gang rapes; see *Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt*, 237.

[27] For a definition of extreme violence, see Jacques Sémelin, "Introduction: Extreme Violence; Can We Understand It?," *International Social Science Journal* 17, no. 54 (2002): 429–31.

[28] Catherine MacKinnon, "Sexuality, Pornography and Method: 'Pleasure under Patriarchy,'" *Ethics* 99, no. 2 (1989): 314–46, 325, 328. MacKinnon's analysis of sexed and sexualized asymmetric power relations is very useful to frame a rape setting. However, I do not share her radical feminist understanding that all sexual intercourse between a man and a woman is akin to rape. Feminist distinctions between male subjects and female objects do not make sense in every context. As Cornelie Usborne shows in her contribution to this special issue of *JHS*, racial bias is critical to the power relations in this context. At home, "Aryan" women held sexual power over foreign workers, and they used that power to get romance and sexual pleasure.

[29] Ruth Seifert, "Der weibliche Körper als Symbol und Zeichen: Geschlechtsspezifische Gewalt und die kulturelle Konstruktion des Krieges," in *Gewalt im Krieg: Ausübung, Erfahrung und Verweigerung von Gewalt in Kriegen des 20. Jahrhunderts,* ed. Andreas Gestrich (Münster: LIT Verlag, 1996), 13–33.

she even laughing? It is very difficult to tell. It is, however, possible that the woman in the rape-joke picture got caught outside a remote village by a group of drunken Germans and that she played along with the joking soldiers, hoping to get out of trouble and avoid rape. Another possibility could be that the German men offered her money to pose for this photo. Perhaps she was a local woman who knew the soldiers. Maybe she was sexually or romantically involved with one of them, and she trusted them without anticipating that a flirtation could go awry and turn into a rape. Or perhaps she was threatened and taken by the soldiers with force.

Even though private photographs shot by Wehrmacht soldiers in Ukraine and other Soviet-occupied territories demonstrate that many women formed close relationships with German occupiers, this does not equalize the power asymmetries.[30] The borders between sexual barter, romantic relationships, and sexual violence were fluid; hence, at any time local women could become the targets of sexual assault. While we cannot tell what exactly happened to the woman in the photograph, it is nevertheless important to open up different analytical frameworks and consider that her role might have been more complicated than we first assume.

The fact that we know so little about this woman and that the role she played is so blurred arises from the fact that the photograph is not about her; it is all about the German soldiers' male bonding. The joking character of the depicted rape act was necessarily meant to speak to the soldiers' peers. In this respect, the self-assured gestures of the man imitating the sex act and his laughing comrade in the white shirt stand out. These two soldiers clearly seek the attention of their onlookers through an ostentatious show of violent virility that may have earned them social capital or power within the group. As I have discussed elsewhere, physical violence is a tool to communicate and negotiate power within a perpetrator community and is thus central to the formation of power relations.[31] Moreover, performative acts that can connote sex have specific social and gendered functions, particularly within the microsocial context of military masculinity, where soldiers represent an important measure of manhood to the institution as well as to society.[32] Thus, the performers in the center of the photo not only show off how brave, funny, and masculine they are but also, through the act of gang rape as mockery, present themselves as hypermasculine and

[30] Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*, 69–71, 305–7. On sexual barter, see also Anna Hájková, "Sexual Barter in Times of Genocide: Negotiating the Sexual Economy of the Theresienstadt Ghetto," *Signs* 38, no. 3 (2013): 503–33.

[31] Elissa Mailänder, *Female SS Guards and Workaday Violence: The Majdanek Concentration Camp, 1942–1944* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), 231–53.

[32] Cynthia Cockburn, "'Why Are *You* Doing This to *Me*?': Identity, Power and Sexual Violence in War," in *Sexuality, Gender, and Power: Intersectional and Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Anna G. Jonasdottir, Valerie Bryson, and Kathleen B. Jones (New York: Routledge, 2011), 189–204, 197.

heterosexual. Christine Helliwell has cautioned that rape feminizes women while simultaneously masculinizing men.[33] Rape, one could argue with Helliwell, imposes difference as much as it *produces* difference.[34]

In fact, when one adjusts the analytical framework, there are actually three focal points with different primary actors: the rape scene performed by the three men in the middle; the man in the white shirt, who is laughing; and the very present photographer, who flatters the assembled crowd. The audience of fellow soldiers plays a significant role in contributing to and legitimizing the misogynistic rape joke. It is they who give the leading performers the platform and legitimacy to act upon and defile a female body. Only one man—the fifth soldier from the left in the front row—looks neither at the rape scene nor at the photographer. The photograph is scratched through his face, making his expression difficult to read, but the fact that his attention is being caught by something off to the right stands in direct contrast to the way that the other soldiers are focused on the camera, trying to draw the attention of the photographer with their gestures. The only other soldier not directly focused on the act of rape is laughing up to the sky and is thus clearly reacting to the scene.

Strangely enough, it is precisely these internal differences between the soldiers that maintain group cohesion between the violent agents and those who might not fully share or buy into the rape joke. Following Kühne, we can acknowledge that there was indeed space for dispute, as some Wehrmacht and even SS soldiers were nauseated by their jobs and repeatedly quarreled with each other about how to kill most efficiently or in a more humane way. The important point Kühne makes is that despite tension the group did not fall apart: "These men stuck together and experienced themselves as a community—not least by coping with their internal disputes."[35] There was, in other words, a certain consensus within these conflicts.

Brutal colleagues can indeed serve a distinct social function: they serve as negative figures of reference, allowing their colleagues to deem themselves

[33] Christine Helliwell, "'It's Only a Penis': Rape, Feminism, and Difference," *Signs* 25, no. 3 (2000): 796, 812.

[34] However, political scientist Aaron Belkin has underlined that anal penetration produces a range of meanings depending on the situation and context and the sex and gender of its agent. As his case study on the Naval Academy and the US Marines demonstrates, service members penetrate and are penetrated continuously, which undermines a straightforward connection between penetration and dominance or penetration and masculinity. In particular, crossing the line ceremonies and hazing rituals make male-to-male (gang) rape into a birth ritual during which heterosexual recruits receiving sex pass a "manly" test of endurance, proving that they are worthy members of the group. In Belkin's understanding, this inherent confusion between penetrating and penetrable helps to produce docile service members. Aaron Belkin, *Bring Me Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Façade of American Empire, 1898–2001* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 79–122, 80, 86–87, 89–92.

[35] Kühne, "The Pleasure of Terror," 240.

to be humane, decent, and compassionate.[36] As a result and irrespective of their approval or disapproval, all soldiers in the picture are part of the spectacle and thus served a role by abetting the sexual violence. It is precisely the dissenting members of the peer audience who tacitly or even reluctantly enable sexual transgression; the more fellow soldiers tolerate, the greater the possibilities for violence and cruelty.[37] Perhaps the most radical conclusion is that there is no "out-group" in constellations of violence, which makes this shared experience such an important and powerful moment of bonding.

Another layer of interpretation for the soldiers' collective engagement in sexual violence is that competition acts as the main vehicle of masculine socialization and gender performance. Although the viewer can never know the exact circumstances of the scenario or the nature of the individual motivations of the soldiers, the photograph nevertheless depicts a moment of male bonding where the desire for performative subversion clearly serves as a form of social recognition and/or personal satisfaction for individual group members. There are, however, different possible interpretations of each soldier's role in this situation: the three men in the center of the scene seem to be the leading protagonists of the joke, and their aim seems to be to impress their fellow comrades with something gross and unexpectedly audacious. A second possibility is that it was not them who took the initiative; rather, they were challenged by a bet or forced by the group or an individual member to do something awkward and abject. Here one soldier—the third man from the right, who is visibly enjoying a good laugh—stands out for his extremely self-confident body language. A third possibility is that this was a competition between the soldiers with the goal of continually upping the ante, playfully testing how far they could go.

Even outside of the constraints of a militarized context, masculinity is highly competitive, a fact that Raewyn Connell demonstrates for the educational system as well as the corporate world.[38] Connell's taxonomy of masculinities shines a further light on the power relations and hierarchies at stake in this photograph.[39] Clearly, not all of the depicted Wehrmacht

[36] Harald Welzer, *Täter: Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2005), 161. See also Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer, *Soldaten: Protokolle vom Kämpfen, Töten und Sterben* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2011), 125–26. This book is also available in English: *Soldiers: On Fighting, Killing and Dying; The Secret Second World War Tapes of German POWs* (London: McClelland & Stewart, 2012). Page citations in what follows are from the German original.

[37] Véronique Nahoum-Grappe, "L'usage politique de la cruauté: L'épuration ethnique (ex-Yougoslavie, 1991–1995)," in *De la violence*, ed. Françoise Héritier (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1996), 273–323.

[38] R. W. Connell, "Swots and Wimps: The Interplay of Masculinity and Education," *Oxford Review of Education* 15, no. 3 (1989): 291–303; and Connell, "The Social Organization of Masculinity," in *Masculinities* (1995; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 67–86.

[39] Raewyn Connell and James Messerschmidt identify four distinct modes of masculinity: hegemonic, complicit, marginal, and subordinate. One might add "protest masculinities," which challenge dominant and well-accepted forms of masculinities. Raewyn Connell and

soldiers show equal enthusiasm. But again, in a culture of "tough" masculinity where brutality and mercilessness are valorized, men who refuse to participate have a distinct function; marginalized by their peers and superiors, they help to bring the culturally shared and socially accepted hegemonic ideal "into sharp focus."[40] Following Kühne, then, we can see that the complicit bystanders not only facilitate but also empower the hegemonic, sexually violent gender performances.[41]

However, in order to grasp the particularities of the soldiers' gendered identities, it is helpful to acknowledge the irresolvable contradictions and ambivalences that structure military masculinity. Soldiers often find themselves constrained to social norms that include a constant need to prove their manhood. As political scientist Aaron Belkin has pointed out in his study on the American army, military masculinity projects itself as powerful, dominant, and penetrating, a type of hypermasculinity. One significant pattern of this gendered self-understanding is to gain legitimacy from the subservience of women and male civilians. Yet, as Belkin has rightfully cautioned, military masculinity isn't exactly "masculine." The fact that soldiers are the armed representatives of state and military institutions gives them considerable status to use violence in combat or under certain other conditions. At the same time, these men are trained to subordinate themselves within the military hierarchy and to endure pain. Service members are constantly subjected to violence in order to prepare them to handle violence—as both givers and takers.[42]

Thus, the very structure of the military makes the status of a "real" man particularly fragile and contradictory because the institution claims a vigorous, aggressive, and virile ideal of masculinity while subjecting its soldiers to obedience, submission, and humiliation. In combat, soldiers constantly have to prove to themselves and their comrades that they are worthy of fighting and killing while facing fear of death, anxieties, doubts, and trauma. Hence, the tensions between the perceived aspirations of masculinity and the possibility of achieving or satisfying them are immense. This regularly leads to "hypercorrections," the pretentious overplaying of gender roles in words and actions.[43] The rape joke can be seen as such an overstatement

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James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 847.

[40] Kühne, "The Pleasure of Terror," 242.

[41] Hegemonic masculinity is not an entity but embodies only culturally shared and "currently accepted" gender performances; hence, it is a historically mobile relation. Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.

[42] For an example of soldiers who suffered and perpetrated violence during their training, see Yonson Ahn, "'Taming Soldiers': The Gender Politics of Japanese Soldiers in Total War," in *Gender and Mass Dictatorship: Global Perspectives,* ed. Jie-Hyun Lim and Karen Petrone (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 213–33; and Belkin, *Bring Me Men*.

[43] Etan Bloom, "Towards a Theory of the Modern Hebrew Handshake," in *Jewish Masculinities: German Jews, Gender, and History*, ed. Benjamin Maria Baader, Sharon Gillerman, and Paul Lerner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 152–85, 162–63; see also

of the soldiers' virile authority in order to gain gendered, hypersexualized self-assurance.

With all this in mind, the rape photograph, in its radical explicitness, not only points to the microsocial group dynamic but also fully reflects the brutality of the war being waged in the East and its climate of toleration toward sexual violence. Yet what did rape and sexual assault actually mean in the Nazi-occupied East? In order to peel back more layers of these extremely politicized gender dynamics, one must reconstitute individual soldiers' frames of reference as well as the specific sociopolitical constellations in which they acted. By drawing upon other sources such as the transcripts of secretly taped conversations between captured German POWs in Britain and the United States, the following section pulls apart the complex nexus of warfare, sex, and violence in the Nazi East.

SOLDIERS, CONQUERORS, COLONIZERS: SEX, CRIMES, AND WARFARE ON THE EASTERN FRONT

In order to understand how sex and brutal forms of violence became intertwined with warfare on the Eastern Front, it is particularly revealing to investigate conversations between soldiers that took place at a time when it was not clear how the war would end. Through their assessment of the transcripts of secretly taped conversations between German POWs held in American and British POW camps, Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer have recently demonstrated that German soldiers actually talked about their experiences of violence with their fellow imprisoned comrades.[44] One particular conversation taped in an American camp even bolsters the theory that POWs spoke extensively about women, sex, and war adventures. The officer who transcribed the tape and whose primary concern was finding war criminals and gathering intelligence was clearly uninterested in these parts of the conversation and simply laconically noted the word "women" at half-hour intervals in the transcript.[45]

If many German soldiers in captivity seemed to have been ashamed of the violence against women and children they had perpetrated or witnessed, these regrets did not deter them from casually talking about the sexual violence deployed in encounters with Russian women. A statement by one Captain Reimbold highlights this point:

> Reimbold: One thing I can tell you directly, there's no rumor about it. In the first officers' quarters where I was held prisoner, there was a very stupid young lieutenant from Frankfurt, a real snot-nose. Eight

Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 62.

[44] Neitzel and Welzer, *Soldaten*, 197–200, 217–28. See also Sönke Neitzel, *Tapping Hitler's Generals: Transcripts of Secret Conversations, 1942–45* (Barnsley: Frontline Books, 2007).

[45] Neitzel and Welzer, *Soldaten*, 224.

> of us were sitting around a table talking about Russia. And he said: "We got hold of a female spy who was running around in the area. We hit her on the noggin with a stick and then flayed her behind with an unsheathed bayonet. Then we fucked her, threw her out, shot at her, and, while she was lying on her back, lobbed grenades. Every time we got one close she screamed. In the end, she died, and we threw her body away." And imagine this! There were eight German officers sitting at the table with me all laughing their heads off. I couldn't stand it. I got up and said, "Gentlemen, this goes too far."[46]

The captain did not witness the act of sexual violence himself; he is referring to a conversation he had had in another POW camp. By showing that he was not like the "snot-nose" from Frankfurt who bragged about sexually mistreating Russian women, he aimed to show his fellow imprisoned comrades that he was a decent guy. In contrast, the young lieutenant from Frankfurt wanted to show off and impress his cellmates with a salacious story about the sexual transgression of Wehrmacht members, and very successfully so, because the audience rewarded him with laughter.[47] But Captain Reimbold himself capitalizes on this sensationalist and quite pornographic rape story with the aim of entertaining and impressing his audience. Depending on the group dynamic, the same captain who now distanced himself from the horror might have himself participated in the collective laughter. The language used to describe rape in the recorded conversations is equally lurid, failing to capture the forced and violent nature of the sexual intercourse. Instead, hypermasculine colloquial terms such as *ficken* (fuck), *bürsten* (screw), *vögeln* (getting a piece of ass), and *hacken* (bang) normalize rape, making it seem a routine sex act with a rough undertone but no real traces of violence and coercion.[48]

Sex and sexual violence were widespread on the Eastern Front.[49] But what was it that made sex and, more precisely, sexual violence against local women so socially acceptable to German soldiers? It is safe to assume that it was first and foremost the racialized aspect of the German war in the East and its colonization policies that accelerated violence like that described in taped POW conversations and shown in the rape photograph. Although racial stratification of the occupied populations and ethnic cleansing programs were deployed against all occupied European countries, the Nazi leaders focused their resettlement and colonization policy on Eastern

[46] Ibid., 173.

[47] Laughter within the military is often subjected to peer pressure and hierarchy. See Belkin, *Bring Me Men*, 40, 83–84, 88, 145.

[48] Neitzel and Welzer, *Soldaten*, 197–200, 217–28.

[49] For overviews, see Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: Die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion 1941–1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003); Beck, *Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt*; Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*; and Mühlhäuser's contribution to this special issue of *JHS*.

Europe.[50] This first became clear in 1939 in Poland, where the causal link between ethnic German resettlement and anti-Jewish policies was strongest. Colonization continued in 1941 in Galicia, Ukraine, the Baltics, and other Soviet territories. Hitler and the German High Command made it very clear that the war in the East was about racial subordination and annexation of *Lebensraum* (living space), as Wendy Lower has demonstrated in her study of "empire building" in the Ukraine.[51]

The German soldiers therefore went to the East as conquerors and exploiters with a distinct sense of supremacy. Although Nazi occupation often involved forced labor, deportation, and famine for local non-Jewish populations and systematic murder for the Jews, the quest for *Lebensraum* was not solely driven by an ideology of annihilation of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. Nazi Germany's fiercely racist mission, which the Wehrmacht largely supported, was also to enslave the Slavic populations.[52] Hitler's policies had long aimed to unite ethnic German populations (*Volksdeutsche*) living outside German borders into the Reich, which required removing and resettling twenty million Poles from the General Government (Nazi-occupied Poland).[53] As Elizabeth Harvey has pointed out, Germans in the so-called Nazi East had a very distinct sense of their superiority and demonstrated a real "consciousness of their own mastery" (*Herrenbewusstsein*) toward the local populations and the Jews.[54] This sense of domination exceeded the dictates of economic and territorial imperatives, and the specific warfare tactics of the German army in the East fostered unprecedented levels of mass violence. The so-called criminal orders, issued in the spring of 1941, authorized soldiers to shoot suspicious civilians as well as soldiers in uniform who were presumed to be political commissars. This effectively declared "open season on both prisoners of war and the civilian population of the occupied areas" and led to increasing brutalization of local populations by

[50] Wendy Lower, "Hitler's 'Garden of Eden' in Ukraine: Nazi Colonialism, Volksdeutsche and the Holocaust, 1941–1944," in *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*, ed. Jonathan Petropoulos and John K. Roth (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 186–204.

[51] See chapter 1 in Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

[52] As Adam Tooze has argued, the Nazis also pursued economic goals in the East, exploiting all available natural and human resources. See chapters 10, 11, and 16 in Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

[53] Although this plan was implemented on a small scale in occupied Poland, where about one hundred thousand Poles were forcibly resettled, compelled into forced labor, or killed, the ultimate plans for a geopolitical reorganization of the occupied East were much more ambitious. See Dieter Pohl, *Von der "Judenpolitik" zum Judenmord: Der Distrikt Lublin des Generalgouvernements 1939–1944* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993), 95–97; Czesław Madajczyk, *Vom Generalplan Ost zum Generalsiedlungsplan* (Munich: de Gruyter, 1994); and Mechtild Rössler and Sabine Schleiermacher, *Der "Generalplan Ost": Hauptlinien der nationalsozialistischen Planungs- und Vernichtungspolitik* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993).

[54] Elizabeth Harvey, *Women in the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 167.

German troops.[55] It is therefore hard to overlook the links between Nazi racial policies, the soldiers' behavior, and the perpetuation of sex crimes.

During the Nazi invasion, the rape of a Soviet or East European woman was not considered a crime, because Nazi ideology deemed them inferior "others" not worthy of honor. By comparison, in France rapes were relatively rare, and in cases where they happened, the crimes were severely punished by the military authorities, as Fabrice Virgili has recently pointed out. It was not until the winter of 1943–44, when the situation in France became precarious for the German occupiers, that the rapes significantly increased and became more and more tolerated.[56] By contrast, from the outset of military operations in the East, the High Command of the Armed Forces (Oberkommando des Heeres) justified the invasion of the Soviet Union as a prophylactic measure to protect German women against sexual violence by the Bolshevik "hordes" who wanted to invade Nazi Germany.[57] Such propaganda bestialized and hypersexualized the Soviet enemy by nurturing deep-seated fears and creating a moral imperative to protect the German homeland by presenting the invasion as a measure of self-defense and therefore justified.

Although the German military's criminal code officially forbade all crimes covered by the civilian criminal code, which included rape, sexual coercion, and sexual relations with minors, soldiers could commit sexual assaults with relative impunity in the East. According to Birgit Beck, the Wehrmacht High Command made the prosecution of rapes a very low priority in the East; most courts-martial dealt with desertion, insubordination, absence without leave, disobedience, and theft.[58] Under these circumstances, the estimated number of unreported cases of sexual violence must have been considerable. Beck's research further demonstrates that in those few instances when rape was actually adjudicated, the cases were handled mostly as a manifestation of a breakdown in discipline and a danger to the reputation of the troops rather than as a war crime.[59] It comes as little surprise that in this specific

[55] Kühne, "The Pleasure of Terror," 246.

[56] Fabrice Virgili, "Les viols commis par l'armée allemande en France (1940–1944)," *vingtième siècle: revue d'histoire* 130, no. 2 (2016): 103–20.

[57] Gisela Bock, "Frauen und Geschlechterbeziehungen in der nationalsozialistischen Rassenpolitik," in *Nach Osten: Verdeckte Spuren nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen,* ed. Theresa Wobbe (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1992), 126–30.

[58] Birgit Beck, "Sexual Violence and Its Prosecution by Courts Martial of the Wehrmacht," in *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937–1945*, ed. Roger Chickering et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 317–33.

[59] Both Beck and Mühlhäuser underline the fact that the rape of local women was a problem in the eyes of the authorities insofar as this lack of sexual restraint was akin to betrayal for the Wehrmacht, as it damaged its image. Regina Mühlhäuser, "Eine Frage der Ehre: Anmerkungen zur Sexualität deutscher Soldaten während des Zweiten Weltkrieges," in *Ideologie und Moral im nationalsozialismus*, ed. Wolfgang Bialas and Lothar Fritze (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 153–74, 154; and Beck, *Wehrmacht und sexuelle Gewalt*, 427, 308–25.

context of the Eastern Front, rape was handled as a trivial offense. Some sources even suggest the intimate commingling of violence and sex within the contexts of war and genocide, as the commanding officers of the Wehrmacht, police, and SS often organized Bacchanalian fests after mass shootings, allowing the men to unwind with wine, food, dirty jokes, and sex as a reward for their "hard work."[60]

Yet even if the punishment of soldiers who committed rape was not a top priority of the Wehrmacht command, uncontrolled and unlawful sex with Eastern European and Jewish women still posed significant medical concerns and a serious ideological problem. One great fear of the Nazi regime as well as of the army command was that sexually active soldiers might catch sexually transmitted diseases or impregnate local women.[61] Beyond this medical problem, sex with so-called inferior races also violated official racial policies, thus becoming a matter of "purity and danger."[62] Yet concerns in Berlin did not translate to the situation on the ground. This was especially true in the East, where the Wehrmacht command's own policies were a bricolage of prohibition and toleration. By distributing free condoms, by providing medical assistance in postcoital sanitation facilities, and by the simple fact that diseased soldiers who went for treatment were not penalized, the army authorities were in practice accepting that soldiers were having (un)protected sexual relations with non-Aryan women.[63] The German Army's many prophylactic initiatives clearly demonstrate that the first priority was to protect the health and safety of the soldiers in combat as well as their Aryan women at home at the expense of the safety and lives of the local civilian women, who had no access to medical treatment. The "mixed messages," to borrow a concept from Mary Louise Roberts, sent out by the Wehrmacht command in the Nazi-occupied East created an inherently contradictory reality, since the prevention measures normalized the soldiers' transgressive sexual conduct that these policies aimed to

[60] For examples, see Christian Ingrao, "Sociabilité et violence: Rituels de camaraderie dans les Einsatzgruppen," in *Des gestes en histoire formes et significations des gestualités médicales*, ed. Anne-Claude Ambroise-Rendu, Fabrice d'Almeido, and Nicole Edelman (Paris: Seli Arslan, 2006), 184–93; Kühne, "The Pleasure of Terror," 240–41; and Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 449–50.

[61] On the question of unwanted children and abortion, see Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*, 309–66; and Gabriele Czarnowski, "Women's Crimes, State Crimes: Abortion in Nazi Germany," in *Gender and Crime in Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret L. Arnot and Cornelie Usborne (London: UCL Press, 1999), 238–56, 244.

[62] As Belkin shows, Western warrior masculinity has been associated closely with the idea of being clean, self-restrained, racially pure, and sexually moral; anything else is unmanly. Belkin, *Bring Me Men*, 125–50, 133. On the different meanings of pollution as a boundary transgression, see Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (1966; repr., London: Routledge, 2002).

[63] Beck, "Sexual Violence," 317–31; Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*, 240–365; and Röger, *Kriegsbeziehungen*, 75–167.

prevent.[64] As a result, the tension between rigid, state-prescribed regulations and disregard for them by Wehrmacht soldiers encouraged not only heterosexual intercourse but also sexual violence.

The Wehrmacht's task to conquer, economically exploit, and, in the case of occupied Poland and Ukraine, evict Eastern European populations was, in fact, a very empowering experience, offering the soldiers multiple occasions to transgress official orders. On the ground, as Mühlhäuser has demonstrated, sexual exploitation and violence took many forms: rape and sexual slavery, forced disrobing and molestation, physical and/or verbal assaults, and humiliating mockery rituals such as forced naked dancing and body searches.[65] Furthermore, eyewitness accounts of Soviet and Jewish survivors testify that along with rape, dismemberment and castration were also commonly practiced in German-occupied territories in the East.[66] Some of the taped POW conversations reveal that necrophilia also occasionally occurred on the Eastern Front.[67] Within the framework of Nazi ideology, the act of transgressing the racial boundary was ultimately a more serious infraction than the act of sexual violence, whether it occurred within the borders of the Reich or in the occupied Eastern territories. Yet this did not prevent German soldiers from sexually abusing Jews. Instead, it encouraged them to take precautions by, for instance, murdering Jewish women after a rape to destroy the corpus delicti of the first crime.[68]

This brings us back to the rape photograph, where soldiers took the time to pose for a group photo mocking a local woman. Considering the specific context of Nazi warfare and the occupation of Eastern Europe, it is very possible that this picture was taken either before or after a rape. Yet despite the licentiousness of the sexual violence in the East, it is still surprising that an image like this exists. After all, depending on the attitude of one's military superiors, sex with local and particularly with Jewish women, not

[64] What Roberts demonstrates for a totally different context—the US Army's liberation of France—is to a certain extent translatable to the German Army in the East. Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 171, 175–76.

[65] Regina Mühlhäuser, "The Unquestioned Crime: Sexual Violence by German Soldiers during the War of Annihilation in the Soviet Union, 1941–45," in *Rape in Wartime,* ed. Raphaëlle Branche and Fabrice Virgili (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 34–46.

[66] Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*, see esp. chap. 2; Bergen, "Sexual Violence," 183–84; Wendy Jo Gertjejanssen, "Heroes, Survivors: Sexual Violence on the Eastern Front during World War II" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2004); and Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 150, 449–50.

[67] For example, one German POW told another about how a presumed SS officer shot a "beautiful Russian woman" and then raped her dead body in front of his comrades. Neitzel and Welzer, *Soldaten*, 228.

[68] Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*, 85–155. See also Klaus-Michael Mallmann, Volker Riess, and Wolfram Pyta, eds., *Deutscher Osten 1939–1945: Der Weltanschauungskrieg in Photos und Texten* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003), 155; Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 450; and Neitzel and Welzer, *Soldaten*, 162–65, 219.

to mention rape, could still lead to varying degrees of disciplinary action. Why would the soldiers risk capturing an image that so obviously flouted Nazi racial and sexual policies as well as sociocultural norms? How can we interpret this act of taboo breaking in ways that explain what was so funny to the soldiers in the photograph? This raises further questions about the mere act of shooting the photograph as well as the particular meanings of this act both during and after the click of the shutter. It is important to expand the frame of analysis and trace the cultural and social photographic practices of amateur photographers. Two photographic genres seem to be particularly relevant here: the trophy photograph and what we would today call a selfie.

An Army of Amateur Snapshotters: Trophy Selfies in the Nazi East

Taking a group photo such as the image from the Romanian archives is a highly self-affirmative and self-aware act. Irrespective of the motives of the primary agents in the photograph, their actions had three explicit and implicit audiences: their peers, the photographer, and future viewers of the photo. The first two explicitly intended audiences, the photographer and his comrades captured in the photo, were immediate and physically present for the photo shooting. But taking a photograph necessarily implies an afterlife that the photographer as well as the depicted persons cannot entirely control; this is the place where the unintended audience comes into play. It is doubtful that the soldiers wanted the print to fall into the hands of someone like Karoly Francisc-Iosif. In fact, the men may have expected the photo to remain in the possession of members of their small group. With that in mind, how can the reader best comprehend the relationship between subjectivity, individual photographic practice, cultural framework, and social use of such an image?

The Second World War was the first global conflict in which ordinary soldiers documented their experiences on such a large scale. The invention of the 35 mm camera, with its fast shutter speed and practical size, allowed soldiers to document "their" wars.[69] This was particularly true for Nazi Germany, as Nazi policy encouraged and promoted amateur war photography, envisioning its soldiers not only as combatants but also, in the words of Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels, as an "army of millions of amateur photographers."[70] As historian of photography Petra Bopp points out, in

[69] Petra Bopp, *Fremde im Visier: Fotoalben aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2009). For a general overview, see also Peter Osborne, *Traveling Light: Photography, Travel, and Visual Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

[70] Cited from the photography magazine *Photoblätter* 18 (1941): 29, in Petra Bopp, "Images of Violence in *Wehrmacht* Soldiers' Private Photo Albums," in *Violence and Visibility in Modern History*, ed. Jürgen Martschukat and Silvan Niedermeier (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 181–97, 196.

doing so, the regime aimed to enhance the excitement and pleasure of warfare not only as an individual but also as a collective experience.[71] As a result, German soldiers experimented happily and extensively with their affordable cameras made by Agfa, Kodak, or Voigtländer; they captured random images of their workaday service and took snapshots of landscapes, people, and their comrades.[72] Of course, the overwhelming majority of these images engaged in a particular Nazi-German view, to the delight of the publishers of amateur photography magazines such as *Photofreund* and *Photoblätter*, which regularly published selections of private war photographs. In addition, the army's official propaganda magazine, *Signal*, also gave soldiers a public platform for exhibiting their private shots. An entire industry evolved around snapshots and amateur photography of and for soldiers, including camera shops that sold photo albums bearing Third Reich symbols such as the swastika and imperial eagle. Retailers also offered so-called sample books (*Musterbücher*) of preselected photos from the front that soldiers or their relatives could order and share.[73] This widespread individual use of photography by conscripted foot soldiers provides us with a unique and highly personalized view of the Nazi war machine and occupation of Europe.

Nevertheless, it would be misleading to assume that German soldiers invented a new photographic language or genre. Since the invention of the photographic camera, travelers, traders, and, more particularly, soldiers captured "their" time abroad in images and mediated their knowledge through a lens, including, as Susan Sontag has convincingly argued, through shock-pictures of violence, cruelty, and death.[74] At first glance, the rape image differs little from the photographs of millions of soldiers who recorded their wartime deployments and displayed the souvenirs they had captured in the battlefield or behind the front line.[75] Apart from the material appropriations of such *objets trouvés*, soldiers sometimes

[71] Thomas Eller and Petra Bopp published a private collection of photographs of Wehrmacht soldiers that had been randomly stored in a shoebox. See Rose, *Shadows of War*.

[72] Bopp, "Images of Violence," 181–97. See also Timm Starl, *Knipser: Die Bildgeschichte der privaten Fotografie in Deutschland und Österreich von 1880 bis 1980* (Munich: Koehler & Amelang, 1995); and Maiken Umbach, "Selfhood, Place, and Ideology in German Photo Albums, 1933–1945," *Central European History* 48, no. 3 (2015): 335–65.

[73] The photo album was a quite new visual medium of self-expression, and it allowed soldiers to creatively manufacture images of their own life, to present their own war experiences to others, and to preserve the memory of it. On the history of family albums and photography as a visual means to communicate family values, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 30–31.

[74] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of the Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 24.

[75] For accounts of the work of Lee Miller, one of 117 women who were accredited as American war correspondents and who followed the US Army through France and Germany, witnessing and photographing both the combat zone and military life behind the frontline, see Katharina Menzel-Ahr, *Lee Miller: Kriegskorrespondentin für Vogue—Fotografien aus Deutschland 1945* (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 2005), 196–200; and Anthony Penrose, *Lee Miller's War: Beyond D-Day* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014).

photographed human captives and body parts as trophies, as images captured in the Pacific war by both Allied and Japanese soldiers show.[76] Germans, too, frequently shot pictures of dismembered corpses, particularly of Slavic women, partisans, and African soldiers of the Allied troops.[77] Their photos do not simply document a moment of victory or the successful killing of the enemy; these human trophies are highly racialized performative acts, exhibiting virile prowess through the photographic medium.[78] Clearly, the rape photograph we are dealing with is an example of this existing pictorial convention. As in any other colonial context, the Nazi trophy photograph functions as the performance of imperial power and virility in a colonial "Wild East."

But what exactly was the trophy moment in the photograph from the Romanian archives: the rape of a woman, her killing, her killing and rape, or simply the mimicry of the rape with a corpse? These questions must remain unanswered, as we do not have any background information about the moment the picture was taken. However, it is the woman's body showcased as an object of ridicule and subjugation that we need to further reflect upon. By posing next to her body (or corpse) and raping her in jest, the soldiers turned the woman into a trophy, into something they hunted and owned.[79] Here sexual othering is inextricably entangled with racial othering as the German soldiers stage themselves as conquerors, thereby reducing the woman and her community to the status of racial and cultural pariahs.[80]

[76] A veteran of the Pacific war reported in his memoirs that a marine officer celebrated the habit of urinating in the mouths of Japanese corpses. Eugene B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 199. As historian Joanna Bourke shows, Allied soldiers gained status in the Pacific war by collecting body parts of the enemy and wearing these bodily trophies as necklaces or as a talisman. Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 121.

[77] Bopp, *Fremde im Visier*, 62–65, 83, 94–99, 122–39; and Helke Sander and Barbara Johr, eds., *BeFreier und Befreite: Krieg, Vergewaltigung, Kinder* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995), 132.

[78] George Bird Grinnell (1849–1938) was the first to develop the concept of "hunting with a camera"; he published an article with this title in the May 1892 edition of the journal *Forest and Stream*. See Matthew Brower, "Trophy Shots: Early North American Photographs of Nonhuman Animals and the Display of Masculine Prowess," *Society & Animals* 13, no. 1 (2005): 13–32.

[79] J. R. Ryan, "Hunting with the Camera: Photography, Wildlife and Colonialism in Africa," in *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places,* ed. Chris Wilbert and Chris Philo (London: Routledge, 2000), 203–21.

[80] On the racialized character of rape, see Helliwell, "'It's Only a Penis,'" 812; Ann Laura Stoler, "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race, and Morality in Colonial Asia," in *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era*, ed. Micaela di Leonardo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 51–101; and Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 165–96, 174–75.

Following Matthew Brower's definition, trophies fall into two categories: "those in which the trophy is indexically related to the endeavor; and those in which the trophy is an external symbol of accomplishment."[81] Within the context of military male bonding and the war of annihilation that the Germans fought in the East, a trophy was most likely to be "earned" firsthand and not bought secondhand. While many soldiers raped or assailed women on the Eastern Front, we do not know of many photographs where the camera captured the precise moment of assault and ownership. It almost feels as if the joke arises from the fact that the soldiers accidentally stumbled upon a woman's corpse and decided to rehearse the violation as something they had at least previously witnessed if not perpetrated themselves. Their serenity and enjoyment of this act prove that this rape joke refers to something very much a part of life on the Eastern Front. If the woman is dead, the humor rested precisely in the fact of messing around and defiling a cadaver. One of the key trophy elements, and thus the attraction of the photo, must have consisted precisely in the risk taken by these men, who played with taboos such as rape, race defilement, and sexual violence and then documented their acts.[82]

Yet there is something more to this photograph and the soldiers' gestures. It is something playful, violent, and indisputably sexual. Self-portraits and group photos taken by ordinary soldiers are not only a powerful medium for self-expression but also tools for self-fashioning and self-advertising.[83] It makes sense, then, as photo historian Silvan Niedermeier convincingly argues, to introduce the contemporary parlance of "selfie" to designate the amateur self-representations of soldiers at war.[84] Of course, there are major differences between modern selfies and those shot at the beginning or the middle of the twentieth century. Today's mirror-image self-portraits are taken from arm's length or with the help of a stick, whereas the cameras of the 1940s were not yet portable enough to allow self-taken pictures, and very few had timers. In contrast to contemporary photographic practices, soldiers in earlier wars were less autonomous and not entirely able to control the outcome of their pictures. In order to get a self-portrait, they had to rely on the photographic skills of their fellow soldiers or studio

[81] Brower, "Trophy Shots," 23.

[82] The contrast between the Allied soldiers' photographs and those taken by the Germans is illuminating. While both engage with a voyeuristic male gaze of the occupier, many of the pictures taken by GIs representing the punishment of women accused of collaboration by the French Forces of the Interior (1944–46) had a condemnatory connotation that is absent from most of the Wehrmacht soldiers' photographs. See Fabrice Virgili, *Shorn Women: Gender and Punishment in Liberation France* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 75–112, 159, 224, 236; and Roberts, *What Soldiers Do*, 77–84.

[83] Harvey and Umbach, "Introduction," 293–94.

[84] Silvan Niedermeier, "Imperial Narratives: Reading US Soldiers' Photo Albums of the Philippine-American War," *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 18, no. 1 (2014): 28–49.

photographers. Despite these obvious technological differences, there are similarities between how soldiers at war portrayed themselves in the first half of the twentieth century and our current practices.

The point here is to fully recognize the importance of photos as tools of "performative self-fashioning," to borrow Jennifer Evans's term, while also decoding the meanings of the postures.[85] Photos, particularly self-portraits, help serve as a vehicle of selfhood. If we conceptualize selfies as practices of freedom, in the sense that a self-shooting is an engaged and highly self-affirmative and self-aware pursuit, then the fifteen soldiers in our example certainly emerge as distinctly gendered and sexualized agents who fully engage in self-posturing.[86] What seems at first sight inapplicable to the context of war and genocide is thus not so peculiar. In the eyes of the perpetrators, the rape photograph was a self-portrait that conveyed empowerment and agency, the pleasure of self-presentation, and the freedom to fool around with a woman's body or corpse.[87]

There is an imminently self-ironic and, at the same time, extremely derisory twist to the soldier's posture; by mimicking or parodying an act of sexual violence, he transforms something illicit into a joke and thus into something not only just but also enjoyable and sexually exciting. Hence, we are not simply talking about a power trip but about titillation. As Doris Bergen points out, Nazi ideology and policing endeavors constructed taboos around non-Aryan women, which in turn made intercourse with them comparable to zoo- and necrophilia.[88] Although Bergen's argument is compelling, especially in light of the sexual violence that occurred within close proximity to the killing sites, raping "racially inferior" women and necrophilia represent quite different forms and degrees of breaking physical and symbolic taboos. This raises the question, however, of how cultural and legal prohibitions are related to the allure of transgression. The tension between these normative frameworks and transgressive practices is particularly apparent if we consider that the presence of the camera, which by definition is a voyeuristic instrument, considerably heightens the pleasure of transgression because one not only violates the rules but also documents and extends this violation.[89]

The vulnerability and taboo of the target make the sexual subjugation and deliberate degradation of the woman all the more attractive to the

[85] Evans, "Seeing Subjectivity," 433.

[86] Katrin Tiidenberg and Edgar Gómez Cruz, "Selfies, Image and the Re-making of the Body," *Body & Society* 21, no. 4 (2015): 1–26.

[87] Kühne opposes the widespread binary juxtaposition between joy and entertainment, on the one hand, and terror and cruelty, on the other. As he convincingly argues, it is not the compartmentalization of conflicting values and emotions but the way that pleasure and violence are intertwined that creates such a powerful and stimulating duo. Kühne, "The Pleasure of Terror," 234–36, 239. See also chapter 4 in Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler's Community, 1918–1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

[88] Bergen, "Sexual Violence," 189.

[89] Bopp, "Images of Violence," 188–93.

perpetrators; the more tabooed and unequal, the more fun and lustful is the soldier's self-affirmation.[90] Freezing this choreographed moment in time not only transforms transgressive violence into a pornographic visual experience of war but also prolongs the excitement of sexualized power.[91] The mere fact that the soldiers dared to so openly and coquettishly repudiate legal and sociocultural conventions and then captured and immortalized the moment on 35 mm film is a further demonstration of their boundless confidence and self-proclaimed superiority. It is as if they were saying: "We're here and we can do what we want." This self-affirmation works in various contexts: with soldiers who think that they are about to win the war, as well as for a withdrawing army when defeat seems near. If we could locate and date the photo shoot, we could push the comprehensive reading of this performative rape act even further.

In the context of the struggle over the subordination of people and territory, sex had an eminent political and ideological meaning for the Nazi regime and its soldiers. Mühlhäuser's studies underscore this point: sexual violence against women represented a projection of male fears of submission and the desire for domination.[92] A photo captured during the early stages of the Eastern campaign, prior to the period in the late fall of 1941, when German military fortunes began to decline, would certainly have implied a more lighthearted sexual and geographical conquest than would be the case if the image had been taken in 1944, when the Wehrmacht was hastily retreating from the advancing Red Army. In the latter case, we might read the photograph as a symbol of the last-ditch effort to subjugate the occupied territory. If this photograph was taken in a zone controlled by partisans, we would have to add another layer to its meaning and describe it as an act of revenge.[93] The image could thus represent either the German rape of the East or the impending death of Hitler's dream—we will never know. But speculating about its origins demonstrates how temporality shapes the way people might look at this image.

Like any other photographic trophy, this group's self-portrait was meant to be circulated and displayed, first of all within an insider group or between

[90] Tabooed and vulnerable groups are privileged targets of acts of cruelty. See Mailänder, *Female SS Guards*, 9–13, 255–71; see also Nahoum-Grappe, "L'usage politique," 296–97.

[91] It would indeed be interesting to discuss this photograph in an even more global and contemporary context of sexual torture and photography, comparing it, for example, to images of the soldiers involved in the torture at Abu Ghraib, who were also low-ranking Army Reserve military police guards. On this incident, see Cynthia Enloe, "Wielding Masculinity inside Abu Ghraib: Making Feminist Sense of an American Military Scandal," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 10, no. 3 (2004): 89–102; Timothy Kaufman-Osborn, "Gender Trouble at Abu Ghraib?," *Politics & Gender* 1, no. 4 (2005): 597–619; and Mary Ann Tétrault, "Sexual Politics of Abu Ghraib: Hegemony, Spectacle, and the War on Terror," *NWSA Journal* 18, no. 3 (2006): 33–50.

[92] Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*, 73–155. For the US Army, see Roberts, *What Soldiers Do.*

[93] Masha Cerovic, *Les enfants de Joseph: Les partisans soviétiques; Guerre civile, révolution et résistance armée à l'occupation allemande, 1941–1944* (Paris: Seuil, forthcoming, 2017).

comrades. One could even say that it was conceived as an anticipatory memory, a souvenir of the wild and fun aspects of war. Precisely because photographs like this represented "good times" and a bright future, soldiers carried them around, and some copies even ended up in the private photo albums of veterans. In the aggregate, these practices normalized war and its images of destruction and murder not only for the soldiers themselves but also for the civilians, family members, and ordinary Germans who could order the amateur war photography prints for their private use. However, because of its transgressive and sexualized violent content, the rape photo from the Romanian archives was not likely destined for the eyes of a domestic audience, particularly not a female one, either before, during, and or especially after the German defeat. By war's end the photograph's purpose and meaning had changed for the soldiers as well as for the larger society. Even though it is a difficult question to answer, it is nevertheless important to consider who might have viewed this photo after the war.

While the photograph still might have served as a personal souvenir and trophy object shared between men at the *Stammtisch* (the designated table for male regulars at the local pub or sports or veterans' clubhouse), sexual conquest and violence in the Nazi-occupied Soviet territories was certainly not a regular topic of the otherwise loquacious conversations about war memories. In fact, as Cold War borders calcified in Europe in 1948, the archives that would have shown the massive implication of the crimes and genocide perpetrated by ten million German soldiers serving on the Eastern Front were either closed or inaccessible, conveniently allowing both German states to ignore this chapter as they created their respective liberal-democratic and state-socialist images.[94] The frequently violent encounters of German soldiers with Eastern Europeans were thus omitted in political and historical narratives. As far as we know, they also occupied little or no space within family memories of the war.[95] It was not until the

[94] Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). For a comparative perspective on East and West Germany, see Peter Reichel, Harald Schmid, and Peter Steinbach, *Der Nationalsozialismus: Die zweite Geschichte; Überwindung, Deutung, Erinnerung* (Bonn: Beck, 2009).

[95] Historians have challenged the notion of a postwar silence. Robert Moeller, for instance, has shown that the German expellees (the so-called *Heimatvertriebene*) as well as German prisoners of war spoke frequently of their war experiences as a way of cultivating a community identity by drawing upon their own experiences. Unfortunately, few scholars expressed interest in the question of the Wehrmacht's role in Nazi crimes before the 1990s, meaning that very few oral histories or other inquiries addressed this issue. For examples of how this question has transformed more recent research, see Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal German Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Claire Trojan, *L'identité interdite: Les expulsés allemands en RDA, 1945–1953* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014). For a description of the historiographical debates

1990s, in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reports of ethnic cleansing during the war in Yugoslavia between 1991 and 1995, that the mass violence and genocide perpetrated by the Wehrmacht entered public awareness. The end of the Cold War also made archival material in Eastern Europe accessible, helping to encourage new scholarship on the forms and organization of war crimes committed outside of the concentration camps, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, about which historians had previously been all too silent.[96]

An exhibit called *War of Annihilation*, which was organized by the Hamburg Institute of Social Research and which traveled across Germany and Austria from 1995 to 1999, had a major impact on the public debates about World War II in the German-speaking world. Based largely on photographic evidence of the crimes perpetrated by the German Wehrmacht between 1941 and 1944 throughout Eastern Europe, the traveling exhibition presented the agency of low-level perpetrators—fathers, sons, and husbands—in its full complexity.[97] The aim was to encourage the German and Austrian public to recognize that it was not only the SS but also reserve police battalions and Wehrmacht soldiers who were engaged in mass violence and genocide. This was the first time that private war photographs of soldiers documenting mass violence, executions, and torture had been displayed, and the exhibit provoked fierce discussion and some backlash from the estimated 1.2 million visitors.[98] As Mühlhäuser notes, this was one

in the earlier period, see Alf Lüdtke, "Coming to Terms with the Past: Illusions of Remembering, Ways of Forgetting Nazism in West Germany," *Journal of Modern History* 65, no. 3 (1993): 542–72.

[96] The work of American historian Christopher Browning proved groundbreaking in this regard. See in particular Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992). Annette Timm examines historians' reluctance to discuss these issues in the introduction to this special issue of *JHS*. For an example of recent work that tackles these subjects more forthrightly, see Hájková, "Sexual Barter in Times of Genocide."

[97] Although historians rightly pointed out in 1999 that two dozen captions incorrectly attributed crimes to the Wehrmacht that were instead executions by the Soviet Army in the summer of 1941, a historical commission convened by the Hamburg Institute of Social Research later reaffirmed the exhibition's fundamental claim about the Wehrmacht's war crimes. Nevertheless, the controversy persuaded the institute to immediately terminate the exhibition in 1999. The exhibition reopened in a completely revised form in 2001 and traveled until 2004. For a general overview, see Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, *Eine Ausstellung und ihre Folgen: Zur Rezeption der Ausstellung "Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944"* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999), http://www.his-online.de//fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/veranstaltungen/Ausstellungen/Kommissionsbericht.pdf. See also the report of a commission of historians, *Bericht der Kommission zur Überprüfung der Ausstellung "Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944,"* 2000, http://www.verbrechen-der-wehrmacht.de/docs/ausstellung/ausstellung.htm#.

[98] This exhibition included a total of 1,433 photographs. In cities like Bremen and Munich, the exhibit sparked a very emotional debate about the general condemnation of how the Wehrmacht was portrayed in the exhibition in the regional press, supported by veterans' associations. For detailed descriptions of the debate, see Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung,

of the first times that former soldiers publicly discussed sexual violence on the Eastern Front.[99]

Austrian filmmaker Ruth Beckermann captured some of the visitors' discussions and reactions at the Vienna exhibition in the fall of 1995. Her documentary and diary offer an interesting perspective on the attitudes of former soldiers.[100] Beckermann observed that the same old men visited the exhibit repeatedly, reviewing certain photographs in detail and even arguing about them with other veterans. "What upsets them so?" Beckermann asked, concluding that it was not so much the photos as evidence of the perpetration of violence but rather the fact that the exhibit invited all visitors to "see through the eyes of the soldiers who took the pictures back then."[101] What seemed most unbearable to these elderly men was to be forced to engage once again with their former perspective and to be put face-to-face with their former feelings. After all, the exhibited photos made it hard to ignore the enthusiasm, joy, and fun that accompanied the horror. This was not the safe space of a *Stammtisch* or a veterans' meeting. This was a highly public display with completely different social-cultural norms, making the once-empowering photographs a compromising threat to the veterans' sense of self.[102] Once the setting had changed, the mass killings, cruelty, sexual violence, and defilement of corpses that characterized this war and might have even felt psychologically and emotionally normal were suddenly seen in a new way. In this new cultural context, they often no longer made sense for the veterans themselves.[103] We thus see how the contexts and spaces of viewing yield different and sometimes even opposite readings.

Watching these truculent old men in their seventies arguing passionately over the obscenity of the Soviet *Flintenweiber* ("shotgun broads," Soviet female soldiers) and the crimes perpetrated by the Wehrmacht through the lens of Beckermann's astute observations, it is impossible not to wonder whether the men depicted in the rape-joke photograph would have confronted their trophy selfie with similar emotions. Unfortunately, we will never know.

"Besucher einer Ausstellung: Die Ausstellung 'Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944,'" in *Interview und Gespräch* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998).

[99] Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*, 116–17, 156–57; and Mühlhäuser's contribution to this special issue of *JHS*.

[100] Ruth Beckermann, *Jenseits des Krieges* (*East of War*), documentary (1996, with English subtitles).

[101] Ruth Beckermann, "East of War: Shooting Journal," 1996, translated from German by Monika Nowotny, http://www.ruthbeckermann.com/home.php?il=53.

[102] On the persuasiveness of everyday anti-Semitism in postwar Austria, see Ruth Wodak, *"Wir sind alle unschuldige Täter!": Diskurshistorische Studien zum Nachkriegsantisemitismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991).

[103] Robert J. Lifton, "America's New Survivors: The Image of My Lai," in *Home from the War: Learning from Vietnam Veterans* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 33–71. See also Nahoum-Grappe, "L'usage politique," 296–97.

Figure 2a–d. Stills from Ruth Beckermann, *Jenseits des Krieges* (*East of War*), documentary (1996).

Conclusion: Capturing Subjectivities

Taking photographic images of extremely violent scenes was a common practice among German soldiers. Unlike propaganda unit photographers, common Wehrmacht soldiers had no specific photographic assignment; they could capture whatever images they chose and select their own subject matter. However, as we have seen, the soldiers had to be cautious when they were transgressing racial laws and military codes. The fact that this group of soldiers chose to photograph rape-scene mimicry, their voluntary use of the camera, provides us with important social, cultural, and psychological insight into how soldiers coped with war. The rape joke thus becomes a precious source of an embodied history of violence, lust, and desire that includes coercion, impulsiveness, ecstasy, "breaking bad," and everything in between.

Building on historian Jennifer Evans's work, this essay valorizes the "shifting subjectivities" of the photo, that is, how it conjures both a social reality and a self. Private photos taken in what the Nazis called the Russian Campaign, including the trophy photograph, reveal laughing soldiers who have seemingly boundless confidence. Rarely did they take pictures that displayed their personal distress, shame, and doubts. Nevertheless, these images are important sources precisely because of their subjective, fragmentary, and coded nature. As Evans argues, our ultimate goal should not be to "find new and more sophisticated ways of cataloguing lives lived" but to fully recognize the (inter)subjectivity of photographic meaning making.[104] This seems particularly important when engaging with sexual violence in armed conflict, a topic that not only requires further study but also challenges and strains existing conceptual methodologies to their limits.

As the rape photograph shows, photographic images do not always render the past easily legible, and they certainly cannot simply be taken as straightforward evidence for what happened, particularly in cases of murky provenance. Furthermore, the perpetrator's gaze and the violent, highly sexualized content of the image would make it unsuitable to publicly display as an illustration or documentation for atrocities.[105] However, even though we do not know who took the rape image, who precisely the men who are portrayed in it are, where the photograph was captured or for what purpose, this image nevertheless is a valuable historical source in its own right. It offers complex insight into the question of how soldiers imagined themselves in the world, challenging the viewer to enter into a critical dialogue with the past. The photographic source of this article is a visual trophy and powerful evidence for how the depicted soldiers participated in war. By displaying their conqueror masculinity within an Eastern European

[104] Evans, "Seeing Subjectivity," 433.

[105] "'A Perpetrator Gaze?': The Photographic Record of National Socialism and the Modern Museum," conference, University of Nottingham, December 17, 2013.

landscape, they crafted their racial superiority and asserted an imperial self. Even the very fact that these men felt entitled to shoot a photo of a mimicked rape scene with a female body or corpse speaks volumes about the gendered and sexualized power structures on the Eastern Front. On the one hand, it addresses what kinds of (sexual) violence could be committed and against whom, while on the other hand, it precisely demonstrates how that violence was understood, be it as a crime, humiliation, or *just* a joke.

The gravity and moral implications of the photograph come to the fore only once one decodes the position and significance of the woman's body and further realizes that these are not merely "boys being boys" laughing about a harmless prank. In order to capture the multilayered meanings of the rape image, one must elaborate upon different understandings of pleasure, not only as something genuinely good and uplifting but also as something destructive but nevertheless funny for an initiated group of buddies. As Kühne pointed out, history provides plenty of examples of community building through the bonding experiences of illicit and criminal acts.[106] Moreover, moral transgressions *can* be entertaining and even sexually titillating; they even can have a social function inasmuch as they forge bonds and enhance men's social power within a regime of gender relations. Yet this photo is not solely about the criminal activities of mass shootings and genocide that Nazi Germany elevated to a shared practice. This photo is primarily about sexuality, violence, and the allure of transgression. However, how precisely sexual violence functioned in a particular moment of war, conquest, and mass death—a question raised by Doris Bergen—is still largely unresolved and certainly cannot be addressed by a single photographic source.[107] This does not lessen its empirical value. The significance of the depicted social interactions gives us access to processes of male bonding that demonstrate the interaction of gender, sexuality, and war.

Unusual for its explicit sexual and violent content, the rape-joke trophy selfie depicts an overtly masculine self-confidence and entirely omits emotions like insecurity, fear, and even doubt that personal letters or diaries revealed. As a blunt demonstration of supremacy and domination, it depicts the sexual exploitation of a "racially inferior" woman and the virile arrogance of German men. The photograph is all about "power and agency in the practices of looking and being seen."[108] In that regard, it has both a disruptive and a normalizing meaning. What is particularly interesting about the performative aspect of this trophy selfie, regardless of whether the woman is dead or alive, is that the soldiers are mocking *themselves* in the process of simulating rape. The depicted scene is thus not just a grotesque act but a grotesque act of mimicry that *means* something very different to the soldiers,

[106] Kühne, "The Pleasure of Terror," 234–55, Belkin, *Bring Me Men*, 103–22.
[107] Bergen, "Sexual Violence."
[108] Tiidenberg and Cruz, "Selfies," 4.

the conquered societies, postwar societies, and us. Hence, the photograph raises more questions than it answers, inviting further investigation, close readings, and discussion.

About the Author

Elissa Mailänder is an associate professor of contemporary history at Sciences Po at the Centre d'Histoire de Sciences Po in Paris. Aside from her recently published book, *Female SS Guards and Workaday Violence: The Majdanek Concentration Camp, 1942–1944* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), she has published several articles on perpetrator history and the structures, mechanisms, and dynamics of violence in Nazi concentration and extermination camps. Her new project, however, examines heterosexual relationships in Nazi Germany, highlighting the importance of mass participation and practices of everyday conformity to dictatorship.