

Sexual Villainy in the Holocaust

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Abstract

A particularly venomous aspect of Nazi ideology directed against the Jew focused on the sexual proclivities of 'licentious' Jews and, in contrast, the 'pure' virginal qualities of Aryan women. Biologically, Jews were depicted as polluting and infecting pure 'Aryan' women through forced sexual contact as well as being morally corrupt through their promiscuity. 'Aryans', however, as the superior 'Master Race' were depicted as heroic, pure, self-sacrificing and upholding simple lifestyles, and above all, fellowship.

In reality, however, the villains in the Holocaust, particularly with regard to sexual behaviour, were German rather than Jewish. Significant acts of sexual brutality were perpetrated by Germans against men and women, heterosexuals as well as homosexuals, Jews and non-Jews, including humiliating nudity, physical and sexual abuse, cruelty, torture and rape. Such sexually directed villainy was perpetrated out of fear, hatred, power, or even for pleasure.

This paper will explore the ideological image of the sexual villain and the real villain in the Holocaust era.

Key Words: Holocaust, Nazis, Germans, ideology, sexuality. sexual brutality, Jews, non-Jews.

1. The Ideological Image of the Sexual Villain

Hitler had popularized the conceptualization of the licentious Jew in the 1920s with his writing:

The black-haired Jewish youth lies in wait for hours on end, satanically glaring at and spying on the unsuspecting girl whom he plans to seduce, adulterating her blood and removing her from the bosom of her own people.¹

¹ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1939), 160-2.

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This image was further propagated by novels such as Artur Dinter's popular novel (1919) depicting a Jew with numerous non-Jewish lovers – *Die Sünde wider das Blut*,² and in films including *Jud Süß*³ which depicted Jews as financial manipulators and rapists and *Der Ewige Jude* that portrayed Jews as vile, dirty and verminous. *Der Stürmer*, a virulently anti-semitic, and widely distributed newspaper further popularized these images.

2. The Real Sexual Villain

The Holocaust is known for its physical and psychological cruelty towards Jews. While images of emaciation and mass murder are commonly acknowledged, sexual perversions of the Nazis are less well known. These acts of cruelty occurred in towns and villages, ghettos, prisons and concentration camps. Their targets included men, women and children and groups such as homosexuals. While Nazi ideology depicted the Jews as licentious and sexually abusive, it was in fact Nazis that were the perpetrators of the most heinous acts of sexual depravity.

3. Jews

The Nuremberg laws rapidly removed Jews from most active segments of German life, eventually separating them into ghettos. Sometime during 1941 the 'Final Solution' was implemented. Jews were sent to labour or concentration camps to be worked to death, or to extermination camps where they were murdered on arrival. In camps men and women were systematically dehumanized through actions designed to remove any remaining vestiges of humanity. These included removing their names, clothes, possessions, bodily hair, husbands or wives, children and other family members, means of cleanliness, and privacy for living, washing, or fulfilling basic bodily functions. Women's internal organs were searched for hidden valuables. They were repeatedly forced to strip naked and were subjected to 'selections' for gassing, based on their level of debility or, in some instances, the whims of SS guards. Sexual activity in the camps was reduced to a minimum by separating men and women. Sexual exchange became possible for some who were able to barter their bodies for a slice of bread, or a lifesaving pair of shoes. On the positive side, however, because of the severe Nazi restrictions against sexual contact with Jews for fear of contamination of the German race (*Rassenschande*), many if not most Jewish women were spared from rape or from forced prostitution.

² Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Ipperman, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 37; Michael Kater, *Doctors under Hitler*(Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 179-181.

³ Veit Harlan, "Jud Süß," (Germany: Terra-Filmkunst GmbH, 1934).

4. Aryans

Despite the image of the German as heroic, pure, self-sacrificing and upholding simple lifestyles, and above all, fellowship, promoted by the powerful and effective Nazi propaganda ministry, Germans during the Nazi era were sexually prolific.⁴ While their regime decried 'degenerate' sexuality it also promoted 'healthy sexuality' and many chose to indulge in this with enthusiasm. Reports indicate that fewer than five percent of German girls were virgins at marriage.⁵

In addition, prostitution became an integrated part of the Nazi endeavour particularly during the war years. 'Pure' German women, like Jews, were exempt from forced prostitution, although they were exhorted and encouraged to voluntarily have intercourse with 'pure' Aryans to bear progeny for the Reich. All other categories of women – usually prisoners – could be enticed, or forced, to become prostitutes. Prostitution was seen as fulfilling a number of purposes including satisfying the sexual needs of German soldiers and thereby avoiding their contact with 'impure' forced labourers in occupied countries, as well as serving as a means of 'therapy' for homosexual male prisoners⁶ in an endeavour to convert them to heterosexuality. Lengyel⁷ suggests that prostitutes were provided as an acceptable sexual outlet for SS and other camp guards who were continuously exposed to vast numbers of naked women paraded before them in camps. Access to prostitutes was also used as an incentive for increased productivity amongst both senior camp personnel and privileged prisoners in camps. A network of state-controlled brothels was established across Europe including civil and military brothels, as well as those for forced labourers and those in concentration camps. The most beautiful women went to the SS brothel, the less beautiful ones to the soldier's brothels. The rest ended up in the prisoner's brothels.⁸

⁴ Dagmar Herzog, "Hubris and Hypocrisy, Incitement and Disavowal: Sexuality and German Fascism," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1/2 (2002): 7.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Hans Peter Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lipincott Company, 1971), 225; Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc, 1986), 270-1.

⁷ Olga Lengyel, *Five Chimneys: A Woman Survivor's True Story of Auschwitz*, First Academy Chicago edition, 1995 ed. (Chicago: Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 1947), 195.

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5. Sexual Brutality in Towns and Villages

Sexuality extended into brutality in many settings. Numerous reports show that corpses of thousands of Jews were dumped into pits, which they had been made to dig, after being lined up beside them and killed with guns. German officers and their local allies pulled gold teeth out of mouths, before or after, murdering their victims. Babies were thrown into the air and used for target practice. Jewish women were raped before being murdered. Sometimes, as in Czestochowa, Poland, police forced thousands of half-naked men and women to assemble in a square where they were beaten. Young girls were taken into the synagogue, forced to undress, sexually assaulted and tortured.⁹ The massacre in the Greek town of Distomo also reflects the sexually directed aspects of Nazi cruelty.¹⁰ Just outside the village, SS troops were attacked by partisans. They returned to the village and spent the next few hours killing the population viciously. As Nicholas reports,

Pregnant women were eviscerated with bayonets and their intestines wrapped around their necks. People were decapitated and children's heads crushed. Houses were burned with all the occupants inside. Women and little girls were raped and then executed.¹¹

Children too, did not escape sexual brutality. In a French village, the SS tied the smallest children, boys and girls, to the chairs in the schoolroom. They told them:

to suck the soldiers' organs like their mothers' breasts. Then when the soldiers have had their way, the children are told to imagine it as milk and swallow happily, and their teachers are to make sure they do not cry as they swallow.¹²

⁸ Robert Sommer, *Das Kz-Bordell (the Concentration Camp Bordello; Sexual Forced Labor in National Socialist Concentration Camps)*. (Paderborn Schoningh Verlag, 2009).

⁹ Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War against the Jews 1933-1945*(New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 270.

¹⁰ Lynn H. Nicholas, *Cruel World: The Children of Europe in the Nazi Web*(New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 430.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Daniel Asa Rose, *Hiding Places*(New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 320-22.

The *Einsatzgruppen* were particularly distinguished by their brutality including shooting pregnant women in the belly before throwing them into burial pits, and conducting body searches of sex organs and anuses looking for valuables.¹³ Others might hurl a fist into the belly of a pregnant woman and throw her alive into the grave.¹⁴

6. Sexual Brutality in Ghettos

Ghettos provided little escape from Nazi sexual brutality. In the Kovno ghetto, Tornbaum, a 'typical German gendarme' forced women to undress, so that he could conduct gynecological examinations on them (looking for hidden valuables) while at the same time beating them severely.¹⁵ Internal examinations of women in ghettos are reported by others.¹⁶ In Hungary, prior to deportation, some women had electric wires inserted into their uterus in front of their family as part of the search for hidden valuables.¹⁷ Similarly Dr Edith Kramer reports that women in the Lodz ghetto were offered a chance to work in Poland. Before going they were required to bath: "This provided a good chance for the SS men to beat the naked girls with whips."¹⁸ Martin Gray¹⁹ reports that in the Warsaw ghetto, "he'd seen them dash out the brains of newborn babies against the walls, rip open the bellies of pregnant women, and throw casualties into the flames."²⁰

¹³ Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, and Volker Reiss, eds., *The Good Old Days: The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders* (Old Saybrook, Connecticut: Konecky and Konecky, 1991), 179; Richard Rhodes, *Masters of Death: The SS Einsatzgruppen and the Invention of the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 185-6.

¹⁴ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), 146.

¹⁵ Avraham Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kovno Ghetto Diary* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 403.

¹⁶ Mary Berg, *The Diary of Mary Berg* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1945, 2007), 37; Sol Littman, *War Criminal on Trial: Rauca of Kaunas* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1993), 102; Ana Porter, *Kasztner's Train: The True Story of Rezső Kasztner, Unknown Hero of the Holocaust* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2007), 156-8, 185, 195.

¹⁷ Porter, 170.

¹⁸ Roger A. Ritvo and Diane M. Plotkin, *Sisters in Sorrow: Voices of Care in the Holocaust* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1998), 134.

¹⁹ Martin Gray and Max Gallo, *For Those I Loved* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 204.

²⁰ Ibid.

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7. Sexual Brutality in Prisons

Those in prison were even more readily exposed to sexual brutality: Käthe Baronowitz, arrested as a communist, reported:

The cruelties and perversities of the interrogation can hardly be described. [She] had to undress completely. A howling pack goaded on by alcohol surrounded her. They stuck pens in her vagina and paper flags which they burned so that they could gloat over the tortured woman's screams of pain. They called her a "Jew whore" as they tormented her.²¹

Jadwiga Dzido at the Nuremberg Doctors trial reported being beaten while naked by the Gestapo in Lublin²² and Dr Edith Kramer, imprisoned in Berlin, watched the Gestapo training police dogs to jump at fluttering skirts fastened to wooden rods.²³

Klaus Barbie is perhaps best known amongst sexually brutal prison commanders. Paris wrote:

Women were always tortured naked, to the deep enjoyment of the torturers. Barbie kept two German shepherd dogs. One was trained to lunge and bite. The other was trained to mount naked women who had first been ordered on their hands and knees. A humiliation that cut deeper than the whip, than having one's fingernails pulled.²⁴

Father Bonaventura Boudet who was interrogated by the Gestapo in the prison where Barbie was based, reported that fingers and toes were cut off with kitchen knives, women's breasts were severed and their nipples torn off, limbs were burned and severed from the body.²⁵ On September 18 1943 Klaus Barbie was personally cited by Himmler and on November 9 1943, he was awarded the Iron Cross, First Class, with sword.²⁶

²¹ Marion A Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*(New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 19-20.

²² Vivien Spitz, *Doctors from Hell: The Horrific Accounts of Nazi Experiments on Humans*(Boulder: Sentient Publications, 2005), 146.

²³ Ritvo and M., 141.

²⁴ Judith Miller, *One by One by One: Facing the Holocaust*(New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 123.

²⁵ Tom Bower, *Klaus Barbie: Butcher of Lyons*(London: Corgi Books, 1984), 75.

8. Sexual Brutality in Concentration Camps

While humiliation, nudity and voyeurism were common in the camps, more extreme forms of sexual brutality occurred. The Ukrainian Ivan Demaniuk in Treblinka

stabbed the women's naked thighs and genitals with a sword before they entered the gas chambers and also raped young women and girls.²⁷

In Treblinka, the camp commander had a dog trained to attack a man's private parts. The dog was called "Man" and the Jews "Dogs": He would attack when given the order "Look, Man, that dog isn't working"²⁸

SS officer **Tauber**, in Auschwitz, was known for his sadistic acts towards women. He:

brought a thousand women out into the snow, lined them up, entirely naked, in the freezing air, then, moving along the ranks, lifted their breasts with the tip of his whip. Those whose breasts sagged went to the left, those whose breasts remained firm went to the right and were spared a little longer.²⁹

9. Sexual Brutality Perpetrated by Women

Men were not the only perpetrators of sexual brutality. Some women also achieved notoriety in this respect. In Auschwitz:

Irma Griese had selected a handsome Georgian man to become her lover. When he refused she beat his true love, a slim, Polish woman, brutally in front of him while she was naked. "She was in a dreadful state. Red welts extended across her face and across her chest. The sadistic SS had spared not even her face....I never saw the handsome Georgian again. The beautiful beast had him shot. The girl? ...Griese had had her sent to the Auschwitz brothel."³⁰

²⁶ Erna Paris, *Unhealed Wounds: France and the Klaus Barbie Affair* (Toronto: Methuen, 1985), 94.

²⁷ Eli Rozenberg, "Testimony, p. 6, Jerusalem.

²⁸ Jean-Francois Steiner, *Treblinka* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 166.

²⁹ Fania Fenelon, *Playing for Time* (New York: Berkely Books, 1977), 173.

³⁰ Lengyel, 201-3.

10. Sexual Brutality Towards Homosexuals

The most grievous tortures of a sexually sadistic nature were imposed on homosexual prisoners in concentration camps. Heger describes the torture to death of a homosexual man:

He was stripped naked and his hands tied to a hook in a wall so that he could not touch the ground with his feet. First he was tickled with goose feathers on the soles of his feet, the armpits, between the legs and other parts of his naked body. Then the SS brought two metal bowls, one filled with cold water one with hot. These bowls were placed between his legs alternatively so that his testicles hung in the hot, then cold water. This continued until the victim lost consciousness screaming in agony. A bucket of cold water was thrown over his to bring him around and then the torture started again, "this time with bits of skin now hanging visibly down from the victim's scalded scrotum". Then they shoved a broom handle deep into his anus – his body jerked and tore at the chains. Eventually they cut him down. One of the SS brought a wooden chair down on the victims head with all his force, killing him.³¹

11. Sexual arousal through brutality

Survivor memoirs report sexual arousal and satisfaction being gained through acts of brutality. Irma Griese, in Auschwitz, experienced sexual arousal while observing breast surgery:

From that day on she went around in camp, her bejewelled whip poised, picked out the most beautiful young women and slashed their breasts open with the braided wire end of her whip. Subsequently those breasts got infected by the lice and dirt which invaded every nook and corner of the camp. They had to be cut open if the patient was to be saved. Irma Greze invariably arrives to watch the operation, kicking the victim if her screams interfered with her pleasure and giving herself completely to the orgiastic spasms which

³¹ Heinz Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*(New York: Alyson Books, 1980), 84.

shook her entire body and made saliva run down from the corner of her mouth.³²

Similarly, Klauss Scheurenberg reports that in Eichmann's headquarters in Wulkow, the commandant gained sexual pleasure from watching beatings of men. As he reports, "He sent some of us to Sachsenhausen to be gassed; he shot some; and he beat some to death with a chain. At some point in the beatings, he always reached a climax and his pants got wet."³³

Sexual gratification was also obtained from cruelty to homosexuals. As Heger reports, the camp commander stood by and watched as homosexuals were beaten:

At each stroke his eyes lit up and after a few strokes his whole face was red with excitement. He buried his hands in his trouser pockets and could clearly be seen to masturbate, quite unperturbed by our presence...I myself witnessed on more than thirty occasions how this camp commander got sexual satisfaction from watching the lashings inflicted on the "horse" and the perverted lust with which he followed each stroke and the screams of the victim.³⁴

12. How could they do it? Why did they do it?

How could the Nazis perpetrate such sexual brutality? The effective Nazi propaganda campaign that dehumanized Jews to the point of being considered as 'vermin,' 'subhumans,' or 'life unworthy of life' probably made it psychologically possible for Germans who endorsed Nazi ideology to perpetrate such horrific acts. Underlying such images was an overwhelming fear of 'contamination,' or of the threat supposedly imposed by Jews. Although reduced to the lowest level of poverty and humanity, and comprising less than 1% of German society, Jews were depicted as a global threat. They were seen as promoting an international conspiracy that was the driving force behind the Allied 'enemies' of Germany, and were depicted as responsible for manipulating the world's, and Germany's, finances. Fear and hatred of Jews, combined with the Nazis newfound personal power over others and their desire for a new powerful Germany and Aryan race, combined to mobilize and justify such brutal actions.

³² Gisella Perl, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, Reprint edition 2007 ed.(North Stratford, NH: Ayer Company Publishers, 1948), 61-2.

³³ Johannes Steinhoff, Peter Pechel, and Dennis Showalter, *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History*(Washington: Da Capo Press, 1989), 332.

³⁴ Heger, 53-55.

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The real villains, particularly with regard to sexual behaviours, were clearly Germans rather than Jews.

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