

Summer 8-2015

Silenced Voices: Sexual Violence During and After World War II

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The University of Southern Mississippi

Silenced Voices: Sexual Violence During and After World War II

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of History

August 2015

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Abstract

This thesis explores the different types of sexual violence present during and immediately after World War II and focuses specifically on the European Theater of the war. Memoirs, journals and diaries were used as primary sources. This research focuses on the overlapping themes of sexual violence in the form of forcible rape and sexual violence as a means of protection and survival. The goal of this research is to provide a comprehensive view of the complexity surrounding many situations in which sexual violence occurred. It also aims to partially fill the gap in historical literature on this topic, and bring the different types of sexual violence during wartime to the forefront of academic discussion in this field.

Key Words: sexual violence, WWII, European theater, sexual coercion, war, rape

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my family—Mom and Dad, thank you for your constant encouragement, guidance and most importantly, your support. I cannot thank you enough for your unwavering patience and your willingness to help with revisions. To my sister Marnie, thank you for always answering the phone, no matter how late, and reminding me that it's okay to stumble along the way. You're the best cheerleader a little sister could ask for.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis adviser and mentor, Dr. Allison Abra, for believing in my idea from day one. Thank you for never giving up on me throughout this process; your guidance and genuine excitement about my research are the reasons this project exists.

I would also like to thank Dr. Robert Press for going above and beyond as a professor. Through your encouragement you reminded me of what I was capable of accomplishing, and for that, I am extremely grateful.

And finally, I would like to thank my friends for joining me on this crazy ride. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for listening to me ramble on about this project for months, and still hanging out with me anyway.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Sexual violence during wartime has often been seen as an unavoidable consequence of total war. Total war is a military conflict in which all who are involved are willing to make any sacrifice necessary in order to win, whether it is a loss of lives or resources. Sexual violence is oftentimes used in war as a way to demonstrate dominance over an enemy; not only has the aggressor taken over the country, but also the people, more specifically the women. However, sexual violence should not be brushed off as a consequence of this type of war since it is a problem with long-lasting negative effects on its victims. Sexual violence appeared in many forms during World War II, not just as rape. Mass rape was a major problem, but women also fell victim to sexual violence because of complicated situations and circumstances they were placed in. For example, many women endured sexual violence as a means of protection or survival for themselves or their family and friends. One must understand that this type of sexual brutality and dominance over women occurred on almost every side, and was not limited to one or two militaries. For example, when the Germans entered the Soviet Union, they raped, pillaged, and acted with extreme brutality.¹ In return, when the Soviet Union's Red Army pushed into Germany, many soldiers sought vengeance and they treated the Germans, especially in Berlin, with extreme brutality, ruthlessness, and barbarity.² However, there were also numerous instances of sexual violence among American GIs while in France as well as during their occupation of Germany.

¹ Wendy Jo Gertjeanssen, "Victims, Heroes, Survivors: Sexual Violence on the Eastern Front During World War II," (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2004).

² Ibid.

The issue being addressed in this thesis is how various forms of sexual violence have occurred during and after wartime, and the stigmas that were placed on victims as a result of the sexual violence they endured. This research will focus specifically on the European theater of World War II and the acts of sexual violence committed by soldiers of both Allied and Axis powers. In addition, the complexity of situations that produced different types of sexual violence committed against women will be explored. Existing research and literature on sexual violence against women during wartime identifies these types of sexual violence as forcible rape and prostitution, focusing on these two types and rarely extending the categories of sexual violence any further.³ However, other forms of sexual violence occurred during war. There exists a gap in the literature that fails to identify other forms of sexual violence not clearly falling into these categories. This thesis argues a two-fold alternative form of sexual violence: experiencing sexual violence as a perceived means of survival by the victim, and experiencing sexual violence as a means of protection for others.

Women's personal accounts reveal this complexity. The diary *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in the Conquered City* by Anonymous and the memoir *In My Hands* by Irene Gut Opdyke recount the experiences of two women during World War II. Both of these women experienced sexual violence in more than one form multiple times during the war from occupying forces. In almost every instance of sexual violence during and after World War II, women were victims of forcible rape, and the anonymous author of *A Woman in Berlin* and Irene Gut Opdyke were no exception. Both women were raped by

³ Robert G. Moeller, "Life after Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s," *Central European History* (Cambridge University Press / UK) 38, no. 2 (2005): 339-342, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 20, 2014).

occupying forces multiple times. This was not the end for them, however. Anonymous was living in Berlin during the occupation of the Red Army and was forced to make arrangements and have coercive sex with different officers in order to survive. She was essentially forced into prostitution as a way to protect herself from the mass rapes, as well as to receive food from an officer to provide for herself and her friends.⁴ This was her only option to survive death from starvation and protect herself from the brutality of the Soviet soldiers; relying on rations for food was no longer a reliable outlet, and as the city fell into chaos at the end of the war, women constantly faced the threat of being violently raped by Soviet soldiers and left for dead. Therefore, Anonymous experienced sexual violence as a means of survival and protection.

Irene Gut Opdyke was a Polish housekeeper for a German officer during the war and was hiding Jewish friends in the basement of the house. When the German officer discovered this, he promised to keep Irene's secret, but only at a price. She had to sleep with him and become his mistress.⁵ To refuse him would not only be giving up the lives of her Jewish friends, but also giving up her own life. Irene did whatever she had to in order to protect their lives, and because of this she also endured sexual violence as a means of survival and protection.

These memoirs showcase the brutality and ruthlessness that many women fell victim to during and after World War II, and also hint at the complexity of such situations in which women in occupied areas were forced into prostitution and the circumstances that could cause this. Not only were women raped, but also forced to give up their bodies

⁴ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, trans. Philip Boehm (London: Picador, 2006), 64 and 106.

⁵ Irene Opdyke, *In My Hands*, (New York: Random House, 2004).

for food, protection, safety, and survival. These were not positions that these women desired to be in, nor would they have been in these situations under any other circumstances. However, the brutality of World War II and the constant change of occupying forces resulted in a complicated relationship between women trying to save their homes and the soldiers in the European theatre of the war.

Review of Literature

In order to understand the different types of sexual violence that occurred during World War II, it is important to have a clear understanding of how sexual violence is defined. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines sexual violence as “any sexual act that is perpetrated against someone’s will. Sexual violence encompasses a range of offenses, including a completed nonconsensual sexual act, an attempted nonconsensual sexual act, abusive sexual contact, and non-contact sexual abuse.”⁶ Webster’s Dictionary defines rape as “an unlawful sexual activity carried out forcibly” or “to force someone to have sex with you by using violence or the threat of violence.”⁷ Webster’s Dictionary also defines sexual assault as being “illegal sexual contact that usually involves force upon a person without consent or is inflicted upon a person who is incapable of giving consent or who places the assailant in a position of trust or authority.”⁸

Out of all of the different types of sexual violence during World War II, existing literature has focused primarily on stories of forcible rape, which was extremely widespread.⁹ Rape often left many victims struggling with this experience for the rest of their lives. For some women, they were raped multiple times by different people. Mass rape was especially prevalent on the eastern front during World War II. Wendy Jo Gertjens addresses this in her dissertation, “Victims, Heroes, Survivors: Sexual Violence on the Eastern Front During World War II.” With a massive amount of

⁶ “Sexual Violence,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Online, <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/definitions.html> (accessed April 12, 2014).

⁷ “Rape,” Dictionary.com, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/rape> (accessed April 12, 2014).

⁸ “Sexual Assault,” Merriam-Webster Online, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sexual+assault?show=0&t=1395720696> (accessed April 12, 2014).

⁹ Jessica, Ravitz, “Silence lifted: The untold stories of rape during the Holocaust,” CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/europe/06/24/holocaust.rape/> (accessed April 18, 2014).

research collected, Gertjeanssen delves into the different types of sexual violence inflicted on civilians on the eastern front of the World War II and the spread of venereal diseases.¹⁰ Some of the types of sexual violence exposed by Gertjeanssen include civilians being forced into prostitutional relationships, being put in military brothels with forced female workers, as well as mass rape, sexual harassment, and complex systems of sexual slavery.¹¹ She notes that Soviets seemed to rape indiscriminately, and German officers were not much better, violating numerous racial laws. Neither age or ethnicity or religion mattered, with a range of young girls to older women experiencing one or more forms of sexual violence. Even though these actions were sexual war crimes, military commanders on both sides overlooked the actions and did not attempt to put an end to these atrocities.¹² Gertjeanssen also notes that neither side accepted responsibility and neither side was prosecuted for these crimes after the war.

The reason for this extreme brutality in sexual violence on the eastern front was the growing hostility between the Soviets and the Germans. When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union they terrorized Soviet civilians, pillaging, raping, and killing as they advanced into the country's interior. So when the Soviets pushed into Germany at the end of the war and overtook Berlin, they did the same to the German population and with a vengeance. The article, *After the Reich: The Brutal History of the Allied Occupation*, was written by Giles MacDonogh in 2009 and is a history of the events that occurred in Berlin following the collapse of the Third Reich and the Soviet occupation. The German people were exhausted, demoralized, and struggling as a country in all aspects because of the toll

¹⁰ Wendy Jo Gertjeanssen, "Victims, Heroes, Survivors: Sexual Violence on the Eastern Front During World War II," (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2004).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

that the war had taken.¹³ Instead of coming into contact with gracious victors interested in rebuilding a new German state, they were faced with victors seeking vengeance through brutal measures. MacDonogh confronts the difficult issues surrounding the lives of German civilians such as death rates, child mortality, food scarcity, forced labor, and sexual violence especially in the form of rape. He estimates that approximately 2.5 million German civilians died during this time.¹⁴ Due to the humiliation and shame that the German population felt following the end of World War II, many Germans have never spoken out about their experiences.

Christoph Schiessl's article, "An Element of Genocide: Rape, Total War, and International Law in the Twentieth Century," addresses the fact that the rape of women is oftentimes a large problem in warfare and always has been, no matter where in the world the war is raging or country is located. There have been attempts to regulate total war and the problems that come with it, such as rape, but unfortunately rape has never been one of the most important topics of regulation at conferences held for this purpose.¹⁵ Until recent years, men were not even tried or punished for the crime of rape and sexual violence against women.¹⁶ Throughout history, rape has been accepted as an unfortunate part of war, but soldiers rape to show dominance over the enemy and also to completely demoralize the enemy people as a whole.¹⁷ They desire to show they have not only taken the enemy's land and country, but also the people, specifically the women, and the

¹³ Giles MacDonogh, *After the Reich: The Brutal History of the Allied Occupation*, New York: Basic Books, 2009.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Christoph Schiessl, "An element of genocide: rape, total war, and international law in the twentieth century," *Journal of Genocide Research* 4, no. 2: 197-210, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 20, 2014).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

communities. Rape was not included in international law until 1949 and it is seen as a crime against peace and humanity, violating basic human rights.¹⁸ Its inclusion in international law as a crime against basic human rights focused on the responsibility of the individual, therefore eliminating the excuse of having acted under orders during wartime.¹⁹ Rape during wartime is a barbaric and brutal act that only inflicts pain on women and instills a sense of constant fear in them—a fear of something that no woman should ever have to be afraid of.²⁰

The reality of this fear is addressed in “Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s” by Robert G. Moeller. This article brings to light the problem of rape during and after World War II and how it was so common. After World War II, many people in Europe did not know how to talk about what had occurred and what they had experienced, so a silence fell over the topic and people did not speak openly about it at first.²¹ The horror of World War II made violence a confusing concept after the war because it ranged in greatness and brutality across Europe and in every theatre of the war, and this included the sexual violence inflicted upon women across countries. Because of the death, mass rape, and other atrocities experienced during the war, there was a move towards a more conservative view of the family, leisure time, and life in general, similar to what existed before the war.²² Each country focused on different aspects of the war in order to remember the mass violence

¹⁸ Christoph Schiessl, “An element of genocide: rape, total war, and international law in the twentieth century,”

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Robert G. Moeller, “Life after Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s,” *Central European History* (Cambridge University Press / UK) 38, no. 2 (2005): 339-342, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 20, 2014).

²² Ibid.

and barbarism caused by the Nazis as a way of preventing it in the future, and distinguishing themselves from that regime. After the war, in order to regain a sense of normalcy, people began talking about the war and what had gone, including the numerous instances of sexual violence and mass rapes.²³ The strong memory of that violence is what has allowed Europe to gain a new sense of normalcy in its society and culture.²⁴

Addressing this memory of violence and World War II in general in his book, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, Antony Beevor writes an account of the German side of the end of the war. Beevor previously wrote the introduction to the memoir, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in the Conquered City* by Anonymous and is a well-known and respected military historian. In *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, Beevor pays attention to the savagery of war through the death, pillaging, sexual violence, and destruction that swallowed Berlin in January 1945.²⁵ Although gruesome, his book provides an honest retelling of the last days of Hitler and the Third Reich. Beevor took advantage of Soviet, German, American, British, French, and Swedish archives, offering the reader a book that is both thorough and hauntingly real. This book illustrates the hopelessness and anguish of the German people during this time, as well as the ferocity of the Soviet Red Army, while demonstrating the complex situation that those in Berlin found themselves in January of 1945.

²³ Moeller, "Life after Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s,"

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Antony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, New York: Penguin, 2003.

Although there is a fair amount of literature that exists on the sexual violence that occurred on the eastern front, recent literature has shown that the American military also was involved in committing acts of sexual violence during World War II. Written in 2007 by J. Robert Lilly, *Taken by Force: Rape and American GIs in Europe in World War II* is an important piece of literature that focuses on this topic. Lilly is a sociologist and criminologist, and the book examines the social ramifications for these crimes. This is another recent publication focusing on the rape and sexual violence forced on European women between 1942 and 1945. Lilly focuses primarily on the rape of British, French, and German women by the U.S. army estimating that 14,000 civilian women were victims.²⁶ He also takes note of the different circumstances and social contexts present in each situation and country in order to provide the reader with as thorough of an understanding as possible. In this field, Lilly's book does the same as the recent publication of *What Soldiers Do* by stressing the necessity of this type of research in order to fill in the gaps that currently exist.

Another important piece of literature, and the most recent to be found on this topic, is the book *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* written by Mary Louise Roberts in 2013. In this book, Roberts discusses the American occupation of France in 1944 and the sexual violence that occurred there. Roberts unveils the tactic used by the American military in order to encourage soldiers to enlist and go overseas in World War II. This tactic was relied on exploiting the myth that all beautiful French women were sexually experienced, as well as free with themselves sexually.²⁷

²⁶ Robert J. Lilly, *Taken by Force: Rape and American GIs in Europe in World War II*, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

²⁷ Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.

This made the young American men believe that upon their arrival, French women would be throwing themselves at the soldiers sexually for liberating and saving them. This myth caused extreme problems once the American GIs were in France and resulted in extreme cases of sexual violence, not to mention chaos.²⁸ Roberts uses a range of sources to provide information revealing the horrific situations that occurred as a result of this widespread belief among American GIs, such as widespread venereal diseases, mass rape, and even the abuse and ill-treatment of prostitutes. These actions, as well as the lack of response and control from the American military leadership over the GIs, proved to be traumatic to the already downcast French population.²⁹

This book is vital to this research because Roberts addresses the sexual violence experienced in the European theater of the war, but more specifically, the actions of the American GIs, a topic previously glossed over. Roberts does not discredit any of the successes of the American military in World War II, but instead brings another side of the story to light for an honest look at what Americans call the Greatest Generation. *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* is also an important book because its recent publication showcases the growing interest in this topic and helps to validate the significance and urgency of this research.

In addition, the article written by Petra Goedde, “From Villains to Victims: Fraternization and the Feminization of Germany, 1945-1947,” also addressed the presence of the American GIs and their acts of sexual violence in Germany. This article focused on the often overlooked relationships between American soldiers and German civilian women. When American troops occupied Germany, many became involved with

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*

German women, which directly violated some military rules and also resulted in a warped vision of Germany for many of them. American soldiers were banned from fraternizing with Germans, but by the summer of 1945 many soldiers had gotten involved with German women and this was a major problem among the occupying forces.³⁰ By August 1945, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among American soldiers and German civilians had reached its peak, forcing German and American health officials to work together to solve this problem, and the birth of children outside of marriage—called “occupation children”—rose drastically.³¹ Although some of these interactions between American soldiers and German women were voluntary, many were not. German women lived in constant fear of being raped by American forces. Although it is not addressed as often as sexual violence, the American soldiers were not innocent when it came to having sexual relations with foreign “enemy” women. These atrocities need to be noted and acknowledged from every front.

The Pacific theater of the war also is significant in this research because of the presence of different types of sexual violence that occurred there. In recent years, the situations and experiences of the comfort women have become topics that have gained interest. This explosion of literature on the experiences of the comfort women showcases the complex and unimaginable situations these women were placed in and also sheds light on the existence of sexual violence in forms other than forcible rape. It is for this reason that this literature is fundamental in expanding to the experiences of the women in the European theater during and after World War II. Peter Li’s article “The Nanking

³⁰ Petra Goedde, "From villains to victims: Fraternization and the feminization of Germany, 1945-1947," *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 1: 1 (1999), *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 20, 2014).

³¹ Goedde, "From villains to victims: Fraternization and the feminization of Germany, 1945-1947,"

Holocaust Tragedy, Trauma, and Reconciliation” looked into this theater of the war. When Japanese troops took over the Chinese capital of Nanking, mass killings and rapes occurred in numbers unlike any before its time.³² The sexual assault on women was so terrible that what was called the Nanking Massacre also became known as the “Rape of Nanking.”³³ Men, women, and children were brutally killed in Nanking, oftentimes for no reason or simply for “practice.”³⁴ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that women were brutally raped in mass numbers. Records show that hundreds of thousands of Chinese women were sexually abused and raped by Japanese soldiers.³⁵ These mass rapes resulted in the Japanese institution of comfort women, which was such a “success” in Nanking that it was implemented throughout Japanese occupation areas during World War II. The Japanese have refused to fully and legally acknowledge the Nanking Massacre and all of the damage it occurred and pay reparation for these actions. Instead, many Japanese officials have argued that the damages caused in Nanking were substantially less than what has been previously claimed.³⁶

Many women did not experience random acts of aggression in the form of rape, but sometimes it was a well-planned and orchestrated, event.³⁷ In fact, they were sometimes organized by the military itself. During World War II, the Japanese forced thousands of young women into prostitution. These women were known as “comfort

³² Peter Li, "The Nanking Holocaust Tragedy, Trauma and Reconciliation," *Society* 37, no. 2: 56-65 (2000), *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 6, 2014).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Li, "The Nanking Holocaust Tragedy, Trauma and Reconciliation,"

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Chunghee Sarah Soh, “Human Rights and the ‘Comfort Women,’” *Peace Review* 12 no. 1 (2000): 123-129,

<<http://content.ebscohost.com/pdf10/pdf/2000/PCR/01Mar00/3453579.pdf?T=P&P=AN&K=3453579&S=R&D=aph&EbscoContent=dGJyMMTo50Seqa84yNfsOLCmr0yepRFsKq4SbSWxWXS&ContentCustom er=dGJyMOvX5Yavqa9JuePfgex44Dt6fIA>>.

women.” Chunghee Sarah Soh addressed this institution in the article, “Human Rights and the ‘Comfort Women.’” Comfort women came from a range of Asian countries, and in many cases the sexual abuse they suffered through was not openly discussed or acknowledged until the 1980s because of the stigma within society that was placed on them. These women were forced to have sex with multiple men, sometimes more than fifty in a single day.³⁸ For many years, Japan avoided the subject of having set up “comfort stations” during the war and shirked any responsibilities or duties to compensate the surviving women for the pain and suffering inflicted upon them. Nor did they issue a formal apology. Many of the countries from which the comfort women were taken would like for the violated women to be given a formal apology, legal compensation, and to have Japan rightly punished for their violations against the women’s human rights.³⁹ Thousands of comfort women during World War II have never been fully compensated for the sexual abuse they endured because of the Japanese military.

Thanks to the work of historians and researchers, there is a great amount of existing literature that sheds light on the different types of sexual violence that was prevalent in the Pacific theater of the war, such as the comfort women. However, there is a very little information and existing literature regarding this topic in the European theater of the war. Combining information on sexual violence from both the eastern and western fronts, Jeffrey Burds writes an article, “Sexual Violence in Europe in World War II, 1939-1945.” This article explores the different forms of sexual violence that were

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Soh, “Human Rights and the ‘Comfort Women.’”

associated with the different militaries in Europe during and after World War II, as well as following the patterns of sexual violence created. Burds writes that although there were multiple types of sexual violence against civilians initiated by soldiers, there was also sexual violence directed towards civilians present among irregular forces, such as partisans and civilian vigilantes.⁴⁰ Oftentimes, it was found that these irregular forces, especially nationalist partisan forces, were increasingly savage and vicious against females who were seen as enemy nationalities. After liberation, these women, and even young girls, were called sexual collaborators for engaging in sexual acts with the enemy, even though it was unwanted by the vast majority of these females.⁴¹ They were victims of numerous types of sexual violence, and Burds recognizes this and attempts to make the distinction between them. This article will aid this research by the researcher to fill in the gaps left by Burds, as well as expand the research to sexual violence present in the European theater as a whole.

This thesis will address the question of the different types of sexual violence that occurred during and after World War II by uniting research regarding sexual violence on both the eastern and western fronts, and as a result, hopefully providing a comprehensive view of sexual violence in its varying forms. It will look into the different situations present and the circumstances that resulted in these actions. Currently, the majority of literature on the topic of sexual violence during World War II focuses primarily on forcible rape or the situation and experiences of the comfort women. By studying and

⁴⁰ Jeffrey Burds, "Sexual Violence in Europe in World War II, 1939-1945," *Sage Journals: Politics and Society* 37, no. 1 (2009): 35-73, <http://www.sovhistory.neu.edu/Burds-Sexual-Violence-COURSE.pdf> (accessed April 18, 2014).

⁴¹ Burds, "Sexual Violence in Europe in World War II, 1939-1945."

researching sexual violence in broader terms, this research will bring to light the importance of the recognition of all forms of sexual violence during World War II, and in turn, provide important historiographical information that is currently lacking in this field.

Methodology

This thesis will examine the different forms of sexual violence during and after World War II. The primary research to be collected will be in the form of documents such as memoirs, journals, letters, diaries, and previously recorded interviews. I will be using these personal accounts to explore the history of sexual violence during wartime in two distinct, and prevalent forms, and reviewing these documents based on the themes of sexual violence in the form of forcible rape, and sexual violence as a means of protection and survival.

These are two themes that have a strong presence in the personal accounts and also can loosely provide explanations for the circumstances and situations in which these women found themselves to be victims. There is also a pattern that intricately links the two themes together, and this is the overlap of forcible rape. Almost every woman who was a victim of sexual violence was raped, which often was what led to their later decisions and actions regarding the sexual violence they would later encounter in the form of protection and survival.

I will be reviewing multiple memoirs for the themes of sexual violence in the form of forcible rape and sexual violence as a means of protection and survival. In addition to analyzing these memoirs, I will also be expanding on interviews conducted by Philipp Kuwert, a trauma expert and head of the department of psychiatry and psychotherapy at the University Hospital of Greifswald in northeast Germany. Kuwert headed a research project on repercussions of sexual violence in World War II, and in this project he has interviewed twenty-seven women who spoke about their experiences of sexual violence during the war. The average age of these women at the time they

experienced some form of sexual violence was 16.7 years of age, and through his research, Kuwert also discovered that each woman was raped an average of 12 times. By using these memoirs and interviews as primary sources, I will be able to discover the true voices of these women, unveil their experiences, and expose the history of sexual violence during and after World War II by categorizing their stories into the two themes of sexual violence.

This study is bounded by the time period during World War II and the years following immediately after, 1939-1950. Therefore, the events described in these documents will have occurred during this time frame.

The organization of this thesis will be an introduction providing an overview of the research conducted, followed by two overarching chapters. These chapters will be broken up into sexual violence in the form of forcible rape and sexual violence as a means of protection and survival; included in the chapters will be the memoirs, journals, diaries, and personal accounts studied according to the appropriate category. The thesis will close out with a conclusion of the research that has been collected and what I have discovered regarding this thesis topic. Through this research, I hope to provide a comprehensive view of the different types of sexual violence present during and after World War II.

Chapter 2: Sexual Violence in the Form of Forcible Rape

The most commonly known and acknowledged type of sexual violence during wartime is forcible rape of civilian women by soldiers, which was widespread during World War II.⁴² Webster's dictionary defines rape as "an unlawful sexual activity carried out forcibly" or "to force someone to have sex with you by using sexual violence or the threat of violence."⁴³ In addition to this, it is also important to acknowledge that rape can occur in various forms, such as individual rape, gang rape, rape-shooting or rape-stabbing combinations, and also rape murders.⁴⁴ During World War II, mass rape was an extension of the concept of total war and was used by soldiers to demonstrate total domination and control over the conquered population; in this way, sex came to be seen as a trophy of conquest and became deeply imbedded in twentieth century warfare.⁴⁵ Discretion was nonexistent and women of conquered territories lived in constant fear of being brutally raped and left for dead.⁴⁶ Rape during and after World War II was a common occurrence and an unfortunate reality for women across Europe, as well as in every theatre of the war.

The rape of women was not a problem that was new or unique to World War II. In fact, this has been a problem throughout numerous wars and is oftentimes a major problem in warfare.⁴⁷ It is not an issue concentrated to one generation or one region of

⁴² Jessica Ravitz, "Silence lifted: The untold stories of rape during the Holocaust," CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/europe/06/24/holocaust.rape/> (accessed April 18, 2014).

⁴³ "Rape," Dictionary.com, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/rape> (accessed April 12, 2014).

⁴⁴ Jennifer M. Brown and Sandra L. Walklate, *Handbook on Sexual Violence* (London: Routledge, 2012), 190.

⁴⁵ Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 87.

⁴⁶ Antony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 67.

⁴⁷ Christoph Schiessl, "An element of genocide: rape, total war, and international law in the twentieth century," *Journal of Genocide Research* 4, no. 2 (2002): 197-210, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 20, 2014).

the world. Even as prevalent of a problem as rape during wartime has been, few soldiers have been tried or punished for the crime of rape and sexual violence against women until recently. Previous attempts to regulate total war and its ensuing problems, such as rape, have fallen short, rarely being viewed as one of the more important topics of discussion among those leaders present at international law conferences.⁴⁸ Because of this, rape and sexual violence during wartime had become accepted as an unfortunate part of total war, and were used to completely demoralize conquered populations as a whole.⁴⁹ Ilse Stritzke writes in her memoir *Nightmares of an East Prussian Childhood* that it was under the occupation of the Red Army when she learned that sex could also become “an act of evil brutality performed by a man to degrade and humiliate a woman.”⁵⁰

Until 1949, rape was not included in international law, but it is now recognized as a crime against peace and humanity, as well as a violation of one’s human rights.⁵¹ As Neil J. Mitchell writes in *Agents of Atrocity*, “Even the early philosophers and legal theorists of war separate rape from other actions, observing its selfish, nonstrategic, and singularly dishonorable characteristics.”⁵² To further validate his point, Mitchell makes use of a quote from Albenco Gentili who said, “to violate the honor of women will always be held to be unjust.”⁵³ Rape during wartime is a brutal act and the only result is the infliction of pain upon the victim. The inclusion of rape in international law as a

⁴⁸ Schiessl, "An element of genocide: rape, total war, and international law in the twentieth century."

⁴⁹ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*, 7 and Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, 31.

⁵⁰ Ilse Stritzke, *Nightmares of an East Prussian Childhood* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2013), 13.

⁵¹ Schiessl, "An element of genocide: rape, total war, and international law in the twentieth century."

⁵² Neil J. Mitchell, *Agents of Atrocity: Leaders, Followers, and the violation of Human Rights in Civil War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 49.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 49.

crime violating a person's basic human rights puts the responsibility of the act on the individual who has committed the crime. This not only reduces the likelihood of a soldier from claiming that he was acting under orders during wartime, but eliminates it as an excuse entirely.⁵⁴

Many women were raped multiple times by different people, and the threat of mass rape and gang rape was ever looming for women.⁵⁵ As civilians fled their homes seeking safety, refugee women relayed warnings to others in an effort to protect them from the horrors of rape, urging them to escape while they still could.⁵⁶ In the memoir *Nightmares of an East Prussian Childhood*, Ilse Stritzke is warned of soldiers raping young girls, and that should the soldier want to take her with him, he would be allowed to do so.⁵⁷ After all, "Who is going to stop him?"⁵⁸ This was especially prevalent on the eastern front of the war, where Soviet soldiers raped indiscriminately without any concern for a woman's age or nationality. This disregard for age or nationality is displayed in Sabina de Werth Neu's memoir, *A Long Silence: Memories of a German Refugee Child*, when she recounts her experience of being forcibly raped by Russian soldiers, along with her mother and sisters, after the soldiers entered their home on the night of May 8, 1945.⁵⁹ De Werth Neu describes the scarring encounter with horrifyingly vivid details:

⁵⁴ Schiessl, "An element of genocide: rape, total war, and international law in the twentieth century."

⁵⁵ Wendy Jo Gertjeanssen, "Victims, Heroes, Survivors: Sexual Violence on the Eastern Front During World War II" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2004).

⁵⁶ Stritzke, *Nightmares of an East Prussian Childhood*, 20-21.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Sabina De Werth Neu, *A Long Silence: Memories of a German Refugee Child, 1941-1958* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2011), 43-45.

The door crashed open. Someone smashed the mirror above the marble-top washstand; the sound of falling glass was strangely comforting. Gabi and Tina were whimpering and then shrieking. I was invisible; no one could find me.

But rough hands did find my feet and pulled me out of bed. I hung upside down, my small white nightie over my head. I was thrown around, and I expected to fall on the hard floor. Something entered between my legs, sharp and thick. The pain was almost unbearable. I wanted to shriek but could not make a sound. All my senses were sharpened. I saw muddy boots, smelled the ogres' sweat and my own blood running through the nightie from my belly to my chin. Everything was happening so slowly.

My nightie was ripped off me; I was tossed again. Something really awful entered my mouth. It was hot and smelled so bad it made me gag. I couldn't breathe. I was dying... I was drowning in foul-tasting liquid, suffocating. My face, my ears, my hair was covered with this stuff. The voices were frantic now, spewing words I did not understand. The stench of human excretions was nauseating. I dared not vomit... I was limp, like a lifeless doll, and I was dead. If I was already dead, nothing would hurt me again... I was gone.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ De Werth Neu, *A Long Silence: Memories of a German Refugee Child*, 44.

She was four years old at the time of her rape.⁶¹

Irene Gut Opdyke, a young Catholic Polish girl, was another who fell victim to the mass rapes when she was separated from her family and attempting to find safety in Poland. One night when Irene was standing watch on a street corner, she was spotted and attacked by multiple Soviet soldiers who took turns brutally raping her and then left her for dead.⁶² German soldiers were no better.⁶³ Soviet soldiers engaged in widespread rape in Berlin after occupying the city.⁶⁴ The situation was so severe that it is unlikely that anyone will ever know the number of German women raped by Soviet soldiers in the months during and after Soviet occupation; the numbers could be somewhere between tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands, and could even reach as high as two million.⁶⁵ The anonymous writer of *A Woman in Berlin* includes a comment made by another woman while a group was discussing the stories of Soviet soldiers and raping sprees: “Next came Fräulein Behn: ‘Let’s be honest for once. None of us is still a virgin, right?’ No one says anything; I wonder who among us might be.”⁶⁶ As previously stated, the Soviet soldiers raped indiscriminately and ages ranged from any girl over the age of twelve to older women in their later years.⁶⁷ In *A Woman in Berlin*, the older widow that the anonymous writer is staying with is violently attacked and raped:

‘It was pitch dark when some Russian came up and grabbed her,
threw her on the floorboards... A mere child, she whispers, no beard

⁶¹ Ibid., 43.

⁶² Irene Gut Opdyke, *In My Hands* (New York: Random House, 2004).

⁶³ Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, 29-30. and Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*, (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1995), 70.

⁶⁴ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*, 87.

⁶⁵ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*, 132-133.

⁶⁶ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, trans. Philip Boehm (London: Picador, 2006), 20.

⁶⁷ Brown and Walklate, *Handbook on Sexual Violence*, 41.

at all, smooth-skinned and inexperienced... I don't know her age exactly. I'm not even sure she would tell me. Probably between forty and fifty... But for them any woman will do, when they're grabbing in the dark.'⁶⁸

There were so many occurrences and reports of gang rapes and night rapes that it was impossible to consider these actions isolated incidents.⁶⁹ The anonymous author of *A Woman in Berlin* experienced this shortly after the Red Army entered Berlin, when she was attacked by two Soviet soldiers waiting for her outside of the basement she, and others, were hiding in.⁷⁰ That same night, Anonymous is raped again in her own apartment by a Soviet soldier who broke into the apartment and snuck up behind her, grabbing her and taking her by force.⁷¹ Unfortunately, this would not be the last time she was raped. In another experience, a Red Army soldier rapes her while another stands guard, threatening the widow at gunpoint if she should try to intervene.⁷² As her diary reveals, this raping spree began in April and continued for weeks, affecting thousands of women and driving some to commit suicide.⁷³

However, rape by Soviet soldiers was not confined to Berlin or German women, but also included women in areas of the Soviet Union just liberated from the Germans.⁷⁴ The Red Army left a trail of rape and sexual violence as it made its way across Eastern

⁶⁸ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, 59.

⁶⁹ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*, 72-73.

⁷⁰ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, 53.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 63.

⁷³ Anthony Read and David Fisher, *The Fall of Berlin* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 439-440.

⁷⁴ Mitchell, *Agents of Atrocity: Leaders, Followers, and the violation of Human Rights in Civil War*, 10.

Europe.⁷⁵ Ilse Stritzke, a young girl living in East Prussia during the war, and her family experienced this rampage first hand when they found themselves living under the Russian Occupation. Soon after the arrival of the Red Army, Ilse witnessed Russian soldiers take her mother, aunt, and sister at gunpoint to be raped upstairs while she and the rest of her family were unable to do anything in their defense.⁷⁶ Upon seeing her sister's face after she was raped, Ilse writes, "I had never seen anyone look so frightened and distraught. It was as if she witnessed the devil himself."⁷⁷ It was not long after this episode that Ilse witnessed her mother being raped again by Soviet soldiers, this time publicly in a hotel lobby that the family and other refugees had taken shelter in for the night.⁷⁸ Two other countries affected by this rampage of sexual violence included Romania and Hungary, where reports existed of Hungarian girls being raped repeatedly and sometimes killed while locked in Soviet quarters in Budapest.⁷⁹ There were even problems in Yugoslavia when Soviet troops crossed the border, and later investigations reported that in 121 documented cases of rape, all of the cases also included murder except for ten.⁸⁰

Furthermore, it was not just the Red Army raping civilian women. Rape proved to be a problem across Europe and within all armies. French soldiers committed rape on a large scale, as well as Moroccan mercenaries fighting for the Free French Army in Italy. British soldiers also raped both French and Italian women. In addition, the *Handbook on Sexual Violence* reports that "American GIs in Europe raped about 14,000 civilian women in England, France and Germany" and that between June 1944 and the

⁷⁵ Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, 65.

⁷⁶ Stritzke, *Nightmares of an East Prussian Childhood*, 12-13.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷⁹ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*, 70.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

end of the war, there were 3,500 rapes in France alone, all by American soldiers.⁸¹ There are also statistics provided by the US Judge Advocate General reporting that American soldiers raped at least five hundred German women.⁸² Although these numbers pale in comparison to the number of women raped by Russian soldiers in 1945, which reached numbers between 110,000 to 900,000, it is further proof that sexual violence in the form of rape was a serious and prevalent problem committed by all sides.⁸³

Women lived in fear of the possibility of being raped by occupying forces, and this fear was not uncalled for, as stories quickly spread across Europe.⁸⁴ As Ilse Stritzke recalls in her memoir, “the context of discussion concerning rape was always met with fear and repulsion.”⁸⁵ In fact, the fear of rape was so great that in some instances people locked up their young girls in crawl spaces or secure apartments to hide them from occupying soldiers. There was even an example of a doctor setting up a makeshift quarantine hospital, claiming the patients inside were infected with typhus. The “patients” inside were actually young girls and the entire ruse was created to protect the girls from being raped.⁸⁶ Other women attempted to disguise themselves by making themselves look older or more unattractive in hopes that they would go unnoticed. This was the case after Ilse Stritzke’s aunt was raped; she sprinkled flour in her hair and covered her head with a large handkerchief to disguise herself as an elderly woman.⁸⁷

During the war, blackouts caused safety problems for women as well, and women roaming the streets after dark were in danger of being attacked and raped, some cases

⁸¹ Brown and Walklate, *Handbook on Sexual Violence*, 41.

⁸² Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*, 198.

⁸³ Brown and Walklate, *Handbook on Sexual Violence*, 41.

⁸⁴ Read and Fisher, *The Fall of Berlin*, 397.

⁸⁵ Stritzke, *Nightmares of an East Prussian Childhood*, 20-21.

⁸⁶ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, 95.

⁸⁷ Stritzke, *Nightmares of an East Prussian Childhood*, 13.

ending in murder. In fact, less than two years into the war in Berlin there were thirty-five reported cases of rape and countless others that went unreported.⁸⁸ In addition, doctors and clinics in Berlin saw over 90,000 women and girls whose visits were a result of being raped.⁸⁹ In one such instance, a woman was reported to have been raped by “twenty-three soldiers one after the other,” and as a result, she had to be stitched up in the hospital. The experience of suffering multiple rapes was one shared by a substantial amount of women, and according to one doctor’s deductions, about 10,000 out of 100,000 women in Berlin died due to rape and many of them committed suicide.⁹⁰

Women often sought for some sort of protection, or any semblance of justice and order during this time. However, it was rare that any could be found, and women often felt completely vulnerable, as if they were at anyone’s mercy.⁹¹ Military commanders of both Allied and Axis powers overlooked the sexual violence that was occurring, and in the few instances when an effort was made to put an end to it, the effort was minimal at best.⁹² Rape and sexual violence often went unchecked by those in authority and were met with total indifference.⁹³ In the case of the Soviet soldiers in Berlin and throughout Eastern Europe, officers and those in authority were often reluctant or unwilling to provide help for women who requested it, and in many cases would simply shrug the women off impatiently.⁹⁴ In addition, the officers themselves raped with no remorse and did not seem to be particularly bothered afterwards; such was the case after the rape of Ilse Stritzke’s mother, sister, and aunt, when Ilse writes that the Soviet soldiers came

⁸⁸ Read and Fisher, *The Fall of Berlin*, 54.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 440.

⁹⁰ Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, 410.

⁹¹ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, 75.

⁹² Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, 30.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 188, 327.

⁹⁴ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, 51-52.

down the stairs “laughing and carrying on in Russian, paying no attention to any of us, as if we didn’t exist. In fact, neither of them looked at any of us as they walked across the room and out of the door.”⁹⁵

In fact, German women in Berlin quickly learned that there was no point in asking for help or protection and that official complaints were useless.⁹⁶ The Soviet Military Administration did little to nothing to solve, or even acknowledge, the problem of rape committed by Red Army soldiers.⁹⁷ There were a few cases of officers arbitrarily exercising control and authority over his soldiers in regards to the issue of rape, but most in authority were less concerned with the rape of German women and more concerned with senseless destruction of the city.⁹⁸ In fact, many Soviet soldiers dismissed rape as being a part of war that was inevitable.⁹⁹ This is displayed clearly in *A Woman in Berlin*, when a group of women approach the commandant asking for protection through the night. The commandant laughs and then replied, “Come on, I’m sure they didn’t really hurt you. Our men are all healthy” before walking away and leaving the women to fend for themselves.¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, this was not the first instance in which a Soviet officer brushed off the anonymous author when she asked for help; one of her first attempts at securing protection resulted in the Soviet officer telling her not to worry and to return home because no one was going to hurt her.¹⁰¹

There was often no real authority actively monitoring and regulating relations between soldiers and civilians, and this lack of authority made it extremely challenging to

⁹⁵ Stritzke, *Nightmares of an East Prussian Childhood*, 13.

⁹⁶ Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, 110.

⁹⁷ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*, 128.

⁹⁸ Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, 30.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰⁰ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, 54.

¹⁰¹ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, 51.

control the sexual violence and rape that occurred as a result, if not impossible.¹⁰² In addition, within Allied law, there were no specific requirements for prosecuting rapists, thus making an appropriate punishment more difficult to identify.¹⁰³ In *Agents of Atrocity*, Neil Mitchell writes:

Hugo Grotius, in the *Law of War and Peace*, argues that “rapists should be punished for moral and practical considerations, explicitly noting the enjoyment for the agent as well as the pain of the victim, and that rape neither enhances security nor represents punishment: “not only the injury but the unrestrained lust of the act; also, the fact that such acts do not contribute to safety or to punishment, and should consequently not go unpunished in war any more than in peace.”¹⁰⁴

This lack of regulation or punishment was a major issue in France, where many sexual relations developed between first German soldiers and French women, and later between American GIs and French women.¹⁰⁵ While occupying France, the Germans faced the problem of controlling prostitution, as well as limiting the spread of venereal diseases, and in an attempt to gain control of the situation, they established specific brothels for certain ranks of officers and soldiers in the Wehrmacht.¹⁰⁶ Thus creating regulated German military brothels in occupied France.¹⁰⁷ In *What Soldiers Do*, Mary

¹⁰² Philippe Burrin, *France Under the Germans: Collaborations and Compromise* (New York: The New York Press, 1996), 204-205.

¹⁰³ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*, 127.

¹⁰⁴ Mitchell, *Agents of Atrocity: Leaders, Followers, and the violation of Human Rights in Civil War*, 49.

¹⁰⁵ Burrin, *France Under the Germans: Collaborations and Compromise*, 205.

¹⁰⁶ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*, 136.

¹⁰⁷ Burrin, *France Under the Germans: Collaborations and Compromise*, 204.

Louise Roberts writes that for the French, “rape became a degrading reminder of the defeat of 1940 and the German occupation. The raped woman’s body symbolized the failure of French men to protect their women from outside enemies.”¹⁰⁸

Although the United States War Department’s official stance on prostitution was that it was banned and sexual relations with civilians were prohibited, American military propaganda still eroticized the war campaign by painting Paris as a city of lovers and exploiting the myth that French women were sexually free, sexually experienced, and waiting for American GIs.¹⁰⁹ This propaganda tactic proved to be a disastrous failure for the United States because of the lack of response and control that American military leaders implemented and enforced over the GIs in regards to their sexual relations with civilians.¹¹⁰ In fact, the GIs were encouraged by the military propaganda, and the military leaders were complacent and inactive in enforcing the United States War Department’s policies regarding sexual relations.¹¹¹ As further encouragement, or so it appeared, the American army set aside thousands of hotels rooms in Paris for the GIs to make use of while on leave in the city.¹¹² So while the official policy issued from the United States War Department forbade American soldiers from engaging in sexual relations of any sort with civilians, the military was still providing condoms and access to prophylactic stations in an attempt to prevent the spread of venereal disease, thus sending extremely mixed signals.¹¹³ It became clear that the way in which the military chose to address the

¹⁰⁸ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*, 249.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 134, 136.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 134, 171.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 135.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 171.

growing problem of sexual relations, and sexual violence as a result, was to publicly abide by official regulation, but privately disregard aforementioned regulations.¹¹⁴

As the U.S. army's problem with sexual violence continued to grow, the military was forced to confront and address the issue. Instead, the military did not provide any answers for the excessive number of rapes; the main concern among military leaders was the effect these crimes might have on the U.S. military's relations with the French.¹¹⁵ The military also chose to scapegoat African American GIs by accusing them of being the principal aggressors of the majority of rapes that occurred during this time.¹¹⁶ The military did not thoroughly investigate the rape charges facing African American GIs and as a result, there was an abundance of rape charges against African American GIs.¹¹⁷ Because of this, rape on the western front became a black crime and many innocent men were labeled as alleged rapists.

It cannot be argued that the mass rapes that occurred were a result of the pressures of combat and total war.¹¹⁸ In fact, J. Glenn Gray insists that the "impersonal violence of war breeds rape."¹¹⁹ Throughout history rape has been used by militaries as a way to assert dominance over a territory and the people living there, as well as to thoroughly humiliate the population, especially the men.¹²⁰ Because of this, in twentieth century warfare, sex and more specifically rape, became to be understood as a prize or trophy of a successful and victorious conquest.¹²¹ Women were no longer separated from other kinds

¹¹⁴ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*, 175.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹¹⁹ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*, 70.

¹²⁰ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*, 87, 198.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

of property under the occupying force's control and without this differentiation, women were viewed as spoils of war.¹²² There are overarching reasons for the prevalence of rape in the European theatre of the war, such as rape being used as a technique with the goal of creating pain, humiliation, and obtaining ultimate defeat, as well as being an insult at the masculinity of a country and the men's inability to adequately protect their homes and families.¹²³ In addition, there are also reasons that varied with each military.¹²⁴

For American GIs in France, many simply believed that the French were a morally depraved people, and French women in general were sexually "easy" and promiscuous.¹²⁵ This led to disrespect for the French as a people and society, in the minds of the contemptuous Americans. American GIs used French women for their own pleasures, but also as a way to exercise power and control over the French as a whole.¹²⁶ Hitler called Paris "the brothel of Europe" and it certainly was the one of the favorite locations for soldiers on leave; American soldiers went to Paris looking for sex, and they found plenty of it.¹²⁷ For soldiers fighting in Italy, such as the Moroccan troops fighting under the Free French Army, the idea of raping an Italian woman proved to be an incentive and motivation for the troops, in a sick and twisted way. Their actions were even defended by the French commander General Alphonse Juin who responded to complaints by saying that under the French articles of war, the troops were granted the right to rape and plunder in enemy territory¹²⁸

¹²² Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*, 89.

¹²³ Brown and Walklate, *Handbook on Sexual Violence*, 41.

¹²⁴ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*, 197.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 127-128.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

¹²⁸ Mitchell, *Agents of Atrocity: Leaders, Followers, and the violation of Human Rights in Civil War*, 10.

On the eastern front, Germans invaded the Soviet Union and raped, pillaged, killed, and utterly terrorized Soviet civilians as they advanced. All of this was done in an attempt to enslave Slavic peoples.¹²⁹ This desire to enslave the Slavic people was encouraged and promoted in the Nazi party's relentless propaganda, which viewed Slavic peoples as lesser beings and subhuman.¹³⁰

Consequently, as the Soviets began to retake Eastern Europe in 1944 and eventually advanced into Berlin, Red Army soldiers terrorized the German population with a vengeance.¹³¹ Soviet soldiers were encouraged to go so far as keeping a revenge book in which they would record the harm done to them by German soldiers so they would not forget the evil that the Germans had inflicted upon the Soviet Union.¹³² The Soviet soldiers regarded sex with German women as a right of conquest and treated the women as if they were sexual spoils of war.¹³³ Therefore, rape was used as a way to get revenge and punish the Germans for what the Wehrmacht did to the people in the Soviet Union.¹³⁴ This ultimate show of dominance and humiliation took a toll on Germany and added with the outcome of the war, weighed heavily on its population. By the end of World War II, Germans were demoralized and struggling in every aspect as a country.¹³⁵

Rape during war can also be a result of resentment, as was the case with Soviet troops in Hungary.¹³⁶ The Hungarians enjoyed a higher standard of living than that of the Soviet Union, and the language barrier and unfamiliar culture further complicated and

¹²⁹ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*, 197.

¹³⁰ Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, 30.

¹³¹ Gertjeanssen, "Victims, Heroes, Survivors: Sexual Violence on the Eastern Front During World War II."

¹³² Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*, 72.

¹³³ Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, 32, 326.

¹³⁴ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*, 198.

¹³⁵ Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, 419.

¹³⁶ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*, 70.

frustrated the situation. The result was a rampage of mass rapes and murders as the Soviet advanced through Eastern Europe.¹³⁷

Antony Beevor writes in *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, “rape has often been defined by writers on the subject as an act of violence that has little to do with sex.”¹³⁸ However, he continues on by writing that for many soldiers who had been fighting at the front, they felt that they were satisfying a deprived sexual need.¹³⁹ What’s more is that not only was rape and sexual violence inflicted upon women as a libidinous release, but gang rape and other similar practices also served as recreational activity and social bonding among the soldiers.¹⁴⁰

The reasons for the presence and prevalence of rape in war can vary by country and military, but there is always one common theme: sexual violence and rape as a part of war is focused on demoralizing and humiliating a nation and its people through the use of individuals. The pain and suffering that is inflicted upon the victim is understood as an accidental casualty, and the victim is regarded as someone to have gotten caught in the crossfire during battle.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Ibid., 70.

¹³⁸ Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, 326.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 326.

¹⁴⁰ Brown and Walklate, *Handbook on Sexual Violence*, 41.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 28.

Chapter 3: Sexual Violence as a Means of Protection and Survival

Sexual violence in warfare has been an issue for centuries and transcends regions.¹⁴² During war, sexual violence can take various forms. Although the most commonly studied form that receives the most attention is rape, this is not the only form to that is important to my research.¹⁴³ Forced prostitution, sexual slavery, and sexual relations through coercive means are examples of lesser known, but equally important, forms of sexual violence that women experience in war.¹⁴⁴ For many women who complied, the reasons varied, and were often complex situations, such as experiencing sexual violence in order to ensure the safety and protection of oneself and her loved ones, or even enduring sexual violence to provide food for herself and others in order survive another day.¹⁴⁵

For many women, survival during and after wartime was a day-by-day battle. The question: Can I get to tomorrow? Lack of food was a major issue, and women sought to find solutions through any means necessary in order to provide their family and loved ones with something to eat. Many soldiers in the occupying armies knew the desperation sweeping across the war-torn countries in Europe, and countless soldiers tried to use food as a bribe to convince women to engage in sexual relations. Ilse Stritzke, the author of *Nightmares of an East Prussian Childhood*, a memoir that recounts her experiences living under the Russian Occupation during World War II, found herself in a situation where a soldier attempted to take advantage of her when she was in need. Ilse's mother's

¹⁴² Jennifer M. Brown and Sandra L. Walklate, *Handbook on Sexual Violence* (London: Routledge, 2012), 28.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Philippe Berrin, *France Under the Germans: Collaborations and Compromise* (New York: The New York Press, 1996), 206.

health was failing her and she desperately needed food, so Ilse asked a Russian officer who was the commandant of the area in which her family lived if he had any to spare. She followed him back to his apartment, where he told her to come inside so he could give her the food.¹⁴⁶ Ilse also notes, “I immediately suspected that he must have women clean his apartment and give him sex for food.”¹⁴⁷ The officer fixed a plate of food and then pulled Ilse into a bedroom, where he proceeded to try to coerce her into having sexual relations with him, as a form of thanks and payment for the food. Luckily for Ilse, she was able to manage an escape and remained physically unharmed. She summed up her experience, as well as the similar experiences other women endured, by writing, “This was one of the most traumatizing events that ever happened to me and, to him, just a casual missed opportunity.”¹⁴⁸ Ilse’s experience was not one that was uncommon. Soldiers would often offer food to a starving woman. Sometimes the soldiers referred to foods that had long been scarce or even unavailable during wartime.¹⁴⁹ Sometimes they said how hungry the woman must be, explaining how she could be provided for ... in exchange for something, of course. A Jewish labor camp inmate, Gerda Weissmann Klein, experienced this when a German soldier approached her while she was working on machinery in a factory:

‘Perhaps bread and butter,’ he suggested. ‘Apples, sausage, warm soup.’ He mouthed those words so easily that I realized the disgusting truth. He was no partisan, for if he truly wanted to help

¹⁴⁶ Ilse Stritzke, *Nightmares of an East Prussian Childhood: A Memoir of the Russian Occupation* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2013), 67-68.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Gerda Weissmann Klein, *All But My Life* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 148.

me, he would not tease me. He continued, his voice unctuous and dirty: ‘And for all that, I don’t want much from you—‘ ‘What do you want?’ I demanded. His voice changed abruptly. ‘Don’t pretend to be stupid, or one might think you are a lady... You will be sorry!’ he said before he left.¹⁵⁰

Gerda rejected the soldier’s proposal, even though she knew she would pay for her boldness later in the labor camp.¹⁵¹ Unfortunately, many women did not have the luxury of denying the gift of food from a soldier. This was the case for the mother of a friend of Ilse Stritzke, the author of *Nightmares of an East Prussian Childhood*, which recounts her experiences living under the Russian Occupation during World War II. Ilse’s friend confided in her saying, “My mother is a whore! Instead of working, she has sex with this soldier... he gives her food, in return for sex.”¹⁵² Many women could not find jobs at this time, or any other way to pride for their families, leaving these types of agreements as one of their only options. Further demonstrating the nonsensical twist of fate that women were facing across Europe, Ilse proceeds to write, “A few months ago women were calling the Russians subhumans, perhaps having been raped by them, and now they were having sex with them. This world was upside-down.”¹⁵³ Although women knew the threat that these soldiers posed and that many were known to rape indiscriminately or demand sex in exchange for food, many found it unbearable to face another day of starvation. Because of this, many young girls and women, including Ilse, were willing to

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Klein, *All But My Life*, 148-151.

¹⁵² Stritzke, *Nightmares of an East Prussian Childhood*, 60.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

ignore the warnings and risk interacting with a soldier who seemed to be nice, with the hope that he would provide her with food without any ulterior motives or requirements.¹⁵⁴

Also, it was not just food and the chance at daily nourishment sexual relations could provide, but protection, protection from other soldiers looking to fulfill their carnal desires.¹⁵⁵ This practice was found throughout Germany as the Red Army advanced, and becomes more understandable given a passage from the diary of the playwright Zakhar Agranenko. As he writes, “Red Army soldiers don’t believe in ‘individual liaisons’ with German women...Nine, ten, twelve men at a time—they rape them on a collective basis.”¹⁵⁶ In fact, horror stories spread rapidly about the rape of women in parts of Germany occupied by the Soviets, claiming that the Russians were monsters who were going to rape all of them.¹⁵⁷ Even after having only pleasant encounters with Soviet troops, some women, such as the twenty-four year old German actress Magda Wieland, decided to quickly find an officer to provide her with protection before any would attempt to attack her occurred.¹⁵⁸

The protection these officers provided was invaluable. Women were living in a constant state of fear, terrified of being raped.¹⁵⁹ However, being spoken for by a higher-ranking officer usually placed a taboo on the woman, granting her a certain level of protection and safety from the mass rapes occurring. Lower ranking officers would not

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 87.

¹⁵⁵ Antony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 345.

¹⁵⁶ Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, 28.

¹⁵⁷ Edith Hahn Beer, *The Nazi Officer’s Wife: How One Jewish Woman Survived the Holocaust* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000), 253.

¹⁵⁸ Anthony Read and David Fisher, *The Fall of Berlin* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 397-398.

¹⁵⁹ Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, 67 and Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949*, (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1995), 133.

try to touch her, and the officers were usually territorial, not only with the woman but also with her living quarters. This meant that the house was open to the officer, his friends or guests, but she was safe from intruders looking to find a woman with which to sleep.¹⁶⁰ In fact, in *A Woman in Berlin*, the anonymous author notes that it became customary for her recent acquaintances and her officer's friends to help her get rid of unknown men who entered the apartment throughout the day.¹⁶¹ This provided her, and other women in the same position, with a feeling of safety in some form, and the taboo often worked.

Food was not the only tool soldiers would use to bribe women to enter into sexual relations with them. Soviet soldiers often attempted to entice women through gifts such as stolen watches that the women could attempt to sell for money.¹⁶² Also, it was not uncommon that these soldiers were exceedingly drunk, and in many instances, the promise of a gift simply was an effort to take the woman without resistance. No was not an answer that many intoxicated Soviet soldiers would accept, and there were a number of cases where the soldier attacked the woman anyway.¹⁶³ In one such case, a Soviet lieutenant physically abused a woman by the name of Vera 'Lantsova by beating her and threatening that he would shoot her if she did not sleep with him. This continued for eight days.¹⁶⁴

Consenting to sexual violence as a means of survival and protection became a common practice among many women, especially in war-torn Berlin once the Red Army

¹⁶⁰ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, trans. Philip Boehm (London: Picador, 2006), 82.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁶² Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, 48.

¹⁶³ Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, 31.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

occupation began.¹⁶⁵ Women often attempted to find and attract the attention of a high-ranking officer in order to be “spoken for” by that officer, thus placing a taboo on herself.¹⁶⁶ Capturing a thought shared by women across Berlin at this time, the anonymous author of *A Woman in Berlin* writes, “I have to find a single wolf to keep away the pack.” She, as well as countless other women, felt as if there was no other option for them to protect themselves and ensure their survival for another day.¹⁶⁷ This was not pleasant, nor were these relationships established out of love or mutual attraction, but simply as a form of protection against the mass-raping sprees that were occurring throughout the city at the time. For example, Anonymous writes:

By no means could it be said that the major is raping me... so I am placing myself at his service of my own accord. Am I doing it because I like him or out of a need for love? God forbid! For the moment I’ve had it up to here with men and their male desire; I can’t imagine longing for any of that again. Am I doing it for bacon, butter, sugar, candles, canned meat? To some extent I’m sure I am. I didn’t like having to sponge off the widow. I’m happy to be able to give her something of mine—through the major, of course... But I can talk with the major. Which still isn’t an answer to the question of whether I should now call myself a whore, since I am essentially living off my body, trading it for something to eat.

¹⁶⁵ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, 115.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

On the other hand, writing this makes me wonder why I'm being so moralistic and acting as if prostitution were so beneath my dignity... But morality aside, could I actually slip into that profession and still be pleased with myself? No never. It goes against my nature, it wounds my self-esteem, destroys my pride—and makes me physically miserable. So there's no need to worry. I'll be overjoyed to get out of this line of work, if that's what I have to call my present activity, as soon as I can earn my bread in some more pleasant way better suited to my pride.¹⁶⁸

This internal battle that Anonymous experienced clearly identifies the lack of a formal and clear definition of the type of sexual violence she is enduring. She understands it is not forcible rape because she has consented to an extent. However, she also does not believe that she can truly be called a prostitute because it goes against everything in which she believes.¹⁶⁹ This blurring of lines between prostitution as a profession and women being placed in unfavorable positions caused confusion and was not just a problem for Anonymous and the women in Berlin, but also for women in France as well.¹⁷⁰ The complexity of women consenting to sexual coercion as a means of survival and protection was a difficult issue for many women to understand or come to terms with. This is shown even more clearly when Anonymous writes, “I just can't force

¹⁶⁸ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, 115-117.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁷⁰ Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 133.

myself into this role, to feel at ease so quickly. I have this repulsive sense of being passed form hand to hand; I feel humiliated and insulted, degraded into a sexual thing.”¹⁷¹

Wartime realities included many civilians facing hunger and deprivation, as well as poverty and the difficulties of living in an occupied land. These realities resulted in women, who had previously enjoyed comfortable lives supported by husbands and sweethearts, taking to the streets in an attempt to make it to the next day.¹⁷² Trading her body for food, as Anonymous puts it, is not something she wishes to be doing. The food rations had run out, the stores had been broken into and any food left in them was pilfered.¹⁷³ The only food left was in the hands of the Red Army. Because of this, and the mass raping sprees the Soviet troops inflicted upon the city, Anonymous was forced into this situation. Establishing sexual relations with an occupying officer was her best option to protect herself and the widow, as well as obtain food for them to eat.¹⁷⁴ This was the case across Europe, with American soldiers possessing some of the most desired items such as soap, cigarettes, chocolate, silk stockings, and even K rations.¹⁷⁵

The reasons for these affairs cannot be summed up by a single explanation. For many, it was the desire to obtain food, favors, or any type of help in order to place themselves and their families in a better position during this precarious time when everyone was struggling to survive.¹⁷⁶ These relationships could provide protection and even advantages that would prove to be necessary as times became more difficult.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷¹ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, 104.

¹⁷² Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*, 144, 148-149.

¹⁷³ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, 106.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁷⁵ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*, 153-154.

¹⁷⁶ Burrin, *France Under the Germans: Collaborations and Compromise*, 206.

¹⁷⁷ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, 111-112.

Tens of thousands of women, at minimum, realized this.¹⁷⁸ This engagement in sexual relations with occupiers sometimes resulted in the creation of types of “sex markets” in some areas of Europe, such as throughout northern France.¹⁷⁹ In these markets, desperate women engaged in sexual relations with soldiers who could provide them with protection or certain products necessary for survival.¹⁸⁰

Many women who engaged in liaisons with occupying soldiers, willingly or unwillingly, were employed by the men, thus complicating their situations even further. This was especially the case in France with women, who were under the Germans’ employment as maids, laundresses, waitresses, nurses, office workers, or anything of the sort.¹⁸¹ Employment was also the case for Irene Gut Opdyke, a young Catholic Polish girl who engaged in sexual relations with the German officer she employed with. Irene was forced to work as the housekeeper for one of the officers running a camp, and she began hiding Jewish friends in the basement of the house in order to save them from being deported to a concentration camp.¹⁸² When the German officer discovered the unwelcome visitors in his home, he promised to keep Irene’s secret, but for him to do so she had to sleep with him and become his mistress. If she would not comply, he would turn her and her Jewish friends over to the other Nazi officers and they would all be condemned to a certain death.¹⁸³ This was a life or death situation, and Irene felt as if she had no choice but to agree to become the officer’s mistress in order to save the lives of her friends.¹⁸⁴ Because of this, she endured sexual violence as a means of protection and

¹⁷⁸ Burrin, *France Under the Germans: Collaborations and Compromise*, 207.

¹⁷⁹ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*, 127.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁸¹ Burrin, *France Under the Germans: Collaborations and Compromise*, 206.

¹⁸² Irene Gut Opdyke, *In My Hands* (New York: Random House, 2004).

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

survival, and this presents a clear, emerging pattern among women who experienced sexual violence during the war.

Following this pattern, is the Polish Jewish woman Klara's experience, which is relayed in *Clara's War: One Girl's Story of Survival*, a diary written by a Polish Jewish teenager named Clara, whose family goes into hiding in a bunker with many other people, one of which is Klara. The diary follows the group's everyday life in the bunker, and through this, the reader learns of Klara being forced into affair with the man hiding the group, and the husband of her best friend, Mr. Beck.¹⁸⁵ This situation made everyone in the group nervous and endangered all of their lives, but they also knew that neither they, nor Klara, were in any position to say anything to Mr. Beck. He was risking his life to hide them, so they were all at his mercy.¹⁸⁶ Clara so clearly explains their situation when she writes, "We said nothing. We did nothing. Nobody could talk to Beck about it. And perhaps we knew that if Klara tried to break it off, there would be consequences as well... We were afraid that simply to beg him to stop would be enough to put us on the street."¹⁸⁷ At one point, when Klara is asked to "think about the children" hiding in the bunker with them, she replies with, "You don't think I'm thinking of them? You don't know anything."¹⁸⁸ Even later, when Mr. Beck asks her to run away with him, Klara rejects his proposal for the safety and well-being of the group, understanding that if Mr. Beck were to ever leave the house permanently, the group would lose the only form of protection they had and she would be risking their lives.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ Clara Kramer, *Clara's War: One Girl's Story of Survival* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 123.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 175-177.

Another example similar to Irene and Klara's is that of Edith Hahn Beer, a Viennese Jewish woman who took one of the greatest risks in order to secure protection for herself during the war. In her memoir *The Nazi Officer's Wife: How One Jewish Woman Survived the Holocaust*, Edith writes of her marriage to a Nazi Officer by the name of Werner Vetter under her assumed identity. Their marriage provided protection for Edith by their appearance as a "normal Aryan" couple, and her status as a Nazi officer's wife meant that people automatically assumed she was an upright Hitler-loving German woman, which often aided her. An example of this was when Edith needed a registration card in order to receive rations, but because she was going under an assumed identity, she did not have one. When she went to the central registry and the woman could not locate her card, but quickly found her husbands, Edith writes, "I could see her mind working. How could a Red Cross nursing assistant, an employee of the Städtische Krankenhaus, the pregnant wife of an Arado supervisor who was also a longtime member of the Nazi Party, not have an index card? Impossible!"¹⁹⁰ It was assumed that the missing card was their fault, and Edith was given a new card, and in doing so, the one of her greatest weakness and vulnerabilities risking her detection was eliminated.¹⁹¹

In addition, Edith was treated with great respect and even envied because of her position as a Nazi officer's wife.¹⁹² Werner provided safety and well-being, no longer making her a desperate victim fighting off starvation and homelessness. She was able to provide help to her friends.¹⁹³ However, her protection came at a price—Edith had to be a meek, obedient, unassuming wife with no demands or opinions, and only focused on

¹⁹⁰ Beer, *The Nazi Officer's Wife: How One Jewish Woman Survived the Holocaust*, 217-219.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 219.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 247.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 208.

ensuring that everything was just as Werner liked it.¹⁹⁴ She writes of his sexual appetite and the importance of keeping him satisfied, on his terms so as to keep him happy.¹⁹⁵ She knew that her life, and her baby's life, was in his hands and she was in no position to speak against, argue with, or even upset him or she would be putting their lives at stake.¹⁹⁶

As previously mentioned, Gerda Weissmann Klein was a Jewish labor camp inmate, and during her time working in a factory, she was approached by a German soldier who attempted to engage her in sexual relations.¹⁹⁷ Oddly enough, this was not an isolated instance. In fact, this happened to Edith Hahn Beer, who was previously mentioned, when she was forced into labor at an asparagus farm in rural Germany. Edith writes, "It was the Germans who tried to seduce us. The overseer made crude jokes with Frieda, trying to tempt her with his power. Werner, a local boy who hoped to sign up for twelve years in the army, took every opportunity to grope young Eva, the daughter of the vengeful maid. Otto, the SA man from the neighboring farm, battered us with vile suggestions and vulgar jokes."¹⁹⁸ These women encountered sexual harassment from even the proudest of Germans, who were willing to take advantage of their weaknesses and vulnerability in any possible way.¹⁹⁹

One question that may arise is where the men were during this time. Why were they not providing for the women and protecting them? There are many answers to this question. Many of the men were absent. Husbands, boy friends, and brothers and fathers

¹⁹⁴ Beer, *The Nazi Officer's Wife: How One Jewish Woman Survived the Holocaust*, 192.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁹⁷ Klein, *All But My Life*, 148.

¹⁹⁸ Beer, *The Nazi Officer's Wife: How One Jewish Woman Survived the Holocaust*, 91-92.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

were away for the war; whether they were fighting at the front, working in occupied countries, held as prisoners in labor camps, or in hiding with the resistance, the result was always the same: their absence was greatly felt and their presence was needed.²⁰⁰

Although, this also implies that the men would have been able to do something to help protect the women in their lives and ensure their survival, when, in fact, they could do little. There were men present, older men such as Herr Pauli in *A Woman in Berlin*.

However, Herr Pauli was unable to do anything to help the anonymous author or the widow except play along coolly with whatever the Soviet soldiers decided.²⁰¹ In fact, for many men, it was safer for them, and the women, to hide or live as inconspicuously as possible.

The result of all this? Women were engaged in their own private wars, and in not-so-subtle ways, their own private hells. The women who experienced this form of sexual violence felt as if they had no option and nowhere to turn. In order to protect themselves, their family, and their loved ones, they were forced to comply. In order to survive another day, these women gave themselves up and compromised their own bodies. The reasons varied—protection of themselves and loved ones, the promise of safety, and even the ability to provide food for themselves and others in order to survive—but the complexity of consent in these situations plagued their lives.

²⁰⁰ Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II*, 85.

²⁰¹ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, 65.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

“I couldn’t help but think about how good I’d had it, until now—the fact that love had always been a pleasure and never a pain. I had never been forced, nor had I ever had to force myself... But what’s making me so miserable right now is not so much the excess itself, extreme though it is, it’s the fact that my body has been mistreated, taken against its will. And pain is how it responds to the abuse.”²⁰²

This quote from *A Woman in Berlin* shows the brutality inflicted upon countless women during and after World War II. Not only were these women violated and abused both physically and mentally through the sexual violence they endured, but it was in the most personal and private way. Sexual relations and sexual violence under an occupying force during war is a sensitive matter, and not only does it evoke the strongest feelings and emotions in a person, but also in society as a whole.²⁰³

Throughout history, sexual violence in wartime has been a recurring issue, and as the Handbook on Sexual Violence states, it “can be located at the most extreme reaches of a continuum of violence since it is about inflicting pain and humiliation on communities and nations over and above that which is causes to specific individuals.”²⁰⁴ However, there is a lack of information that has been published about the sexual violence that occurred in the European theater of World War II, other than rape. This topic is

²⁰² Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: 8 Weeks in a Conquered City*, trans. Philip Boehm (London: Picador, 2006), 91.

²⁰³ Philippe Burrin, *France Under the Germans: Collaborations and Compromise* (New York: The New York Press, 1996), 204.

²⁰⁴ Jennifer M. Brown and Sandra L. Walklate, *Handbook on Sexual Violence* (London: Routledge, 2012), 28.

sometimes shied away from, and by looking at the situations and circumstances that brought about the different types of sexual violence during World War II, it will also bring sexual violence in the European theater to the forefront of historical and academic discussion.

In addition, by bringing these issues to the forefront of discussion, it is hoped that armed forces may reevaluate their policies pertaining to the actions of soldiers who commit sexual war crimes. In *Agents of Atrocity*, Neil Mitchell writes, “War, conflict, or just a uniform provide an opportunity for perpetrators to commit and get away with this more private crime” and this is exactly what this research hopes to change.²⁰⁵ In recent years, the Statute of the International Criminal Court expanded what qualifies as a crime against humanity, which now includes numerous types of sexual offences. It includes, but is not limited to, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, and any other grave sexual violence.²⁰⁶ For this to take root and create change in future wars, soldiers and military leaders must be committed to the active implementation of policies that protect women from the threat of sexual violence in any form, and in turn, protect their human rights.

The importance of addressing the issue of sexual violence in wartime is distinctly identified in a line from Mary Louise Robert’s book *What Soldiers Do*, where she writes, “Despite their private nature... sexual relations came to possess larger political meanings and provided crucial models of dominance and submission.”²⁰⁷ Within this larger

²⁰⁵ Neil J. Mitchell, *Agents of Atrocity: Leaders, Followers, and the violation of Human Rights in Civil War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 50.

²⁰⁶ Brown and Walklate, *Handbook on Sexual Violence*, 42.

²⁰⁷ Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 131.

political meaning, this research has shown that the role of women and their experience with different forms of sexual violence was essential in shaping each country's national identity during and after the war.²⁰⁸ Sabina de Werth Neu perfectly sums up the issue of sexual violence against women during wartime by writing, "Today I look at history and the war on women and children in particular and realize that it has been going on for centuries. Victimizing women and children in times of war seems to be the ultimate act of rage and revenge by men against the enemy they are fighting. It is an expression of their own victimization that has made them into legalized killers, outside of good and evil."²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 131.

²⁰⁹ Sabina De Werth Neu, *A Long Silence: Memories of a German Refugee Child, 1941-1958* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2011), 68.

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