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Rassenschande, genocide and the reproductive Jewish body: examining the use of rape and sexualized violence against Jewish women during the Holocaust

REPRODUCTIVE JEWISH BODY

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Abstract

Rape and sexual violence against Jewish women is a relatively unexplored area of investigation. This article adds to the scant literature on this topic. It asks: how and why did women's reproductive bodies (gender), combined with their status as Jews (race), make them particularly vulnerable during the Holocaust? The law against *Rassenschande* (racial defilement) prohibited sexual relations between Aryans and non-Aryans. Yet, Jewish women were raped by German men. Providing a more nuanced account than is provided by the dehumanization thesis, this article argues that women were targeted precisely because of their Jewishness and their reproductive capabilities. In addition, this piece proposes that the genocidal attack on women's bodies in the form of rape (subsequently leading to the murder of impregnated women) and sexualized violence (forced abortions and forced sterilizations) must be interpreted as an attack on an essentialized group: woman-as-Jew.

Introduction.

Although not completely absent from the literature, it is fair to say that, prior to the 1990s the subject of rape and sexual violence against Jewish women was an unexplored area of investigation (Horowitz 1998; Ofer and Weitzman 1998; Ringelheim 1998;

Goldenberg 2013). However, in the last ten years, rape has become a new focus of sustained analysis. This prior omission is surprising given the amount of material that has been produced about the Holocaust (Aolain 2000). Indeed, despite the number of memorials and museums about the Holocaust since the 1970s, sexual violence has not been acknowledged, much less been a central topic of investigation (Hedgepeth and Saidel 2010). This may be due to the laws of 'The Protection of German Blood and German Honor' and Rassenschande (racial defilement). Rassenschande prohibited sexual relations between Germans and Jews to avoid contamination of the Aryan bloodline (Friedman 2002). Based on these laws alone, it was believed that instances of rape and sexual violence must have been rare (Sinnreich 2010).

Ringelheim, ([1985] 1993, 375) however, was asking crucial questions about gender and the Holocaust in 1985. Among them were: "if you were Jewish, in what ways did it matter whether you were a man or a woman... Is there...anything to be seen in statistics about the number of men killed compared to women?"¹ The focus here will be to reappraise the questions raised in the edited collection by Hedgepeth and Saidel (2010): *Sexual Violence against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*. Reinharz (2010, ix) has narrowed them down to: "what happened to women during the Holocaust?" and "[w]as there anything different in their experience because they were women?" The questions I will hope to answer are: why did soldiers of the Third Reich rape Jewish women if, firstly, sexual relations with Jews was a criminal offence and, secondly, rape was not an explicit function of the genocidal campaign?

Aim and outline of the article.

This article will focus specifically on the rape and sexualized violence committed against Jewish women by German men during the Holocaust. Whilst Jewish women were raped by non-German allies, collaborators, civilians and fellow prisoners (see Friedman 2002)² this article will focus on the rape of Jewish women by German men: soldiers, guards, members of the Third Reich and SS members. Although prostitution, coerced sexual activities, and sex for survival - "entitlement rape" (Fogelman 2012, 20) - also formed part of women's gendered experience of the Holocaust, they will not be discussed here. I will draw upon Halbmayr's (2010, 30) notion of sexualized violence:

The term sexualized violence makes it clear that male violence against females is not about sexuality but is a show of power on the part of the perpetrator and includes many forms of violence with sexual connotations, including humiliation, intimidation, and destruction. From this we can derive that violent acts can be understood as sexualized if they are directed at the most intimate part of a person and, as such, against that person's physical, emotional, and spiritual integrity.

In this piece, sexualized violence against Jewish women will refer to rape, forced abortion, forced sterilization, and other bodily sex-based violations that can be viewed as emotional expressions of violence (for example, public nakedness and the shaving of hair from intimate parts of the body). All of these can be understood as sexualized violence as they are directed at the most intimate part of a person. Whilst perpetrator motivation may not always be rooted in sexual desire or gratification, the female victim may, nonetheless, experience the attack as a violation of her sexuality.

Given the limited amount of information on the subject of women, rape and sexualized violence during the Holocaust, the article will begin by discussing the data and sources of information that have been used to document these crimes. As we know, the Holocaust was a genocide that targeted all *Jews as Jews*. It also targeted other non-Aryan groups that it deemed inferior and undesirable such as homosexuals, Roma, the mentally ill and the physically handicapped, as well as a number of political and religious opponents. Therefore it is important to take some time explaining, defending even, an analysis that focuses on gender. Having done this, the body of this article will review theories of wartime rape and genocidal rape, comparing them to the use of rape and sexualized violence during the Holocaust. One of the common features in the general literature on rape and sexual violence is the assumption that, in order to commit such acts, perpetrators must dehumanize and objectify the victims first. On the contrary, this article will argue that in the context of Holocaust, the concept of “essentialization” - which, according to Chirof and McCauley (2006, 84-5), involves the reduction and denigration of a diverse group into a single, redundant category and attributing them all with the same negative characteristics, facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the use of rape and sexualized violence by German men against Jewish women. They state (2006, 81):

The idea of essence...turns out to be a key psychological concept in examining violence against groups. Something about members of the targeted group is inherently disgusting – their habits...their appearance – and this justifies the violence against them because their disgusting

characteristics threaten to pollute the environment and must be eliminated.

In times of war and conflict, women and their bodies are regarded as the vessels through which national, racial, ethnic and religious identities are reproduced (Cohn 2013). It will be the argument of this piece, that it was precisely because of their Jewishness (race) and their reproductive (gender) capabilities – the coding of woman-as-Jew - that these women were targeted. My notion of woman-as-Jew has been adapted from Cohn's (2013, 14) "nation-as-woman" and "woman-as-nation" as, I would argue, in the case of Jewish women, Jews - along with Poles and Roma - would have been considered by Nazis as a source of contamination to the German nation/bloodline, and thus more likely regarded as a counter-nation.

Writing about women, rape and the holocaust.

One of the difficulties in writing about the rape and the sexual abuse of Jewish women during the Holocaust is that there are no official Nazi documentations of these assaults (Hedgepeth and Saidel 2010). Despite this, there is sufficient data from victim, witness and perpetrator testimonies (first-hand interviews, unpublished memoirs and archival documents)³ confirming that Jewish women were sexually abused and raped during the Holocaust (Sinnreich 2010). Survivors also talked about other issues relating to gender, including: homosexual activity, consensual sexual relationships, weddings, marriages and divorce (Friedman 2001).

Writers recognize the inherent limitations of oral histories and survivor testimonies as sources of evidence.⁴ Henry Greenspan, for example, takes a different

approach to the more typical ones represented in “video-testimonies” and “oral histories” (Greenspan 2010, ix). Based on multiple – rather than single – interviews with the same survivor, he refers to his collaborative approach as “knowing *with*” and “learning together”(xi emphasis in the original). Greenspan documents the difficulties and complexities inherent in retelling and recounting memories. He presents survivors as individuals, not simply abstract voices from the Holocaust. He is interested in hearing about their experiences before and after the Holocaust, not simply during. This echoes LaCapra’s (1994, 200) notion of “Working-through”, which resists the redemptive totalizing narrative and requires that we place the experience of the Holocaust within a larger context. In typical testimonies these wider stories and experiences of survivors are not considered a part of their recounting at all. Despite these caveats, oral histories and survivor testimonies are useful for providing information on subjects that, due to a lack of evidence, would not exist. My focus is not on questioning the authenticity or reliability of these accounts – which have been discussed elsewhere (see Friedman 2001; Sinnreich 2008)⁵ – but rather on analyzing the possible motives for rape in this particular context.

Incidents of rape and sexual violence are difficult to approximate. Many women were killed after they were assaulted (Sinnreich 2010, 117). A number of survivors from Skarzysko-Kamienna concentration camp discuss women being taken and never coming back. Referring to Fritz Bartenschlager, a German officer at the camp – and in response to a question about rape - Pola Klepacz-Spiegelman says: “[h]e took some beautiful woman...And nobody saw her back.” “He took her and she never came back.”⁶ Harry Koltun, another survivor, corroborates the story of women being taken and never coming back: “[t]hey did what they have to do sexually, then they kill them.”⁷ In

addition, many women have remained silent about their experiences due to shame and guilt (Sinnreich 2010, 117).

Fogelman (2012, 15) reports that over 48,000 of the 52,000 interviews conducted by the University of Southern California's Shoah Foundation Institute of Visual History and Education, are with Jewish survivors. 1,040 of these interviews refer to rape and sexual molestation, most of which were perpetrated by liberators - 508 assaults. 262 assaults took place in the camps and 272 in the ghettos.⁸ Although incidents of rape by Nazis appear to be rare, many Jewish women lived in fear of rape and sexual assault (Ofer and Weitzman 1998; Goldenberg 2013). Gerda Frieberg, a survivor, discusses women's fear of rape and the methods they devised to resist sexual assault. She recalls the women in her camp writing typhoid fever on a piece of paper and sticking it to the door where they slept so the guards would not try to rape them. She explains: "[t]his is why I say women's experiences are different from those of men."⁹

Whilst a gendered analysis of the Holocaust may be a legitimate focus of investigation, it is still important to answer the questions: why women? Why gender? It is because the Holocaust – and the Final Solution in particular - was the first event that did not treat the female population as the inevitable spoils of war. Viewed as the carriers of the next generation of Jews, the Nazi eugenicist policy explicitly targeted pregnant women for death: women whose pregnancies showed were killed immediately upon arrival at a concentration camp (Perl [1984] 1993; Goldenberg 1998, 2013; Horowitz 1998; Ofer and Weitzman 1998; Katz 2012; Patterson 2013). As articulated by Yolan Frank: "Some women were taken away for men's pleasure and when they got pregnant...they are sent back to the gas chamber."¹⁰

It may seem illogical to focus on gender when Nazi ideology was premised on the status of Jews as Jews and their genocidal policy targeted them based on their “race”. Yet, it is clear from women’s testimonies that they experienced the Holocaust differently from men (Goldenberg 1998; Horowitz 1998; Ofer and Weitzman 1998). Women were vulnerable to abuse in a number of ways: rape, forced abortion, forced sterilization, sexual abuse, pregnancy, childbirth and the killing of their newborns. Most of these are uniquely female experiences and women suffered them as women and as Jews. In particular, birthing and menstruation, added layers of fragility to the experiences of Jewish women.

By examining the genocidal violence women experienced during the Holocaust, it is not my intention to ignore or dismiss the violence visited upon men nor, do I wish to reduce the Holocaust to an example of sexism (Rittner and Roth 1993). We know that Jewish men were also targeted and attacked as Jews and as men, that they too endured indignities and assaults on their biology, including sexual assault and rape (Horowitz 1998; Friedman 2002).¹¹ However, my focus here is to examine how and why women were particularly vulnerable to sexualized violence.

Wartime rape, sexual violence and genocidal rape.

Space will not allow for a comprehensive review of the literature on the subject of rape and wartime sexual violence. What follows is an overview of the key theoretical positions for understanding its nature and impact during the Holocaust. First, I will outline the principles of genocidal rape in order to highlight the differences between rape used during the Holocaust and genocidal rape in other contexts. Genocide is

defined in Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) as:

any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Based on this definition, rape can, and is, used as a tool of genocide. In this context, it is used intentionally and systematically as a weapon of war. Explanations of wartime rape and genocidal rape can be demarcated along macro, meso and micro planes. Gender plays an integral part at every level. At the macro level, rape is central to a regime or policy directive (Waller 2012). It is used as a political and social tool to achieve the goals of genocide and ethnic cleansing. The consequences of rape in this context are death, both literally and figuratively (social and psychological). It destroys communities and social bonds. It “dilutes” – and in some instances eradicates - the next generation (Waller 2012, 85). Rape, in cases of ethnic cleansing and genocide, acts as a statement of hetero-nationality and serves as an ethno-marker (Lentin 1999, 3.5-3.6). It may also serve as an attack on the nations’ culture of women (Cohn 2013, 14). At the meso level, patriarchy, phallogentrism, the military institution and hegemonic masculinity all socialize men to embody a violent and aggressive heterosexual

masculinity, whereby rape is normalized and used to achieve and perform this type of masculinity. Individual men, at the micro level, use rape and sexual violence to feminize their victims and to subvert their marginal position within the gender order. Rape is used not out of lust, but out of aggression to enhance masculine identity (Banwell 2014).

Generally speaking then, rape has political, social (genocide and ethnic cleansing) and gendered (phallocentrism, misogyny, hegemonic heterosexual masculinity) motivations. These operate at all three levels of analysis. It is worth noting that what unites these in traditional understandings of genocide and wartime rape and sexual violence is the tendency to view dehumanization as a precursor to this type of violence (see Friedman 2002; Hagan and Raymond-Richmond 2008; Fogelman 2012; Waller 2012).

I do not agree with this position. It was precisely because of their essentialized Jewishness that women were subject to sexualized violence. Dehumanization may have been what followed – it may have been implicated in the process of the violence, as a by-product - but it was not the condition under which rape and sexualized violence were performed in the first instance. Dehumanization was not a precondition for this violence.

The limitations of a macro level understanding.

The rape of Jewish women, unlike rape in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Darfur, and DRC, was not an official component of the Final Solution (Fogelman 2012). The aim of the Final Solution was the elimination of all European Jews. In this context then, rape and sexual violence became redundant weapons of terror and dominance (Goldenberg 2013). Given this, trying to understand the individual motivations (micro) and the context/conditions (meso) under which rape took place during this genocide becomes slightly more complicated.

During the Holocaust women became more undesirable given the various oppressions they were subjected to. Yet this did not deter German men from raping them. For Fogelman (2012) then, it is a myth that only pretty women were raped. In the beginning, however, before women were subjected to various physical degradations, the motivation for rape may have been based on enhancing a masculine gender identity and used for sexual gratification. In the latter stages of their imprisonment - when their feminine attributes and attractiveness had been stripped away through a series of degradations - the motivation to rape may have arisen from aggression, power and dominance. Testimonies from survivors and witnesses describe instances of brutal and sadistic violence (see Perl [1984] 1993). As illustrated by Sara Moses, this was also the case for instances of sexualized violence and abuse.

[T]here were two men there and there were some other people in the room I think. I was put on a table. From what I remember, [it was] as table or it could have been a high table. I was very little so it seemed like it was very high up from where I was and I was very violently sexually abused. And I remember being hit, I remember crying and I wanted to get out of there. And I was calling people and screaming and I remember one thing that stands out in my mind that one of them told me that they would stand me on my head and cut me right in half. And they wanted me to stop screaming and I've had nightmares about that most of my life.¹²

Another survivor, Doris Roe, talks about being taken into a doctor's room where a female doctor strapped her to a bed. Three naked SS men entered the room. The

female doctor instructed the men to rape her. She describes being gang raped by these men. She described her legs being tied to the bed so that she could not escape. After the first three men raped her, another three men enter the room. She describes being raped by twelve men in total. She believed that rape was used as a form of initiation for these men. She stated that the officers bit off her nipples while she was in Birkenhau so she could not breastfeed her child.¹³ This reminds us of Halbmayr's argument that violence is sexualized if it is directed at the most intimate part of a person's body.

"Sadistic rape" (see Fogelman 2012) allowed German soldiers omnipotent control over their victims, whilst simultaneously reducing German soldiers' sense of impotence. Soldiers, who may have felt as though they were powerless cogs in a machine, could use sadistic rape to reinstate power. Related to this motivation is ego-gratification. For ordinary men, seeking to subvert their marginal positions within German society, the Nazi regime offered them success, notoriety, and a chance to advance their careers. Excessive violence, through rape and various acts of sexualized violence, boosted their self-esteem and, as Fogelman (2012, 23) argues, "add[ed] to the already-increased bravado of being an officer" and "having power and privileges."

However, in order to appreciate the more specific meaning of rape during the Holocaust, we must place this behaviour within the social, political, and cultural context of the Third Reich. This moves us onto a meso level of understanding. Despite transgressing German policy, there was, paradoxically, something "political" about the rape and sexualized violence committed against Jewish women. The political coding of woman-as-Jew relocates this sexualized violence from an individual attack to an assault on the collective Jewish body.

Contextualizing sexual(ized), genocidal violence during the Holocaust.

Lentin (1999) argues that the definition of genocide must be gendered in order to acknowledge that many of these political campaigns – aimed at the alteration or elimination of a future ethnic group, through sexual slavery, mass rape, and mass sterilization - are transmitted through and upon women's bodies. Indeed, in the context of the Holocaust, the Nazi eugenic vision of German racial superiority specifically targeted Jewish women as child-bearers (Bock [1984] 1993; Rittner and Roth 1993). The reproductive body of the Jewish woman became a biological danger, as their wombs would bear future generations of Jews (Levenkron 2010). To create a superior Aryan race, Nazi race-hygiene policies demanded the elimination of inferior races. Women's sexuality and their reproductive capabilities became integral components of this agenda. In order to better understand this assault on women's sexuality - in all its devastating forms – it will be useful to unpack Halbmayer's concept of 'sexualized violence' in more detail.

Halbmayer's definition also encompasses indirect, emotional expressions of violence in the form of (sexualized) humiliations. Here they include: forced public nakedness, shaving of hair, and invasive physical examinations. Male guards (strangers) carried out these degrading public humiliations knowing that they would be experienced as grotesque sexual violations (Aolain 2000). By placing this sexualized violence within the historical-political context of the Holocaust, we can view this as part of a continuum of genocidal violence. At one end of the spectrum we have rape and other forms of direct physical/genocidal violence (forced sterilization and forced abortion), at the other we have these more indirect forms of sex-based violations.

The rape of Jewish women.

Rape was committed by Germans and their Nazi collaborators, as well as by other Jews. This took place in the ghettos, in hiding and in the concentration camps. In the ghettos, Jewish women were also vulnerable to murder, including the murder of their children, as well as forced abortions and a number of other sex-based violations. Women were also sexually assaulted while they were being transported from the ghettos to the camps (Aolain 2000; Katz 2012). According to Katz (2012), whilst some similarities may be drawn, the rape of Jewish women during the Holocaust involved factors that complicate a comparison with wartime rape in other contexts. Three distinctive features can be identified. First, we have the crime of *Rassenschande*. This involved all sexual relationships between Aryans and Jews, consensual or otherwise. Between 1935 and 1945, 2,000 cases were brought before the courts. The average sentence for those found guilty of committing *Rassenschande* was four to five years (Katz 2012).¹⁴ Second, if these sexual encounters resulted in pregnancy, these women and their foetuses would have to be murdered. Unlike rape in other contexts, where the genocidal aim is to contaminate the bloodline by reproducing an ethnically mixed cohort of children, contamination of the German bloodline was antithetical to Nazi ideology. Thirdly, unlike other examples of wartime rape, where emphasis is placed on the violation of the woman's body, German men who raped Jewish women violated their own existence and jeopardized their membership in the future master race (Goldenberg 2013).

The requirement to kill Jewish women following the violation of *Rassenschande* - and its potential reproductive consequences - was particularly common in the Skarzysko-Kamienna concentration camp. In the words of survivor Milla Doktorczyk:

My friend, she was working alongside me in Skarzysko. One beautiful girl, tall and slim, a beauty . . . Came one time, a German, he took her away from the machine. They raped her a couple of times, everybody, and then they killed her... They raped her in the middle, one after another one, and they killed her...¹⁵

Paula Neyman, another survivor, recounts the rape and murder of pregnant Jewish women at the Bruss-Sophienwalde Concentration Camp:

They dragged her out, four young Germans, each one had a leg or an arm and they threw her on the snow and...the commanders...they made everybody stand and watch...in full view of these young girls. Six or eight raped this pregnant girl. They picked her up like a sack of potatoes...and threw her on the truck. She was never heard of [again].¹⁶

Fogelman (2012) argues that some acts of rape were committed clandestinely whereas others were done in public to humiliate and dehumanize the victim. During their interviews, a number of survivors talked about women being dragged to the forest to be raped in secret. They discussed the methods guards used to conceal their crime of race defilement. For them, it was clear that these guards were aware of the law of Rassenschande. This is clearly illustrated by Bronia Shlagbaum's account:

A Jewish girl. You know. He want a Jewish girl. You know. To the forest. And he raped her. And it was Rassenschande. That means, how come a German should rape a Jewish girl? So they wanted to wipe up all the footsteps. They were ashamed.¹⁷

In a similar account Ana Cymerman states:

One day he comes over to me and says to me I should come with him in a room and he's going to show me what to do. So I did. You had to. He asked me. He would like to have sex with me.

She explains that she was surprised that, as a German, he wanted to rape her. She was aware of the law of Rassenschande. She explains that at the time she was thinking to herself: "[h]ow can you say this to me? I'm a Jew. A dirty Jew. You shouldn't say that to me. Because I'm Jewish."¹⁸ Sonia Nightingale also makes reference to Rassenschande. She explains that sexual molestation happened a lot "...it was how they call it...Germans shouldn't touch a Jewish girl...Shouldn't even look at her."¹⁹ Sonia struggles to find the correct phrase and so the interviewer suggests Rassenschande. She then explains that they shot the women afterwards. Based on survivors' interpretations, we can argue that these acts (rape and murder), including the manner in which they were carried out, were perpetrated against 'woman-as-Jew': an essentialized group and bearers of the next generation.

Assault on Jewish motherhood: forced sterilizations and forced abortions.

Aolain (2000) argues that the separation of children from their mothers and the removal of their capacity to bear children count as explicit sexual harm. It is an assault on a woman's bodily integrity both in its actual and symbolic manifestations. As a symbolic function, she argues that this act communicates to the wider ethnic or cultural group that the destruction of mother and child denotes the realization of broader military aims: the elimination of that particular group (Aolain 2000).

Forced sterilization was carried out on thousands of women without the consent, or often the knowledge, of the female victims. These genocidal experiments were conducted by means of X-ray, surgery and drugs, primarily at Auschwitz, Ravensbruck and other concentration camps (Aolain 2000). The topic of sterilization was discussed by a number of survivors. Elizabeth Feldman de Jong states: "[t]hey tried to give big injections in your womb. The needles were very painful. They pulled pieces of the womb...so you could not get children." ²⁰ In response to questions about medical experiments Sylvia Amir stated: "[h]e put two injections in [to the uterus] and closed the tubes." He closed the tubes and this was sterilization." ²¹ Magda Blau talks about the experiment centre in the camps. When asked about the experiments that were carried out, she states: "[f]irst of all they did sterilization...and they made different operations on woman...taking out the woman's business." Magda points to her abdomen. She explains that this was done to hundreds of Jewish women: "[a]ll Jewish women." She refers to the "unnecessary operations" as "sadistic" and "horrible." ²²

Forced abortions were also performed as part of the racist ideology. Indeed, abortions were forbidden for Aryan women who were considered to be the bearers of the future master race (Halbmayr 2010). In many of the forced-labour camps and the concentration camps, abortion was not even an option: Jewish women were

immediately condemned to death. A number of survivors also discuss the murder of newly born babies. Pearl Iroff explains: “[t]here was one girl that was pregnant...and then she gave birth to the baby...and the doctor killed the baby.”²³ Similarly, Ruth Foster explains:

One baby was born...the mother carried the full term of pregnancy...the SS...it came to our commandant...it came to his ears that there was a child born in the ghetto...the mother was brought with this little baby of a few days into the hospital...the soft part of the baby’s head had to be pressed in...had to be killed. It wasn't shot, but it was killed that way.²⁴

Describing the birth of a child in Auschwitz Isabella Leitner ([1978] 1993, 31-32) states:

Most of us are born to live - to die, but to live first. You, dear darling, you are being born only to die...You belong to the gas chamber. Your mother has no rights...She is not a mother. She is just a dirty Jew who has soiled the Aryan landscape with another dirty Jew.

Women were forced to kill infants in order to save the mother’s life. This murder of a newborn requires mothers to “...kill something of themselves, part of their own souls, part of the essence of the feminine”(Patterson 2013, 171). Furthermore, Patterson argues that the unique condition of the Holocaust caused “...the murder not only of human beings but of the very origin of human life and of human sanctity...the Jewish mother” (172).Doris Roe describes giving birth to a little girl. A few weeks after the baby

was born she informed the nurse that her baby was hungry. She recalls the nurse telling her that the baby would not cry for much longer: “[s]he walked up to the bunk and picked up my baby and slammed her head against the bottom of the bunk. I passed out.”²⁵

In a similar incident Eva Lassman recalls:

A woman was with me who was pregnant. They let her carry the baby to term. When she delivered, the Germans send in a Jewish man to take the baby away from her. And the baby was pinched by the nose. It was suffocated. She never saw her baby.²⁶

Dehumanization, rape and sexualized violence.

Although Lang’s (2010) thesis on dehumanization is based on genocide and rape, I will be using his ideas about the redundancy of using this concept in relation to my working definition of sexualized violence during the Holocaust. Lang provides a very convincing argument against the use of dehumanization in explanations of genocide. In this section I will compare the literature on dehumanization in genocide with the literature on dehumanization in rape.

Within mainstream analyses of genocide, it is argued that in order for ordinary men to carry out excessive and brutal acts of violence their victims have to be “transformed conceptually and psychologically into less-than-human creatures” (Lang

2010, 227). Hagan and Raymond-Richmond (2008) argue that collective dehumanization places the targeted group outside the normative universe of moral protection, thereby leaving them vulnerable to genocidal violence. Furthermore, racialized and collectivized dehumanization processes are necessary conditions of genocide. In his discussion of sanctioned massacres, Kelman (1973, 38) does not believe that individual psychological forces can explain such violence adequately. Rather, we have to place such actions within a wider policy process. For him, we should focus our attention on "...the strength of restraining forces against violence." Kelman lists three interrelated processes that weaken the moral restraints against violence: authorization, routinization and dehumanization.²⁷ The latter two will be discussed in more detail shortly.

For these writers then, genocidal violence requires the denial of the victims' status as human. More importantly, the dehumanization thesis suggests the denial of the victim's subjectivity. Denying the victim's subjectivity removes the possibility of interpersonal relationships. Lang is not suggesting that dehumanization is completely absent in genocide. Rather, its use by perpetrators has been exaggerated. For Lang, excessive violence is related to dynamics of power and adaptation, whereby power is conceived of as a relational, not absolute, phenomenon. These power dynamics are imbued with human and intersubjective qualities.

It is a common assumption, then, that wartime rape also involves objectification and dehumanization. Throughout, this article has questioned whether the rape and the sexualized violence carried out during the Holocaust took place under these conditions. Disagreements can be found within the literature on this issue (Lang 2010; Fogelman

2012; Waller 2012). Waller (2012) argues that dehumanization is particularly useful for understanding rape and sexual violence against women, as often women – specifically those living in patriarchal, male-dominated societies – find that their “status” as humans is called into question, even during peacetime. Similarly, Fogelman argues that during the Third Reich, rape provided an opportunity to humiliate and dehumanize the victim.

It has been argued that one of the central purposes of rape is to define the victim as “Other”, in a way that permits and justifies the crime. Waller (2012, 88) identifies three mechanisms that are central to understanding the psychological construction of the victim-as-other: us-them thinking, moral disengagement, and blaming the victims.

The first two require further discussion. ‘Us-them thinking’ involves highlighting and exaggerating the distinctions between the in-group and out-group. The second, moral disengagement, entails a process of detachment, whereby certain individuals and groups are placed outside of the moral boundary. Waller (2012, 92) believes that moral disengagement is facilitated by the dehumanization of the victims. Such dehumanization is most likely when the target group can be readily identified as a separate category of people belonging to a distinct racial, ethnic, religious, or political group that the perpetrators regard as inferior and/or threatening. Surely identifying “them” as belonging to an identifiable “group” contradicts the central premise of the dehumanization argument? Indeed, this “Othering” of the victim need not always involve dehumanizing the victim. Less dramatic processes to that of dehumanization are difference, distance and routinization. The concept of difference, which is based on ‘us-them’ thinking or “Othering”, creates a social context for cruelty. In this context, victims are placed in binary opposition to the perpetrators. Victims become the vessel onto which perpetrators project all of their anxieties, insecurities and hostilities. The out-

group are disparaged and treated as undesirable and unwanted elements of society (Lang 2010).

This notion of difference, the 'us-them' dictum, can also be found in Ignatieff's work.²⁸ Ignatieff (1999) argues that the fabrication of minor difference between individuals, societies and communities can cause anxiety. These minor differences become major when they are used as markers of power and status. He states: "[n]o human difference matters much until it becomes a privilege, until it becomes the basis for oppression" (50). What exists then is a paradoxical relationship between narcissism and aggression, where such differences, precisely because they are so minor, are exaggerated and expressed aggressively. In this process, nationalism is transformed into narcissism. For Ignatieff, dehumanization requires a particularly pernicious form of narcissist fiction. Nazi propaganda presented the assimilation of the Jewish people as a form of pollution/contamination, whereby separation of Aryan and Jew marked a kind of purification (Ignatieff 1999).²⁹ Ignatieff (1999, 62) argues that this language of purity and cleansing is the most perilous of all languages of narcissism. What starts with the narcissism of minor difference ends with "utter moral abjection." As LaCapra (1994, 104) notes, the Jews became a "phantasmatic cause of all evil", symbolizing both a "hygienic and a ritual threat to a 'pure' Nazi identity." In sum, the narcissism of minor difference involves the battle of essences. Thus the question becomes: "[w]hich of the two antagonistic groups possesses the 'true' and the 'good' essence, and which one is an 'evil' imposter?" (Chiot and McCauley 2006, 89).

A similar mechanism to difference is that of distance, which is achieved through a series of deprivations. This involves stripping victims, through enforced uniformity, of their personal identities and expressions of individuality. Any personal characteristics are

replaced by generalizations of their social category (Waller 2002, 245 as cited by Lang 2010, 229). Leon, a survivor says: “[t]hey took away your name. They took away all other means of identifying yourself with reference to others – you are all reduced to gray anonymity – head shaved, striped uniform...” (quoted in Greenspan, 201, 80). It is worth noting that the destruction of individuality is not the same as removing humanity. As Lang stresses, this process of de-individualization generates a useful psychological distance from the victims in the perpetrator’s mind, but it does not necessarily entail dehumanization. In her interview with a former commander of Treblinka, Sereny asks him whether it is accurate to say that he did not view them as human beings. The former commander, Stangl, states that he viewed them as “Cargo.” “I rarely saw them as individuals. It was always a huge mass” (Sereny 1983, 200-200). Sereny probes further and asks whether there were any moments when he came “up against the knowledge that these were human beings” (203). Stangl acknowledges that there was a “beautiful red-blond” Polish woman whom he admired. Referring specifically to “work-Jews” he claimed that he had “quite friendly relations” with them and that he enjoyed “human relations” with them (quoted in Sereny 1983, 207). He names two Jews in particular. Whilst these statements seem to contradict his earlier statement about viewing them as a huge mass, in both accounts dehumanization is not obviously present.

Other mechanisms that do not require or involve the dehumanization of the victim are diffusion of responsibility and routinization. The latter allows perpetrators to focus on the details of their job rather than the morality of what they are doing. This allows them to view themselves not as the creators of genocide, but simply performers of, and participants in, this atrocity (Waller 2012). Referring to selections, Dr Ernst B, an SS doctor, stated: “[i]n the beginning it was almost impossible. Afterward it became

almost routine. That is the only way to put it... [w]hat remains are a few personal impressions and these impressions are in themselves not even the really cruel events...because it is a technical process..."(quoted in Lifton 2000, 195 and 200.)

Returning to de-individualization and essentialization, both are examples of more subtle techniques that are employed to carry out genocidal acts of violence. In fact, deindividuation, transforming the Jews into a generalized social category – and denigrating them as a collective - essentialized the Jews (Lang 2010). As Chirot and McCauley (2006, 84-85) argue:

Essentializing the out-group means that there is something bad about all of them, every one of them...Nazis knew perfectly well that Jews were not literally rats...But they did believe that everyone in that category, old and young, strong and weak, threatening and helpless - all must be exterminated, just as all vermin must be exterminated. Essentializing turns the enemy into a single dangerous and irredeemable character.

They further argue: "[t]he very ideas of pollution and contamination require the idea of essence, an unseen spirit or nature that is endangered by contact or infection. The German *volk* had to be protected from the foreign and degrading Jewish essence" (Chirot and McCauley 2006, 86. Emphasis in the original). In contrast to Hagan and Raymond-Richmond (2008), they argue that by definition, genocidal killing involves killing by category and by membership in a group rather than by individual guilt or crime. Similarly, LaCapra (1994, 104) refers to the Nazis' "exorcism" of the Jews through racial essentialism/hypostatization.

Kelman (1973) argues that continued participation in mass killing has the tendency to dehumanize the perpetrators as well as the victims. He posits that one of the sources of the victimizer's dehumanization is his loss of community. Lang (2010) however, argues that the perpetrator's humanity is not removed through the use of extreme violence but that the use of excessive violence enables the victimizer to establish himself as an exemplary member of the community. This interpretation regards the use of excessive violence as an attempt, by the perpetrator, to reestablish personal identity. Furthermore, this excessive violence, according to Lang (2010, 240), becomes personalized, in the sense that violence becomes "an articulation and expansion of their own self-consciousness." It is possible to apply this thinking to rape. As highlighted earlier, rape was not used as an official weapon during the Final Solution and not all rape was sadistic. Sometimes rape was used for sexual gratification. This may have provided German soldiers with physical intimacy that enabled them to restore a sense of normalcy amidst the killing. Rape may have enhanced perpetrators' feeling of camaraderie among the group, thus restoring their sense of community. Furthermore, if rape is used as a form of excessive violence and the goal is personalization it would, as Lang argues, be counterproductive to dehumanize the victims.

"He used to pick the most pretty girls."³⁰

Sharon Marcus (391 cited by Flaschka 2010, 78) states:

Masculine power and feminine powerlessness neither simply precede nor cause rape; rather, rape is one of culture's many modes of feminizing

women. A rapist chooses his target because he recognizes her to be a woman, but a rapist also strives to imprint the gender identity of 'feminine victim' on his target.

If we accept this position, then it makes theoretical sense to ask Jewish female survivors if they understood their rape as a reminder that they were female/feminine, in an environment (the concentration camp) that had stripped them of their feminine qualities. This question forms the basis of Flaschka's argument. It supports my argument against the dehumanization hypothesis. The testimonies of female survivors who were raped and witnessed other rapes believed they were raped because of their female attractiveness.

Here are two examples. Eve Gabori:

[T]hey looked at me, and I was a beautiful girl...I was all sunburned, even my hair grew about half an inch, I looked healthy my face was red and brown, because the sun was beating down. This girl was tall, huge, huge beautiful grey eyes, very delicate...they told us to go into the barrack to wash the floor...and it was horrible. We went in they locked the door, grabbed this girl and went into this other small room. I heard her screaming. I knew what they were doing to her. I never saw the girl again.³¹

Ester Gomo:

He did not let me go. In his eyes I was very pretty. In his eyes. And he started to make me compliments. 'Beautiful breasts'...that I'm very young...he says he can't resist me. He took his right hand and twisted my breast.³²

The concentration camps challenged women's identities as women. When women entered the camps, their heads were shaven, they were given formless clothing and starvation meant loss of body weight especially from their breast and hips: their quintessentially feminine attributes were diminished. Perhaps the rape of these women served, paradoxically, to reinforce their gender identity that had hitherto been challenged by the camp environment. In this context, rape may have functioned to remind women that they were women (human) in an environment that challenged their identities as women. In fact, the survivor accounts presented above - and many others - suggest that this was the case. This does not support the notion that victims were dehumanized before they were raped.

Conclusion.

The main aim of this piece was to answer the following question: why did German men rape Jewish women if it was a criminal offence to have sex with Jewish women and it was not an explicit function of the genocidal campaign? Given the relative paucity of information/literature on the subject of rape and sexual violence during the holocaust, this was a difficult task.

According to an anonymous female survivor "[a]mong the many defeats at the end of this war is the defeat of the male sex "(Anonymous [1954] 2011, 64). Based on the laws of 'The Protection of German Blood and German Honour' and Rassenschande

(racial defilement), one way of interpreting the actions of soldiers of the Third Reich is to view them as the actions of weak men: their actions had an existential cost and undermined their German identity. This may have been the consequence of their actions, yet, what was their purpose? Mass rape in this instance did not occur. Its use was not explicitly genocidal. Impregnated women were killed so the aim of rape in this context, unlike genocidal rape in other contexts, was not to contaminate the bloodline or to reproduce an ethnically mixed cohort of children.

In terms of contextualizing and interpreting the behavior of German men, rape and sexualized violence was not enacted upon a dehumanized body. It was carried out on the reproductive bodies of Jewish women. It was, as Patterson has argued, an assault on Jewish motherhood, as the source of the Jewish people is the Jewish mother. The concentration camps were described as places that were the antithesis of the maternal. In the concentration camps, motherly love – pregnancy and maternity itself – were capital crimes, often resulting in women’s immediate death.

Forced sterilization and forced abortion are acts of sexualized genocidal violence. Unlike the use of rape, they did not contradict the Nazi eugenic vision of creating an Aryan race. Their devastating genocidal logic is apparent. Both examples, however, benefit from an analysis which views Jewish women as an essentialized group: woman-as-Jew. Moving beyond the dehumanization thesis allows us to understand the political, racial and gendered dynamics (intersubjective) and meanings (degradation/humiliation) behind this sexualized violence. To enrich this analysis, we also need to draw upon existing micro and meso theories of wartime rape and sexual violence. As discussed earlier, these include, but are not limited to, the gendered institutions and practices of

patriarchy, phallocentrism, misogyny, the military institution and hegemonic heterosexual masculinity. In this particular context German men, in order to enhance their masculine identities, and/or, subvert their marginal position within German society, may have used rape to achieve these goals. It may have been employed to boost their egos and their self-esteem, or to add to the bravado of being an officer of the Third Reich or part of a quasi-military institution. It may have simply been used to humiliate and degrade the victim. Sometimes raped women, and certainly impregnated women, were murdered. Perhaps then, the law of *Rassenschande* provided these men with a license to rape. Dr Ernst B (quoted in Lifton 2000, 200) talked of a detached military professionalism that also contained an all-pervasive corruption. This corruption was based upon open secrets involving everyone and contributed to a sense of group cohesion:

Every single SS man had so many possibilities for being corrupt in some way that almost everyone did something – had dirt on his walking stick. And everyone else knew about everyone else’s improper activity, which is why nothing ever came of it.³³

In the context of the Holocaust, I would argue that Jewish women faced a double jeopardy: first as women (as socially, economically and politically subordinate to men) and second, as Jews (as racially inferior to Germans). From a gendered perspective, both the feminine/feminized (through rape) and maternal Jewish body were attacked. The sexualized and genocidal violence discussed here only makes sense if premised on a gendered intersubjective relationship between victim and perpetrator. The sole aim of

the Nazi killing machine was the extermination of the Jewish people. Conceiving them as non-human renders the entire operation unintelligible. Logic comes from placing the rape and sexualized violence against Jewish women during the Holocaust in the context of a relational dynamic between perpetrator (German) and gendered victim (woman-as-Jew).

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Notes

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- ¹ On the subject of the function of sexism within Nazi racist ideology, Tec (2003) advances a different argument to Ringelheim. She argues that there is no systematic data to suggest that women were more oppressed than men during the Holocaust. Furthermore, she is less interested in whether more women than men died, and more interested in how women and men fared in different Holocaust settings and how they responded to their circumstances.
 - ² Contributors in the edited collection by Hedgepeth and Saidel (2010) also refer to this issue.
 - ³ Some are based on catalogued oral histories from the Shoah Visual History Foundation, Steven Spielberg's Los Angeles based project.
 - ⁴ For Greenspan (2010,3) "testimony" suggests something formal and finished, a one-way transmission that one gathers. He prefers the term "recounting" as it reflects the provisional and developmental nature of retelling. La Capra (1994, 23)

advances a similar argument when he talks about the process of “canonization”— a process which “... involves the mitigation or covering over of wounds and creating the impression that nothing really disruptive has occurred.”

⁵ LaCapra (1994, 179 and 200) advocates a more critical analysis of documents and texts. His notion of working through requires that we recognize that we are involved in transferential relations with the past in ways that will change depending on our subject-positions. He highlights the tension between unworked-through historicist contextualism – where we understand the past in its own terms and for its own sake – and projection onto the past, whereby we invoke or infer contemporary meaning and values onto the past.

⁶ Interview 32812, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

⁷ Interview 19656, USC Shoah Foundation testimony. See also Luba Malz interview 35267, USC Shoah Foundation testimony. Luba also describes the women and girls selected for rape as beautiful.

⁸ Goldenberg (2013) also reported that many women were killed before they could testify. Hedgepeth and Saidel (2010) state that the number of citations of sexual violence (including rape) is more than a thousand.

⁹ Interview 13395, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

¹⁰ Interview 35354, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

¹¹ There is also evidence that men were also victims of sexual assault and rape. Flaschka (2010, 86-9) provides a detailed discussion of this. See also Tec (2003) who argues that, given the Nazi emphasis on patriarchal values - which depicted men as rational, aggressive and more powerful than women - Jewish men were regarded as a greater threat to the political system than women. Thus the goal of annihilating the Jews began with the extermination of Jewish men. Tec argues that coping mechanisms for Jewish men and women were informed by gender, pre-war social class and by wartime social labels.

¹² Interview 29016, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

¹³ Interview 23687, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

¹⁴ See ‘Decision of the Nuremberg special court in the Katzenberger race defilement case.’ This contains the court transcripts of the case brought against Lehmann

Israel Katzenberger, who was head of the Jewish religious community in Nuremberg, and a German woman Irene Seiler, née Scheffle. They were tried in a public session on March 13, 1942. According to the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor, Katzenberger was sentenced to death for committing crimes of racial pollution. He was also found guilty of committing a crime against the body according to Article 2 of the Decree against Public Enemies. His actions were interpreted as “polluting the German race” and “a grave attack on the purity of German blood”. He was sentenced to death and Irene received four years of hard labor.

15 Interview 15012, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

16 Interview 4788, USC Shoah Foundation testimony .

17 Interview 10747, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

18 Interview 8641, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

19 Interview 1832, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

20 Interview 543, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

21 Interview 6000, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

22 Interview 19441, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

23 Interview 34942, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

24 Interview 9538, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

25 Interview 23687, USC Shoah Foundation.

26 Interview 51181, USC Shoah Foundation.

27 Based on interviews with Nazi doctors, Lifton (2000) notes that they avoided taking in psychologically what they were doing. This was done through a number of processes including psychic numbing, derealization and doubling.

28 In his chapter, “The Narcissism of Minor Difference”, Ignatieff (1999) tries to understand how the Serbians and the Croats (once friendly neighbors, who had a lot in common) became enemies.

29 During the trial of members of the Reserve Police Battalion 101 referred to Jews as “dirty”, “unkempt” and “less clean.” See Browning (2001, 152).

30 Interview 450, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

31 Interview 1544, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

³² Interview 23436, USC Shoah Foundation testimony.

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