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Love, Comradeship, and Power – German Auxiliaries and Gender Relations in the Occupied Territories*

Introduction: Isolde Springer and her boyfriend Willy: Between love and comradeship

After they had to part in the spring of 1943, army auxiliary Isolde Springer and her comrade and later boyfriend Willy, who had become acquainted during their military service in Agram (occupied Croatia), began to write letters to each other. Willy was stationed in Italy, where he invited his old war-comrade Isolde to come when she was going on vacation.[1] But all the plans were destroyed and nearly another year went by before Isolde and Willy met again and became a couple. The teasing tone of their Agram flirting changed into the longing sounds of separation. However, the perception that they were comrades to each other did not vanish at all; instead from time to time Isolde and Willy went on praising their comradeship. This model of male-female relationship had not only evolved during their military deployment in occupied Agram, but was also a part of the newly established social relationship model during National Socialism. Deeply rooted in the traditionally male military relationship, comradeship during Nazi times was transferred to society in general and designated to be the ground for the *Volksgemeinschaft*, a racist national society, encompassing all people with 'aryan' background: male and female, old and young. Strongly indoctrinated by racist ideology and as 'believing' Nazis, Isolde and Willy obviously knew that their relationship, initiated during the war and in the occupied territories, would differ from a 'traditional' love affair.

* I would like to thank Ruth Leiserowitz, Philip Jacobs, Christina Morina, Maren Röger, and Matthew Stibbe for reading this article and commenting on it in such inspiring ways; my argument was shaped by their remarks.

[1] Letter from Willy to Isolde, May 30, 1944; copied correspondence is in my possession.

In the following, often very long letters they seriously debated not only their male/female identities, thinking about how they were changed by their wartime experiences, but also dealt with the problem of how to live in a peacetime marriage. Was it possible to live a 'normal' life as a married couple after having experienced war together? Could Isolde change her uniform-wearing self into that of a housewife and mother – when she was not even able to cook a meal? Was Willy able to accept her deeply changed female self?

This well-documented relationship – nearly 300 letters written over a period of two years are preserved – is an outstanding source when we ask for long-term gender relations in the army, how they were possible, how they evolved, and how they changed over the war years.

How to write and for what purpose a gender integrated history of occupation and warfare?

This short introduction to the very intense and, oscillating between comradeship and love, ambivalent relationship already reveals that the tableau of historical gender relations during the Second World War and in the occupied countries is richer and much more differentiated than older pictures suggest. While the (male and female) contemporaries stigmatized female auxiliaries as mere *Offiziersmatratzen* (officer's whores), who only were looking for adventure and sexual encounters with high-ranking officers, later (feminist) research often suggested that German women were only victims of male warfare or heroes of the battle against patriarchy. Nowadays, the focus lies mainly on the active participation of women in the Nazi racist politics and the war of annihilation, thus highlighting the excitement and empowerment those women experienced during the war. A growing stock of recently published literature on the history of German women during the war shows their (often willing) participation as anti-aircraft defense auxiliaries at the home front; as Red Cross nurses or *Bund Deutscher Mädel*-girls helping the *Volksdeutschen*, who were settled for example in the occupied Polish territories while Poles and Polish Jews were driven out, deported, and murdered; or as SS-auxiliaries or female guards working in the concentration camps.[2] Here, the analysis of relations be

[2] See only some of the most recent works on women in Nazi Germany (chronologically classified): Gisela Bock, ed., *Genozid und Geschlecht: Jüdische Frauen im nationalsozialistischen Lagersystems* [*Genocide and Gender. Jewish Women in the Nazi Concentration Camp System*] (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus Verlag, 2005), including articles on female SS-guards; Sybille Steinbacher, ed., *Volksgenossinnen: Frauen in der NS-Volksgemeinschaft* [*Female Volksgenossen: Women in the National-Socialist Volksgemeinschaft*], (Göttingen:

tween the sexes was pushed into the background because the main focus lay on the history of women-perpetrators or more generally on the question of how women experienced the war.

Thus, our knowledge about the relationships between men and women during the Second World War, when several states employed women as military auxiliaries, is still rather limited. We do not know much about how those relations were established and developed during the war; how men and women worked and lived together; if male-female comradeship or other new gender models did evolve. Wider social science research on women in the military often argues that women were nearly always excluded from the male military society, because they were supposed to undermine the well-ordered structure of the military; a mighty sexualized discourse, in which female auxiliaries and women-soldiers figured as prostitutes, being turned into scapegoats for defeat.[3]

Nevertheless and beyond generalizations we always have to ask for the real relationship between men and women and to reconstruct the male-female interplays, interactions and interweaving perspectives in order to write a gender-integrated history of war. While this is a platitude in gender theory – to enclose both sexes equally in historical research was a major claim when women's history was on the brink of changing its focus at the beginning of the 1980s –, empirical research often falls behind those achievements and goes on writing gender history basically from a woman's

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Wallstein, 2007); as a more popular history: Kathrin Kompisch, *Täterinnen: Frauen im Nationalsozialismus* [*Women-Perpetrators: Women in National Socialism*] (Köln: Böhlau, 2008); Elissa Mailänder-Koslov, *Gewalt im Dienstalltag: die SS-Aufseherinnen des Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslagers Majdanek, 1942-1944* [*Violence in Everyday Service: Female SS-Guards in the Concentration Camp Majdanek, 1942-1944*] (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2009); Franka Maubach, *Die Stellung halten: Kriegserfahrungen und Lebensgeschichten von Wehrmachthelferinnen* [*Holding Position: War Experiences and Life-Stories of Wehrmacht Auxiliaries*] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009); thereafter Maubach, *Stellung halten*. Nicole Kramer, *Volksgenossinnen an der Heimatfront: Mobilisierung, Verhalten, Erinnerungen* [*Volksgenossinnen at the Home Front: Mobilization, Behaviour, Memories*] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011); Jutta Mühlenberg, *Das SS-Helferinnenkorps: Ausbildung, Einsatz und Entnazifizierung der weiblichen Angehörigen der Waffen-SS 1942-1949* [*The Female SS-Auxiliary Corps: Training, Deployment, and Denazification of the Female Members of the Waffen-SS, 1942-1949*] (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2011).

[3] See the reflections on that topic and the cited literature in Klaus Latzel, Franka Maubach and Silke Satjukow, 'Einleitung' ['Introduction'], in Klaus Latzel, Franka Maubach, and Silke Satjukow, ed., *Soldatinnen. Gewalt und Geschlecht im Krieg vom Mittelalter bis heute* [*Women Soldiers. Violence and Gender during War from the Middle Ages up to Recent Days*] (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2011), 11-49. Thereafter Latzel, Maubach, and Satjukow, *Soldatinnen*.

(or a man's) point of view.[4] Here I am critically referring to my own study on the women auxiliary forces in the German army, but also to other recently published works cited above.

One reason for that gap between theory and empirical research (at least with regards to studies on Nazi Germany) may be found in the fact that the Nazis established a gender-separated rather than a gender-integrated organizational system; people were organized along the line between the sexes. Most of the Nazi's organizations had a male and a female branch: there were girls in the Hitler Youth, young women in the State Labor Sevice for female youth (*Reicharbeitsdienst für die weibliche Jugend*, RADwJ), older women in the female branch of the Nazis' 'trade union', the German Labor Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, DAF), and so on. However, this gender division was blurred by the ideology of an all-national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*), which was to bridge the gaps within society.[5] The idea of gender-community was always vivid, the more so as the war forced the Nazis to call for a united battle of the whole nation; comradeship between the sexes became a major value. However, historical research often kept reproducing the "separate spheres", dividing men and women.[6]

Another reason could be seen in the search for women-perpetrators: since the 1990s historical research has intensely focused on the participation of women in the holocaust by revising early assumptions of a politically driven feminist research that saw women first and foremost as victims of patriarchy or as women-heroes rebelling against that sexist system. Women researchers of the more recent years have been eager to show that

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[4] See the two important critical interventions by Gisela Bock, 'Historische Frauenforschung: Fragestellungen und Perspektiven' ['Historical Women's Research: Questions and Perspectives'], in Karin Hausen, ed., *Frauen suchen ihre Geschichte: Historische Studien zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* [*Women in Search for their History: Historical Studies on the 19. and 20. Century*] (München: Beck, 1987, first 1983), 24-62; Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis', *The American Historical Review*, 9, 5 (1986), 1053-75; and the theoretical key text by Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[5] Sybille Steinbacher, 'Differenz der Geschlechter? Chancen und Schranken für die Volksgenossinnen' ['Gender-Difference? Chances and Barriers for Volksgenossinnen'], in Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt, eds., *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* [*Volksgemeinschaft: New Research on Nazi Society*] (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009), 94-104, here 96. Thereafter Steinbacher, 'Differenz'.

[6] The now classical narrative was established by Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, Family Life, and Nazi Ideology, 1919-1945* (London: Cape, 1986), who saw the guilt of German women in the fact that they maintained a comfortable home for the male perpetrators, a room where they could relax; today research goes far beyond that argument, highlighting the participation of women beyond the private. Thereafter, *Mothers*.

and how ("normal") women participated in the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the racist system of perpetration, and the holocaust.[7]

A pioneer study in this field was Elizabeth Harvey's "Women in the Nazi East", published in 2003, showing for the case of the occupied Polish territories that women played a crucial role in the Nazis' politics of expulsion, deportation, and annihilation.[8] By now we have a plethora of studies highlighting striking findings about the mobilization and motives of (young, single) female auxiliaries during the war years of the 'Third Reich' – a knowledge that is beginning to make its way into general accounts of National Socialism and the Second World War.[9] A main assumption embracing these works implies that race – as the most important category – always was superior to gender: An 'aryan' woman had a higher standing than a 'non-aryan' man, a fact that blurred the traditional gender hierarchy – but beyond that women's and men's studies are rather separated[10] and the stock of studies that integrates both perspectives equally remains still quite small. The findings are pretty much the same when we take a closer look at the research concerning the various armies: though the totalized war forced the male military personnel to integrate more women than ever before and though that fact supposedly challenged the traditionally male structures of the military and blurred the clearly drawn line between the sexes, we do

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[7] Gisela Bock, 'Ganz normale Frauen: Täter, Opfer, Mitläufer und Zuschauer im Nationalsozialismus' ['Ordinary Women. Perpetrators, Victims, Participants and Bystanders in Nazi Germany'], in Kirsten Heinsohn, Barbara Vogel, and Ulrike Weckel, eds., *Zwischen Karriere und Verfolgung. Handlungsräume von Frauen im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland* [*Between Career and Persecution. Female Agency in Nazi Germany*] (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1997), 245-77.

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

[9] This underlines Steinbacher, 'Differenz'. See the works of Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Richard Evans cited there.

[10] In his most recent article Matthew Stibbe unterlines that "the volume of literature on masculinities in the Third Reich is tiny compared to what we now have on the Kaiserreich, the Weimar era and the early Cold War period". Matthew Stibbe, 'In and Beyond the Racial State: Gender and National Socialism, 1933-1955', *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 13, 2 (2012), 159-78. Thereafter Stibbe, 'Racial State'. Important works, more or less explicitely labelled as men's studies, are Thomas Kühne, *Kameradschaft: Die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert* [*Comradeship. The Soldiers of the Nazi War and the 20th Century*] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2006); thereafter Kühne, *Kameradschaft*. Klaus Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten – nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis – Kriegserfahrung 1939-1945* [*German Soldiers – Nazi War? War Experiences 1939-1945*] (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1997); Frank Werner, '"Hart müssen wir hier draußen sein". Soldatische Männlichkeit im Vernichtungskrieg 1941-1944' ['"We Have to be Harsh out Here". Soldierly Masculinity in the War of Annihilation 1941-1944'], *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 34, 1 (2008), 5-40.

not have studies that systematically and from both points of view shift the focus on gender relations – most of the studies concentrate on the female (or male) areas and experiences in the military.[11]

An exception can be seen concerning studies on sexual encounters during the war: the history of rape and sexual violence is well-analyzed. Even if they are often written from a woman's point of view, the male-female relations are at the core of those studies. Regina Mühlhäuser's recently published and important book "Conquests" is a rare example for a study that systematically looks from a male *and* a female perspective – Mühlhäuser takes a close look at the sexual encounters of and love affairs between German soldiers and local women in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union. She shows convincingly that this history of gender relations is not at all detached from the history of war and violence nor its sheer byproduct, but an intrinsic part of it.[12] Other studies address the problem of male-female encounters after the German defeat in 1945, when German women fell in love or had sexual encounters with American, English, French, or Russian soldiers, often giving birth to the so-called "children of occupation".[13] It is somehow weird that it seems to be easier to deal with the problem of male-female relations when men and women physically get to touch each other.

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[11] But see the evolving stock of works concerning women in the armies or partisan forces, where remarks on the gender-relationships can be found: M. Michaela Hampf, *Release a man for combat: the women's army corps during World War II* (Köln: Böhlau, 2010); Nicola Spakowski, *"Mit Mut an die Front". Die militärische Beteiligung von Frauen in der kommunistischen Revolution Chinas (1925-1949)* [*"Courageously to the Front". Military Participation of Women in the Communist Chinese Revolution (1925-1949)*] (Köln: Böhlau, 2009); Barbara N. Wiesinger, *Partisaninnen: Widerstand in Jugoslawien 1941-1945* [*Women-Partisans. Resistance in Jugoslavia 1941-1945*] (Wien: Böhlau, 2008); see the articles on different nations in Latzel, Maubach, and Satjukow, *Soldatinnen*; Franka Maubach and Silke Satjukow, 'Zwischen Emanzipation und Trauma: Soldatinnen im Zweiten Weltkrieg' ['Between Emancipation and Trauma: Women-Soldiers in the Second World War'], *Historische Zeitschrift*, 288, 2 (2009), 347-84, comparing Germany, the Soviet Union, and the United States.

[12] Regina Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen: Sexuelle Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutscher Soldaten in der Sowjetunion 1941-1945* [*Conquests. Sexual Violence and Intimate Relationships of German Soldiers in the Soviet Union 1941-1945*] (Hamburg, Hamburger Edition, 2010), 7-11. See also studies on other countries like for example Fabrice Virgili, *Shorn Women. Gender and Punishment in Liberation France* (Oxford: Berg, 2002); and for the Polish territories Maren Rögers' article in this volume.

[13] For an approach which especially focuses "encounters" in occupied Germany, see Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies. Close Encounters in Occupied Germany, Princeton* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2007), especially 48-87; Silke Satjukow, *Besatzer. "Die Russen" in Deutschland 1945-1994* [*Occupiers. "The Russians" in Germany 1945-1994*] (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 284-98.

Maybe changing perspective within a scientifically constructed argumentation is a problem in itself – not only concerning the history of gender relations but also that of victims and perpetrators during the holocaust; of eastern and western Germans after 1945; of insiders and outsiders throughout history. That is also true for the occupiers and the occupied in what Shelley Baranowski had recently called the "Nazi Empire".[14] Hence, one should keep in mind that Karen Hagemann called it "particularly promising" to shift the "focus on the interactions between occupied and occupiers".[15] To integrate two different, contrasting, or even diametrically opposed and conflicting perspectives demands not only a special attentiveness for the subject and command of the historiographical narrative but also sources which are able to reflect both points of view equally. Thus, a gender integrated history of World War II and the German occupation must not only deconstruct official gender discourse but also needs to analyze the "relationship between real men and women as they struggled to survive the Third Reich".[16] This quest for male and female experiences (and for the ways in which they were referring to each other) leads us into new directions. It is for example not only interesting that and how women were mobilized (and mobilized themselves) during World War II, but also how men reacted to that new mobilized female "self".[17]

These questions can fruitfully be applied to the history of the German occupation in a twofold kind of way. First, concerning the relations of German men and women within the military, German men were confronted with a new type of single and therefore mobile young women. Hence, far from home, good-old gender stereotypes were far less effective and often became challenged. How did soldiers react when female auxiliaries came to "free them to fight" (as a euphemist propaganda term put it)? What relations between men and women within the military did evolve – beyond the sexualist stereotype that women only went into war for sexual encounters or to find an officer to marry? Could comradeship effectively work as a novel model of gender relations – or was it only a mere formula created by Nazi propagandists?

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[14] Shelley Baranowski, *Nazi Empire: German Colonialism and Imperialism from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[15] Karen Hagemann, 'Military, War, and the Mainstream', in Karen Hagemann and Jean H. Quataert, eds., *Gendering Modern German History. Rewriting Historiography* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 63 and further, 75.

[16] Stibbe, 'Racial State', 3.

[17] We do not know much yet, Sybille Steinbacher underlines, about the "reactions of men to the blurred gender borders" while the war went on. Steinbacher, 'Differenz', 101.

Beyond the relations between German soldiers and female auxiliaries developing within the military, we – secondly – have to pose questions concerning the relations of female auxiliaries and the local male population in the occupied (east European) territories. Is it true that race was always superior to gender? To look at the focal points where the traditional gender dichotomy was challenged allows us to characterize the power constellations of occupation. Did the local population accept the occupiers' rule, even if it was exercised by women? How did the German auxiliaries feel when confronted with the local (especially the male) population? How did this relationship change over the war years? Were the historically specific power constellations of occupation able to cut across the traditional longue durée structure of male superiority?

If applied to the history of German occupation gender has not an end in itself but helps to open up new insights into the history of Nazi power. Against this background it is astonishing that, for example, in Mark Mazower's doubtlessly impressive history of Hitler's "New European Order", gender does not play any (key) role.[18] Thus, gender as a category of interpretation tends to transcend itself and can – like a prism – help to illuminate power constellations during the war in a new way. It can be used as a means to shed light on the relationship between victors and victims, between those who exercised power and those who did not.

Motives of German Women's Auxiliaries

Admittedly, I am myself not able to write a gender-integrated narrative of German occupation – my work on the Wehrmacht auxiliaries was not systematically focused on gender relations and my interview sources reflect above all the female perspective. Thus my interpretation is rather tentative, pointing to new directions of research. But I will meet the demand of taking up both perspectives by reading my sources anew with a special regard for the relationships between men and women as they are recounted in oral sources or autobiographical material.

Even if the focus of this volume lies especially on the occupied territories in the east, it is not possible to isolate that theater of war from the larger world war context. Only by a comparison to the situation in the western European occupied countries at the beginning of the war can we understand the nature of what may be called the occupation experience. Many soldiers and female auxiliaries came to the eastern occupied coun-

[18] Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London: Allen Lane, 2008).

tries after having been on duty in France or the Netherlands – and had their 'eastern' experiences against this backdrop. The army began to send female auxiliary forces there after the defeat of France in June 1940. This staff consisted above all of Red Cross nurses, whose skills had not been needed much in the first period of war, when – from the viewpoint of military reasoning – not that many wounded had to be cared for. This is a paradox in the history of women's deployment in the war: that the mass of nurses and auxiliary nurses trained after the (from Germany's point of view) frustrating experience of WWI, were not needed, because the German army advanced astonishingly fast and nearly without casualties (the notorious and somewhat strange word for that was: 'Blitzkrieg'). Some ten thousands of these auxiliary nurses were retrained as auxiliaries for the army.[19] These women worked in the telecommunication units or as secretaries (the so called *Nachrichten- and Stabshelferinnen*). Others set up and ran homes for soldiers (*Soldatenheime*) in the occupied territories which served to prevent soldiers from coming into contact with the local population – mainly with the female population (a strategy that proved to be – as Regina Mühlhäuser shows – at best illusionary).[20] Even if the sheer numbers of female auxiliaries deployed in the occupied territories are rather few (the vast majority of the nearly 500.000 military auxiliaries served on the home front helping to fight the allied air raids), their deployment reveals something historically new: the *Wehrmacht* needed women not to help prevent defeat, but to organize the victory.

Indeed, the female personnel did not care for the wounded but helped to seize and sustain power in the vast occupied land. This service was attractive to young women for several, mostly individual, reasons: being freed from their parents' rule; living an adventure; getting to know unknown countries. But one motivating moment was not merely individual but rather rooted in genuine historical reasons: the vast majority of those women-helpers was born between 1919 and 1926, thus representing a cohort influenced by the defeat of their fathers in World War I, by the crisis of the interwar period, and by the indoctrination in the youth organizations of the Nazi regime. Many of them were anxious to follow their male comrades into the war. This does not differ very much from the parallel male cohort, which historian Mary Fulbrook analyzed in her most recent book "Disso-

[19] Maubach, *Stellung halten*.

[20] There exists only some research on the so-called *Betreuungshelferinnen*, but see the autobiography of the high-rank female leader Wilma Ruediger, *Frauen: Im Dienst der Menschlichkeit. Erlebtes im "Deutschen Roten Kreuz" von 1914 bis Friedland* [*Women: In the Service of Humanity. Experiences in the "German Red Cross" from 1914 to Friedland*] (München: Lehmann, 1962).

nant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships". Being brought up in the "bad" Weimar years and coming to age in the "good years" of the Nazi period, not only the female auxiliaries but also the male soldiers were eager to fight in the front lines and were confident that they would win the war.[21] In diaries or subsequently written autobiographies we routinely find that wish to participate in conquest paired with an impatience with which young women were waiting to take up an appointment in the occupied territories. For example, a fourteen year old girl who heard about the annexation of Austria in 1938 sitting at home in front of the family's radio wrote in her diary: "I'd like to be one of those soldiers marching in [she refers to Linz]."[22]

The traditionally male experience to be a soldier, a conqueror, which was transferred from one male generation to another, had to serve as the dominant archetype – because a similar female role model cum grano salis did not exist.[23] Women had basically to learn from their male comrades how to march through the streets wearing a uniform; already in the very first phase of national socialist movement in the Weimar years female activists adapted to the male style of political fight – and by no means simply were content to live their lives as mere mothers and housewifes.[24]

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[21] See Mary Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives. Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 168-246. For the analysis of "good" and "bad" times in oral history testimony still see Ulrich Herbert, '"Die guten und die schlechten Zeiten": Überlegungen zur diachronen Analyse lebensgeschichtlicher Interviews' ['"The Good and the Bad Times." Thoughts on the Diachronic Analysis of Oral History Interviews'], in Lutz Niethammer, ed., *"Die Jahre weiß man nicht, wo man die heute hinsetzen soll": Faschismuserfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet ["Not sure where to put those years today": Experiences of Fascism in the Ruhr Area*], 2nd edn (Berlin: Dietz, 1986), 67-96.

[22] Ingeborg Hölzer, Diary, entry from March 12th, 1938. Copied diary is in my possession.

[23] There was a thin line of tradition binding together the female employments with the classical role model of Jeanne d'Arc, the rare examples of women auxiliaries in the First World War, with the female pilots to whom attention was paid in the interwar period, and last but not least with the female acticists of the early national socialist party in the Weimar years, who were organized in the DFO (*Deutscher Frauenorden*). Concerning women pilots see Evelyn Zegenhagen, *"Schneidige deutsche Mädel". Fliegerinnen zwischen 1918 und 1945 ["Dashing German Girls". Women Pilots, 1918-1945*] (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007).

[24] See for example how a female activist of the DFO described her fight shoulder to shoulder with her male comrades in the late 1920s/early 1930s: "The party struggles began! We marched! SA and SS units and comrades! Before us, behind us, all around us, a howling, brawling throng. Bystanders threw flowers. Defiantly our battle song rang from our lips: 'We are the army of the red swastika'. How proud we were! Let them stone and curse us. […] We had been there and would return again and again." Quoted in Koonz, *Mothers*, 78. I'm indebted to Matthew Stibbe for pointing me to this quote.

I would argue that those male role models were useful for a first orientation – but then women appropriated those guiding patterns, and developed their own 'female' way of how to wear a uniform or to behave within the military system. Nevertheless many of the women saw their participation in the war as a sort of liberating and emancipating experience (which was a mere illusion, of course, because war and the racial system of power could not feed emancipation).[25]

This former feeling of excitement and enthusiasm paired with the feeling of empowerment can not only be found in contemporary sources (as letters or diaries) but also in oral history testimony – even if the expression of those feelings may not fit into the frame of possible and officially valid rules of how to remember Nazi Germany. Maybe it is much easier for women to articulate former excitement than it is for men of the same age who after the war more often were regarded as being responsible for what had happened. To bring those oppressed feelings up to the surface of the narrative often needs a kind of affirmative – and ethically rather problematic – interview method. However, self-confident as she was, Isolde Springer begins her interview with telling about how much she was filled with enthusiasm: "Well, that was … In 33 Hitler was coming to power. And I was 12 years old. And we were so enthusiastic, I can't tell you … I say that to everybody, I don't have any scruples about that." She became the leader of a growing number of BDM-girls and, after the war had begun, eventually signed up voluntarily to become an army auxiliary: "And then I always read about the telecommunication auxiliaries of the army, how they got around in Europe. And I thought: 'That would be something great.' And then I signed up voluntarily."[26] Since she was recruited just in April 41, Springer was not sent to the western occupied territories but to recently occupied Croatia and only two years later to Paris – by that turning the chronology of real war events into her special war-biography. However, in 1943/44 even Paris was not a place a German auxiliary wished to be anymore – the situation had begun to turn against the German occupational force, and Springer feared the hatred and revenge of the Parisians.

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[25] See my argument in Maubach, *Stellung halten*.

[26] Isolde Springer, Interview by Franka Maubach, October 2004, Germany. Interviews were recorded with mini-disc. Quite similarly the Red Cross nurse Ingeborg Ochsenknecht (b. 1920) describes her great wish to participate in the war adding that she wanted to take revenge for the lost First World War. See Ingeborg Ochsenknecht, *"Als ob der Schnee alles zudeckte". Eine Krankenschwester erinnert sich. Kriegseinsatz an der Ostfront* [*"As if Snow Would Cover Everything". A Nurse's Memories. War Deployment at the Eastern Front*] (München: Econ, 2004), 29.

The idea of war which those young women had in their mind was not experience-based but inspired by propaganda and tales of heroism – and was attractive for the young women precisely because what war really meant was absent. While the occupation experience in the western territories and at the beginning of the war could reinforce and feed a priori expectations, the deployments in the east and at the end of war mostly destroyed them.

Gender-Relationships in and beyond the Military

To the western occupied territories in France or in the Netherlands the auxiliaries came as women-occupiers, proud of representing victory and ready to execute the new power which they had obtained. The auxiliaries lived in extravagant accommodations: villas and even castles where sometimes Jews had lived before. For many women Paris was the place they wished to be stationed. The name of the French capital sounded like the right place to be for young women coming to take part in the German victory. Paris was not only thought of as the captured French capital but also as the 'capital of love'. That motivated women to feel like tourists when they came to Paris: "I hope that one can enjoy oneself in the 'capital of love', that something is going on there. Paris exists only for amusement."[27]

In her autobiography published in 1999, Ilse Schmidt tells the first part of her war story (the second part brought her to occupied Ukraine) like a love story: She flirted with German soldiers and officers and enjoyed from her viewpoint pleasant aspects of German occupation. When she noticed that German men were attracted by French women she kept track of their relations, watching closely how French women dressed and behaved, trying to imitate their style.[28] Schmidt was criticized for that naive and rather non-political narrative;[29] this recounted picture was supposedly fostered by the historical situation Schmidt experienced: military victory and the feeling of excitement and love were mixed together. Moreover she began to notice that German soldiers were not faithful to their German girlfriends or wives

[27] Ilse Schmidt, *Die Mitläuferin. Erinnerungen einer Wehrmachtsangehörigen* [*Fellow-Traveller. Memories of a Female Member of the Wehrmacht*] (Berlin: Aufbau, 1999), 22. Thereafter Schmidt, *Mitläuferin*. For further evidence of this romantic image of Paris, see Maubach, *Stellung halten*, 111.

[28] Schmidt, *Mitläuferin*, 22-27.

[29] See the critical remarks by Gaby Zipfel, 'Biographischer Revisionismus' ['Biographical Revisionism'], *Mittelweg 36*, 8, 5 (1999), 33-38.

at all. When she came to occupied Ukraine in 1942 she was confronted with the mass killing of Jews, who were shot dead in the nearby woods; this event changed her tourist-like perception of the war and made her realize in what crimes she was participating. Living (or at least telling) that time like a love story did not seem possible anymore.

In 1943 the women leader of the Nazi women's organization (*NS-Frauenschaft*), Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, commented on how badly soldiers would treat the female auxiliaries in front of commanders. She underlined that the male personnel within the military still had to be taught how to regard women in the army and how to behave in front of them. They would see female auxiliaries, Scholtz-Klink reports, either as elegant ladies, as women, or as mere recruits: "The ideals of many women, who are employed in the occupied territories, are shattered [*zerdeppert*] when German officers rise in the tramway to offer their place not to German auxiliaries but to French women who had put on make-up […]."[30] This remark, which reminds one of what Ilse Schmidt observed in occupied Paris, reflects the female critique against the inability of the male military personnel to appreciate the female auxiliaries – moreover both were obviously jealous of the fashionable French women.

From the other direction, male commanders often were criticizing the behavior of the female auxiliaries in the occupied territories which sometimes was by no means military-like – instead of wearing their uniforms with pride and stern discipline, they seemed to forget about the institution they served in, sitting laid-back in cafés together with soldiers and officers. Commanders criticized the "loose manners" of women when being employed together with men.[31] In France "female army auxiliaries and soldiers were sitting together in cafés in very improper positions, men and women entangled with each other, without any sense of decency and morality".[32] In Rowno which was the administrative center of occupied Ukraine, a female auxiliary had to be dismissed because she "was so obviously interested in the soldiers, showing her intentions so clearly that the soldiers made a mockery of her"[33].

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[30] Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, Befehlshabertagung in Bad Schachem, 14.10.1943, see the quote in Massimiliano Livi, *Gertrud Scholtz-Klink: die Reichsfrauenführerin. Politische Handlungsräume und Identitätsprobleme der Frauen im Nationalsozialismus am Beispiel der "Führerin aller deutschen Frauen"* [*Gertrud Scholtz-Klink: Reichsfrauenführerin. Political Scopes and Identity Problems of Women in Nationalsocialism: The Example of the "Leader of all German Women"*] (Münster: Lit, 2005), 99, 100.

[31] Luftwaffenbefehlshaber Mitte v. 2.6.1943: BArch MA: RL 13/330.1.

[32] Höherer Nachrichtenführer beim Befehlshaber in Frankreich v. 17.5.1943: BArch MA: RW 35/204.1.

[33] Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Ukraine Abt. IVz vom 7.3.42: BArch MA: RW 41/30.1.

Such gender troubles were rooted in the uncertainties caused by the coexistence of males and females in the military – male commanders often had no idea how to deal with the women because they lacked experience with females in uniform. This uncertainty moreover was arose from the fact that traditional gender hierarchies and behavior patterns were challenged or even blurred when women joined the army. Another good example is the greeting rituals within the military. For example, if male courtesy required that a man would greet a woman first, the military rules of saluting, however, demanded that the lower rank would greet the higher one. In the everyday experience this instruction supposedly caused a feeling of uncertainty – military and traditional gender rules clashed.

In 1955 H. H. Mühlenberger, a today not well known writer of popular fiction, published a novel about a young army auxiliary called „Girls in Blue-Grey" (alluding to the colors of the uniform) which was inspired, according to the foreword, by the experiences and recollections of a 'real' former auxiliary. He suggested that many young women joining the army were not pleased with their duty to salute in front of high-ranking officers; but often, Mühlenberger has a captain say that officers nevertheless would take the chance to greet the female personnel first – by that fulfilling their duty as polite men.[34] Official army regulations also address this issue by pointing to the duty of every female auxiliary to salute in front of officers. For example, air-force auxiliaries in occupied France were obliged to greet not only generals but also their superiors.[35]

We can follow the reverberations of those military rules (which were unfamiliar considering the traditional model of gender-relations) in the correspondence of Isolde Springer with her fiancé. The quick-witted woman soon became the secretary of the general of military occupation. In this function everybody knew her and even high-ranking officers saluted in front of her. Willy, on the contrary, had to salute the officers, standing at attention. As Isolde suggests, Willy felt humiliated and neglected by that. Soon he preferred not to join her, saying that he was no "jumping jack"; in the interview Isolde remembers him having said: "I'm no jumping jack. You are greeted by all the officers, and I'm standing there jumping smartly to attention".[36] I will argue that comradeship could show a way out of those feelings of uncertainty. It was a means to distance oneself from the other

[34] H. H. Mühlenberger, *Mädchen in Blau-Grau* [Girl in Blue-Grey] (Wuppertal, 1955), 36.

[35] Merkblatt für Luftnachrichten-Betriebshelferinnen: BArch MA: RL 14/7.1.

[36] Isolde Springer, Interview.

sex by making possible a new kind of gender-relation beyond sexual encounters and love-stories.[37]

At the same time comradeship was, of course, a highly propagandistic, ideologically fuelled term, which the regime used as a means to create the *Volksgemeinschaft* and to make it work effectively. Like *Volksgemeinschaft*, comradeship drew its strength far more from its excluding than including function. Pointing to the fact that they were comrades to the soldiers could for example protect the auxiliaries against any sexual invectives the soldiers or German women at the home front were directing at them. Being comrades was the best proof of their decent motives. At least the correspondence of Isolde and Willy shows that the new wartime gender-model influenced even love-affairs. Hence, it is far too easy to remain on the surface of sexualized stereotypes, assuming that women auxiliaries were seen not much better than prostitutes who only joined the army to cajole an officer into marriage.

As mentioned above, Isolde and Willy accepted the gender-model of male-female comradeship and tried to translate that ideal into their private sphere: "[…] [I]n the end I will be your comrade in every respect," Isolde wrote in February 1944. And four weeks later, on the 1st of April 1944, Willy put it this way: "You'd like to be more than my housewife; you'd like to be my lifelong supporting and stimulating comrade."[38] It is interesting that Willy interpreted comradeship as something more precious than fulfilling 'only' what was to be seen as the wife's duties: looking out for the household and caring for the children. By this he seems to underline that the intense war experience they had in common bound them together much more than the everyday life of an ordinary marriage. Being immersed in the preparations for their wedding since spring 1944, an important question arose: Should they marry wearing their uniforms or not? On the 21st of February Isolde wrote: "I actually would like to marry in uniform, because my grey gear is a garment of honor [*Ehrenkleid*] for me, even if some girls don't behave themselves that way, but in the end it depends on the one who is wearing the uniform." And Willy answered (1.4.1944): "As a genuine, real soldier I'm happy that you are respecting your uniform. We will both go wearing our uniform."[39] Trying to take up and to reconstruct the male perspective this could mean that women were not to be despised

[37] Comradeship between the sexes plays almost no role in the work of Thomas Kühne, *Kameradschaft*. He points above all to the fact that comradeship could cause a feeling of warm, motherly relations between soldiers during war.

[38] Letter from Isolde to Willy, February 28, 1944; letter from Willy to Isolde, April 1, 1944; copied correspondence is in my possession.

[39] Letter from Isolde to Willy, February 21, 1944; letter from Willy, March 1, 1944.

for entering the army but on the contrary could be highly esteemed for fighting side by side with the soldiers and for knowing what war did really mean (including the knowledge about the inhuman warfare of the Wehrmacht).

On the contrary no evidence could be found for love affairs or sexual relationships of auxiliaries with the male occupied population. Given some of their autobiographical narratives they even seemed to avoid coming into close contact.[40] Supposedly they were aware that their status was rooted in the special military situation of German victory and thus always precarious. However, female auxiliaries enjoyed the new power when they came to the occupied territories – on the one hand their status was much higher in the eastern than in the western territories but on the other hand they enjoyed a greater luxury in the western territories like, first and foremost, in France. For example, Ilse Majonek, a telecommunication auxiliary stationed in the Netherlands, felt really important as a woman occupier and enjoyed the special treatment. In the big villa she lived in with her female comrades there were servants from amidst the local population who cleaned up the rooms and did the cooking. As a member of the occupation force she moreover was allowed to use public transport for free. Once when she wanted to use the tramway the conductor demanded that she should pay. But she refused to do this, explaining that she belonged to the German army and therefore had the right to take the tramway for free. (In the interview she explained that to me in the following way: "We were the boss, ah, I mean, the Germans were the occupiers.") But the conductor refused to drive without her having paid. Up to that point the scene shows a persisting gender hierarchy; though Majonek as a member of the occupation force was over the local population, she as a woman was supposed to be inferior to the man. Majonek decided to call for a man to help: "Is an officer here somewhere?" It is not important if the German officer did come or not; the sentence forced the conductor to let Majonek ride for free. So the recalled story is very ambivalent: firstly, we can find a persistent system of gender hierarchy, which contradicts the rules of occupation. Secondly, this supposedly predominant system was successfully challenged. After all, Majonek forced the tramway to depart.[41]

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[40] An exception is the autobiography of Elisabeth Himmelstoß, who was stationed in occupied Wilna, Minsk, France and Denmark. She was critical of the Nazi regime and during her French stay came into contact with the resistance. Elisabeth Himmelstoß, … *und ich konnte nichts ändern! Odyssee einer Nachrichtenhelferin* [*... I Could Not Change Anything! Odyssey of a Telecommunication Auxiliary*] (Berlin: Mittler, 1994). Thereafter Himmelstoß, *Odyssee*.

[41] Ilse Majonek, Interview by Franka Maubach, October 2003, Germany.

One can hardly imagine a man of the local population in the eastern European occupied countries who would have been as courageous as the Amsterdam tramway conductor in obviously challenging the occupiers rule. In the East, the Nazi racial system presumably had more impact on the relationships of men and women so that the line between occupiers and occupied was more clearly drawn. In that situation it could have been dangerous even to speak out, so a (local) man supposedly would have obeyed a (German) woman's order without even raising his voice. For that reason the women auxiliaries in the eastern territories could feel even more superior to the local population even if their situation was, from their point of view, less "advantageous" than in the western European countries. They lived not in villas but in barracks and amidst a violent atmosphere. From the Nazis' racist point of view it was beyond all doubt that the German women were superior to local men.

Helping hands? Relations of the male and female military service

In examining the occupied Polish territories Elizabeth Harvey has pointed out that the status of German women there was also higher than in the Reich.[42] In the remote outposts of the Reich, gender hierarchy was – because of the ongoing war and the yet unfinished establishment of Nazi rule – less fixed and more flexible. This situation and the fact that manpower was needed at the front, allowed women to get hold of important positions and to feel more self-confident and powerful. Not least the widely used term auxiliaries has hitherto hindered a deeper understanding of women's real relevance for warfare and occupation. The female auxiliary forces of the army, for example, replaced regular soldiers (who were even frightened when female auxiliaries came to "free them to fight", because they knew what this could eventually mean for them[43]). Although they were less skilled and for that reason deployed as *auxiliaries*, they in fact did the same work. Much of the archival material we are using to reconstruct the war and the holocaust was produced by telecommunication and staff auxiliaries, who thus knew about the ongoing events – even if they were lacking knowledge about the greater context in which those events took place.

Beyond our everyday or moral understanding of help we have to carve out the *historical* meaning of the term, which developed during the Second

[42] Harvey, *Women*.

[43] See for an example Himmelstoß, *Odyssee,* 64, 65, where Himmelstoß made friends with the young soldier she had to replace and who was very afraid of dying at the front.

World War.[44] As auxiliaries the women were said to be merely 'helping hands', but by looking more precisely at what they actually did and experienced, this description of women auxiliaries seems to be euphemistic. The term covers the real relevance of female auxiliaries in the context of total war, where unskilled or less skilled but flexible personnel were required to be installed wherever needed. In the end the female auxiliaries were as skilled at war and as experienced as their male comrades – and that sometimes helped the German soldiers to accept women as comrades. The term auxiliaries moreover hides the fact that those women often were to 'help' in warlike situations: in the violent atmosphere of the occupied eastern territories; during the retreat of the German army; as auxiliaries serving in flak units to protect the German population against the allied air raids. Many of the situations they were involved in were genuine war situations at the front. So the German auxiliaries – though mostly unarmed – were really participating in war (and some groups consequently were defined as combatants in September 1944).[45] Female auxiliaries were close to the soldiers also in this respect.

What does all that mean with regard to female violence? We have only rare evidence that women actually exercised violence against the local population. 1943 the former BDM leader Renate Finckh, born in 1926, was sent to the Warthegau to 'help' the Germans "settle down" there (in a context impressively described by Elizabeth Harvey). She remembers a farmer's wife demanding that she should hit the polish shepherd boy who allegedly let the cows run away. Although she felt ashamed she hit him – in an, as she describes it, only "symbolic" way: "But I hit him."[46]

Women often seem to feel ashamed of being superior to local men. This is further evidence that a conventional gender hierarchy persisted through the war as a longue durée structure. For example the staff auxiliary Ilse Schmidt, who at first worked in Paris, was then sent to occupied Yugo-

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[44] See in detail for that argument Franka Maubach, 'Die "Macht weiblicher Hilfe" im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Methodische Überlegungen zu einem frauengeschichtlichen Phänomen der Militärgeschichte' ['The "Power of Female Help". Methodological Thoughts on a Women's History Phenomenon in Military History'], in Jörg Echternkamp, Wolfgang Schmidt, and Thomas Vogel, eds, *Perspektiven der Militärgeschichte: Raum, Gewalt und Repräsentation in historischer Forschung und Bildung* [*Perspectives of Military History: Space, Violence, and Representation in Historical Research and Education*] (München: Oldenbourg, 2010), 187-204.

[45] OKW vom 5.9.1944; 1. See Ursula von Gersdorff, *Frauen im Kriegsdienst 1914-1945* [*Women in Military Service*] (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1969), Dok. 218.

[46] Renate Finckh, *Sie versprachen uns eine Zukunft: Eine Jugend im Nationalsozialismus* [*They Promised Us a Future. A Youth in Nazi Germany*] (Tübingen: Silberburg, 2000), 209.

slavia and then to the Ukraine in 1942. In her autobiography she remembers that she was "deeply ashamed" when seeing a Jewish man ironing the bra of a female comrade. She felt terrible not only because this was a situation of female intimacy, from which a foreign man should have stayed away, but also because Schmidt knew that this man was a university professor. She was embarrassed about the old authorities – male gender, high education and socio-economical status – becoming worthless due to the governing racist system and the victor's law. One could say that in a very subtle kind of way she tended to obey those old authorities – but the new power constellations prevented her from doing so. This highlights the fundamental confusion of values and social norms arising from the war.

Losing superiority and becoming scapegoats

But the situation changed. At the latest, soon after the battle of Stalingrad in 1943, the occupied German forces found themselves in a less advantageous position and found it difficult to sustain their authority. What impact did that changed situation have on the relationship of military women and civilian men? I would argue that the war-related and short-term authority of women was challenged by the pre-war gender relations. Women quickly lost their status and became the first target of the population's fury and hate. The more the Nazi authorities were in danger of losing power, the more the local population regained confidence in the possibility of a reversed situation. Men became a potential threat to the female auxiliaries, who were, for example, only allowed to go outside when accompanied by armed soldiers. Isolde Springer being posted in Paris in 1944 recalled that the German women were driven to work in an armor-cased bus.[47] The local male population more and more posed a permanent threat to women.

At the end of the war hundreds of thousands of young German women knew what the word war really meant, they knew – to a lesser or greater extent – about the violence German troops and civilian authorities exercised against the local population especially in the eastern European occupied territories – and they were part of that system. It is striking how deeply they were involved. The relationship between local men and German women gives us some evidence about women exercising power. At the same time, however, we have to be aware of the long-term relations between the sexes, which persisted during the war and were reinforced during defeat. German men, too, despised the female auxiliaries because of their participation in the war – once again the sexualized stigma of those danger-

[47] Isolde Springer, Interview.

ous women who had left their traditional private space to enter the male public sphere gained a lot of social significance. Female auxiliaries lost their 'good reputation'; men doubted that they went into war for better reasons than to find a boyfriend. So they were called *Blitzmädchen* or *Offiziersmatratze* not only by veterans or older women who had stayed home, but also by their own comrades, being sexualized by those invectives. By this a traditional line of sexualized discourse was taken up, denouncing women as responsible for defeat. However, while those accusations after the First World War were publicly articulated for example against leftist women activists like Rosa Luxemburg, they were not more than part of private talk after 1945 – what was needed much more was the image of an innocent woman to establish a space allegedly untouched by the Nazi politics of persecution, deportation, and murder.[48]

But it would be too easy to argue that the pre-war gender ratio could simply be re-established after the war. The new female experiences of being powerful and part of warfare did not cease to exist. After reading my presentation a friend of mine told me an American proverb: "How are you gonna keep them down on a farm after they've seen Paris?" That describes quite well what many female auxiliaries must have felt after the war. But at the same time they were happy that their agency sank into oblivion, as the whole extent of what they were part of became more and more obvious. They had participated in the Nazi war of annihilation. That they allegedly rather 'helped' than really participated in the war, had relieving implications; that they had been only *auxiliaries* helped them in coping with their past. Interestingly their need to express what war had meant to them breaks through in their memories. As mentioned above, many of the former auxiliaries explicitly told me that the wartime had been the best of their life.

Even if many women auxiliaries after the war avoided talking about their war-biographies trying to hide behind the picture of female innocence, female veteran groups (female comradeship was at least as important as male-female comradeship) made it, for example, possible to remember the "good times" of the war and the former position of power. And the male-female comradeship was vivid within marriages which were arranged during the war. Men who became acquainted with their later wife in military service supposedly after 1945 went on accepting their wife's past. However, for women who were unmarried at the end of the war, it sometimes became difficult to find a man – their bad reputation was a major obstacle.

[48] For the First World War, still see Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien* [*Male Phantasies*], 2 vols. (Basel: Roter Stern, 1986).

The long-lasting and intense conversations of Isolde and her boyfriend and later husband came to an end when Willy died in April 1945 leaving Isolde pregnant with twins. Obviously comradeship had disburdened them from living a traditional love-affair and marriage with clearly determined roles – which anyway was not possible during the war. Feelings of love and comradeship were mingled with each other showing how complex the relationship between soldiers and female auxiliaries really was. We only can guess about what the couple and former believing Nazis would have said and how they would have remembered the war and their place within it they were to be interviewed together.