

‘FOR ALL THIS WE THANK THE FÜHRER’:

BIO-POLITICS AND THE BARE LIFE IN *A WOMAN IN BERLIN: EIGHT WEEKS IN THE CONQUERED CITY. A DIARY.*

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Abstract

This article’s primary focus is to theorise and historicise war rape through a discussion of the mass rape of German women in Berlin by Russian soldiers at the end of World War II. These events and their ramifications are documented in the anonymously-written text titled A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City. A Diary. I offer a series of close readings of the events detailed within the diary, building an understanding of them by referring to key theoretical concepts from the bio-political theories of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben. Ultimately, I will argue that ‘gender-blind’ theories of bio-control should be modified to address how mechanisms of control such as war rape are enacted upon differently-sexed bodies, as evidenced in this anonymously-written text.

Approximately twenty years ago, American journalist Tom Brokaw coined the term the ‘Greatest Generation’ to describe the American men who lived through the Great Depression and fought in World War II (WWII).¹ In addition to Brokaw’s two books and numerous televised films which corroborate his proclamation, several contemporary films likewise present the ‘great’ heroics of American soldiers in Europe including *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) and HBO’s eleven-hour television miniseries *Band of Brothers* (2001). The tradition of valorising the heroics of the Allied Forces in such cultural productions is not a recent development, nor do the artefacts solely focus upon American soldiers. A number of films dating back to the war itself present the courageous acts of Allied troops in Europe and include Edwin L. Marin’s *Paris Calling* (1942), Tay Garnett’s *The Cross of Lorraine* (1943), and Jacques Tourneur’s *Days of Glory* (1944). As interesting as these productions may be, the films typically perpetuate the reductive categories of good (the Allied Powers) versus evil (the Axis Powers). It is relatively straightforward to make such distinctions when the only criteria being referred to are the atrocities committed by the Nazis and the horror of their concentration camps.

¹ Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1997).

What becomes difficult, however, is to read the representations of WWII as well as the actual events through a lens which focuses upon gender and sexuality. Employing polemical distinctions such as hero and anti-hero, victim and villain becomes much more complicated when one considers the sexual crimes committed against women within the context of war. Though the German Nazis are categorised as villains due to the number of atrocities and crimes committed against humanity by the Party, in the case of these mass rapes by the Russian Army, the German women are indeed victims. These particular crimes, however, are rarely (if at all) included in the depictions of the war I mention above. War rape has been omitted from many histories of war—suggesting an unconscious desire, due to phallogocentric discourses, to suppress the reportage of such acts. The fact that the rapes were not seriously investigated by the Allied Powers, as Mark Ellis² writes, likewise demonstrates a conscious strategy to ignore the mass rapes in Berlin and in other locations in Europe.

This article's primary focus of study is the mass rape of German women by Russian soldiers in Berlin, Germany at the end of WWII as documented in the anonymously-written book *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City. A Diary*.³ The diary was written by a female German journalist during the occupation of Berlin in 1945 by the Russian Army and documents the mass rape of female German civilians by male Russian soldiers from late April to mid-June in 1945. The entries begin on 20 April 1945. 'It's true', writes the narrator, 'the war is rolling toward Berlin'.⁴ Historian Norman Naimark's report corroborates the narrator's first entry. He writes that on 16 April, 'the Red Army launched the last great offensive of World War II from its staging area on the Oder'.⁵ The attack relied upon over 2.5 million soldiers, 42,000 guns and mortars, 6,200 tanks and 7,500 planes with Soviet troops arriving at the outskirts of Berlin by 21 April, and 'by 1 May, the Third Reich had been obliterated'.⁶ Between 9 May 1945 and 6 June 1945, writes Naimark, 'the Soviet military governed Germany through a chaotic and uncoordinated system, in which a multitude of newly created administrative units shared authority without a clear sense of hierarchy'.⁷

As the Soviets made their way through Berlin and into the suburbs, Naimark writes that chaos was the norm. The break-down in the Soviet chain of command resulted in looting, pillaging, and rape. Many of the Russian soldiers were highly intoxicated during these events, contributing to the overall brutality, and these erratic behaviours were fuelled by a complicated array of emotional responses to the atrocities committed by the Nazis. 'A number of Soviet memoirists wrote that it was far from simple to get the troops to think of Germans as human beings deserving of respect', writes Naimark.

The wartime Soviet propaganda had been very effective in exposing Russian soldiers to the worst crimes of the Nazi occupiers ... Vivid pictures of Majdanek [a concentration and extermination camp located near the urban city of Lublin, Poland]⁸ published in the press and the horrors of the concentration camps discussed in agitational meetings were very much on the minds of Soviet soldiers as they marched into Germany.⁹

² Mark Ellis, 'Breaking the Silence: Rape as an International Crime', *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, 38, no. 225 (2006-07): 227.

³ Anonymous, *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in a Conquered City: A Diary*, trans. Philip Boehm (New York: Picador, 2005).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵ Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁸ Construction on this particular camp began in 1941 and some of the first prisoners there were Soviet prisoners of war. Most were dead within a year, according to reports in the Holocaust Encyclopedia. See 'Lublin/Majdanek Concentration Camp: Conditions' at <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005190>

⁹ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 77.

Though vengeance against the Germans was normalised, rape was technically forbidden by Russian military regulations. However, ‘in typically self-contradictory fashion’, writes Naimark, ‘Stalin insisted that undisciplined behaviour was not the fault of the troops, while at the same time providing them reasons for engaging yet again in violence and pillage’.¹⁰ It is estimated that in 1945, approximately 130,000 German women were raped by Russian soldiers in occupied Berlin, but it is hypothesised that up to two million women in total were raped in 1945, including Polish women and ‘Soviet women and girls brought to Germany for slave labour by the Wehrmacht’.¹¹ German historian and feminist Atina Grossmann writes: ‘It has been suggested that perhaps one out of every three of about one and a half million women in Berlin at the end of the war were raped ... The numbers [of victims] cited for Berlin vary wildly; from 20,000 to 100,000, to almost one million, with the actual number of rapes higher because many women were attacked repeatedly’.¹² The mass rapes which occurred in Berlin, however, were not the only instance of such crimes during the war. Russian attacks on civilian women were as severe in Silesia as they were in Berlin, states Naimark.¹³ German soldiers also committed acts of rape during the war, though it is estimated that the attacks were substantially lower than the number of rapes committed by the Russian army.¹⁴

Helke Sander, who produced the book and film titled *Liberators Take Liberties*,¹⁵ chronicling the mass rapes of German women, states that a vast number of German soldiers (approximately three million) engaged in ‘relationships’ with women in occupied Eastern territories earlier in the war. As Sander suggests: ‘a number that high naturally poses the question of the extent of the women’s free will in the matter’.¹⁶ It is difficult to determine whether such relationships were consensual when the balance of power between the participants was so skewed.

The sexual abuse of women during wartime is not a phenomenon exclusive to Europe or WWII, but the negation of such acts from historical texts is pervasive. Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen report:

For centuries organized rape has been an integral aspect of warfare. Yet, remarkably, it has been absent from the classics on warfare, which have predominantly focused on ‘regular’ warfare in which one army confronts another in a battle for the conquest or defence of a territory.¹⁷

Histories, then, have ignored sex crimes, and the acts of violence have also been disregarded at the community level. Nicola Henry writes that:

[M]any victims of wartime rape commonly report fear that their stories will not be believed or that their stories will not be listened to. In nearly every war, victims of rape have had their stories silenced by post-war politics and the imposed unspeakability of wartime rape.¹⁸

Failure to report rapes is self-imposed by victims in some instances, but the suppression of information is also often based upon communal mores which regard the discussion of rape as taboo. Complicating the matter even further is the idea that silence may suffice for the non-representation of such unbearable acts of violence. As Henry explains:

¹⁰ Ibid., 77.

¹¹ Antony Beevor, Introduction to *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in a Conquered City: A Diary*, xx.

¹² Atina Grossman, ‘A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers’, *October*, 72 (1995): 46.

¹³ Naimark, 79.

¹⁴ Grossman, 46.

¹⁵ Helke Sander, *Liberators Take Liberties*, BeFreier und Befreite, 1992.

¹⁶ Helke Sander, ‘Remembering/Forgetting’, *October*, 72. (1995): 15.

¹⁷ Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen, ‘Becoming Subject: Rape as a Weapon of War’, *Body & Society*, 11, no. 1 (2005): 111.

¹⁸ Nicola Henry, ‘The Impossibility of Bearing Witness: Wartime Rape and the Promise of Justice’, *Violence Against Women*, 16, no. 10. (2010): 1101.

Primo Levi posits that the one who cannot or does not bear witness is the true witness or the absolute witness because only nonlanguage or silence can convey the inexplicability of the experience as it is impossible for testimony or language to alternatively do so ... silence is counterproductive to recognition and justice, and the irony is that the historical silence of wartime rape—both internal and external to the victim or witness—has helped to secure impunity for these crimes in the aftermath of armed conflict. Levi was not, of course, advocating silence. Instead, he was articulating the paradox of the impossibility of bearing witness: between both the impossibility of speaking on one hand, and the impossibility of silence on the other hand in the aftermath of terrible atrocities.¹⁹

Though the discussion of rape is suppressed by the community and words are likely inadequate to express the horror of war rapes, there are female-authored narratives that chronicle such crimes. *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City. A Diary* is comprised of entries ranging in length and written by the author before, during, and after she and other German women were systematically and repeatedly raped by Russian soldiers. Such rapes, as Diken and Laustsen argue, are not only ‘an integral aspect of warfare,’ but also, as demonstrated in the events reported in the diary:

[become an] instrument of traumatizing not just the women in question but also their families and, ultimately, the community in which they live. Rape cannot be understood as ‘just’ a deplorable side-effect of war provoked by soldiers’ sexual frustration. Rape is, literally, a weapon of war.²⁰

As ‘weapons of war’, the acts of rape, according to historian Filip Slavetski, were frequent and public; often committed in front of German men. Slavetski writes that:

[H]istorians have offered further explanations for the rapes, exploring the symbolism of rape in war and the sexual peculiarities of the Red Army and, indeed, Stalinist society. They help to explain why soldiers raped so extensively and publicly, often in front of German men.²¹

The rapes served to emasculate German men, but also:

A soldier’s pain at any aspect of the German occupation—the murder of his relatives or the destruction of his village—could be channelled towards sexual violence. But in the chaos of the advance and disintegration of military discipline where much became permissible, more direct, less symbolic reasons remained in play. Soldiers were often blind drunk, sex-starved for years and couldn’t be bothered looking for four standing walls in the rubble to rape women in private, German or not. In the place of slavery, forced starvation and mass exterminations—the hallmarks of the German occupation—rape became widespread in 1945.²²

¹⁹ Ibid., 1100.

²⁰ Diken and Laustsen, 112.

²¹ Filip Slavetski, *The Soviet Occupation of Germany: Hunger, Mass Violence, and the Struggle for Peace, 1945-1947* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 6.

²² Ibid.

Beevor suggests that ‘many soldiers had been so humiliated by their own officers and commissars during the four years of war that they felt driven to expiate their bitterness, and German women presented the easier target’.²³

Amidst these complexities of state and power, *A Woman in Berlin* stands as a testimony of the rapes, yet its own publication history and reception demonstrates attempts to sequester such discourse from being circulated as well as to question its authenticity. ‘First published in 1953’, writes Hans Magnus Enzensberger, ‘the book disappeared from view, lingering in obscurity for decades before it slowly reemerged, was reissued, and then became an international phenomenon—a full half century after it was written’.²⁴ In spite of its status as ‘international phenomenon,’ there are still those who did not approve of its publication. Its original press run ‘was highly controversial in Germany, where some accused it of besmirching the honor of the German women’.²⁵

In 2005, after the book was re-released, Christophe Gottesmann questioned its authenticity in a letter to *The New York Times Book Review*.²⁶ Stating that he did not wish to ‘deny the historic fact of the mass rapes and atrocities carried out by Russians in Germany’, Gottesmann argues that ‘until a serious and critical edition of the diaries of the *Woman in Berlin* is published, this book should be regarded as a work of fiction rather than of fact’.²⁷ Gottesmann claims the book’s history is ‘dubious’ and ‘troubled’, and that ‘there was no serious investigation of the authenticity of the handwritten notes’.²⁸

Both Enzensberger and Anthony Beevor (who introduces the Picador version of the book) responded to Gottesmann’s letter in *The New York Times Book Review* the following week. Enzensberger states that Gottesmann’s letter ‘is not the first attempt to discredit the book’.²⁹ ‘As the German publisher responsible for its republication,’ writes Enzensberger, ‘I have had the manuscripts examined by an expert and looked at the different stages the text underwent, from notes scribbled during the last stages of the war to the final typewritten version. I am puzzled by the assertion that I have been the accomplice to a forgery’.³⁰ Beevor verifies the book in a separate letter, writing: ‘this diary is completely free of significant mistakes and of the false notes’ which discredited the Hitler Diaries and ‘Last Letters from Stalingrad’.³¹ Contrary to what Gottesmann suggests in his letter, Beevor confirms ‘the original notes and typescript were subject to a close examination ... and declared authentic’.³²

Historical data supports the events described in the diary. Jody Raphael reports: ‘Within the past several years, reputable historians have verified that approximately two million German women were rape victims, between 95,000 and 130,000 in Berlin alone’.³³ Alluding to questions regarding *A Woman in Berlin*’s truthfulness, Raphael asks: ‘What was it about this diary that provoked such discomfort? It seemed to me that the reaction to the book was almost as interesting as the work itself, displaying as it does discomfort with the stark facts of sexual assault and its purposes’.³⁴

One reason the diary produces such discomposure relates to the depictions of the war described earlier, which categorically characterise Germans as the villains. The diary forces a revised

²³ Beevor, xix.

²⁴ Hans Magnus Enzensberger, ‘Foreward’ to *A Woman in Berlin*, ix.

²⁵ Beevor, xv.

²⁶ Christophe Gottesmann, ‘A Woman in Berlin’, Letters, *New York Times Book Review*, 11 September 2005, 6.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Hans Magnus Enzensberger, ‘A Woman in Berlin’, Letters, *New York Times Book Review*, 24 September 2005, 6.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Anthony Beevor, ‘A Woman in Berlin.’ Letters. *New York Times Book Review*. 24 September 2005. 6. Beevor writes in the introduction to the Picador version of *A Woman in Berlin* that the Hitler Diaries were ‘fake,’ and that ‘the great bestseller of the 1950s, “Last Letters from Stalingrad” was found to be fictitious over forty years after its first appearance’.

³² Ibid.

³³ Jody Raphael, ‘Silencing Reports of Sexual Assault: The Controversy Over *A Woman in Berlin*’, *Violence Against Women*, 12 no. 7 (2006): 693.

³⁴ Ibid.

view which depicts the German women as victims, revealing the moral complexities of the war. Atina Grossmann explains that: 'This debate about whether German women should be studied primarily as Opfer (victims) or Täter (perpetrators) has now been played out in many forums, notably the bitter arguments between Gisela Bock and Claudia Koonz over the latter's book *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, The Family and Nazi Politics*'.³⁵ Grossmann characterises feminist discourse about rape and historical discourses about Nazism as 'two highly developed discourses that continually intersect and threaten to block each other'.³⁶ This blockage is manifested as discomfort in some and in others as the refusal to believe in the diary's authenticity, such as in Gottesmann's letter to *The New York Times Book Review* cited earlier.

Historical-judicial discourses regarding the rapes in WWII are also troubling. Mark Ellis writes that 'modern-day sensitivity to the crime of rape did not emerge until after World War II'.³⁷ According to Ellis, rape was not discussed in the Nuremberg Charter, the document issued on 8 August 1945 which outlined the procedures for the Nuremberg trials. Though 'the article on crimes against humanity explicitly set forth prohibited acts ... rape was not mentioned by name', and though 'the Allies did establish a commission to investigate allegations of mass rape of French and Belgian women', writes Ellis, 'it was not a serious initiative'.³⁸

Theories of Bio-power as a Site of Intervention in Berlin

At the end of WWII, through the Soviet occupation of Berlin and after, the report and prosecution of the mass rapes was suppressed at the community level and all but ignored at the state level. *A Woman in Berlin* interrogates the intersection between states (Germany and Russia) and bodies (women and men) in post-war Berlin. It seems logical, then, that theories of bio-power and bio-control would be a suitable site of intervention to study the events chronicled in the diary, since in simplest terms, 'bio-power' is defined as the state or sovereign's control over a group of bodies. Bio-power is described by Michel Foucault as: 'the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power'.³⁹ Bio-power is also defined by Foucault as: 'the numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations'.⁴⁰ Though the acts of rape were not officially condoned by the Russian occupying forces, the rapes ultimately subjugated the women (through the violence) and the men, by emasculating them.

Foucault's claims are the catalyst for subsequent theories regarding bodies of power, as well as human bodies and power. Foucault writes that during the nineteenth century the 'technology of sex was a whole series of different tactics that combined in varying proportions the objective of disciplining the body and that of regulating populations',⁴¹ and that 'at the juncture of the body', and 'sex became a crucial target of power organized around the management of life rather than the menace of death'.⁴² It is the female body that ultimately produces new subjects necessitating 'management', therefore a logical addendum to Foucault's work is that techniques of bio-control and bio-power can be enacted upon differently sexed bodies in different manners. This is especially true in the case of war rape and the subsequent pregnancies such crimes can produce. As Claudia Card states, mass rape committed by the military is:

³⁵ Grossman, 49.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 42, 45.

³⁷ Ellis, 227.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 228.

³⁹ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2007), 1.

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 140.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 147.

a product of a living organism (the rapist) is used to attack a biological system (the reproductive system) in members of the enemy population. Although this attack need not produce illness, it is designed to produce social chaos ... Sperm so used becomes a social and psychological toxin, poisoning the futures of victims and their communities by producing children who, if they survive, will remind whoever raised them of their traumatic origins in torture.⁴³

Foucault's analysis of sexuality and power is relevant, then, to considerations of rape as a technique of bio-control as he explicitly connects structures of power to disciplinary techniques related to sex and gender. As relevant as these theoretical trajectories are to contextualising the intersections between military and civilian and men and women in the events in *The Woman in Berlin*, Foucault also argues for the de-sexualisation of rape as crime, suggesting that the act should not be interpreted as disparate from any other violent crime.⁴⁴ This argument will be cited and discussed at length below.

Approximately two decades after Foucault introduced the neologism 'bio-power,' Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben employed Foucault's work as impetus for his own bio-political considerations in his 1995 text *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* and later in *State of Exception* (2005). Moving beyond Foucault's initial theories regarding bodies and power, Agamben explores the tension between *zōé* and *bios*, or between what Greek philosophers determined as the 'bare life' (*zōē*) and 'qualified life' or the 'good life' (*bios*).⁴⁵ To Agamben, *zōé* 'expressed the simple fact of living common to all beings (animals, men or gods),' and *bios* 'indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group' typically through the application of law in civilised society.⁴⁶ Thus, *bios* and *zōé* are productive in contextualising the events that occurred in Berlin.

Agamben's conceptualisation of the 'state of exception,' as outlined in his book of the same title is substantiated by the content of *A Woman in Berlin*. Agamben argues that:

The entire Third Reich can be considered a state of exception that lasted twelve years. In this sense, modern totalitarianism can be defined as the establishment, by means of the state of exception, of a legal civil war that allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system.⁴⁷

A state of exception 'marks a threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without logos claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference'.⁴⁸ This threshold is demonstrated by the journalist's description of the Nazis' atrocities in *A Woman in Berlin*. 'The radio just broadcast another concentration camp report. The most horrific thing is the order and the thrift: millions of human beings as fertilizer, mattress stuffing, soft soap, felt mats.'⁴⁹ For the Nazis, perhaps, there was logic in the supposed thrift and order of the camp, but the horrors are not logical, but perverse and depraved, highlighting pure violence without logos.

Though Agamben utilises Nazi rule to define his concept of the 'state of exception' the Soviet occupation of Berlin is also illustrative of such a juncture. This theme emerges in Slavetski's work on the Russian occupation of Berlin. He writes that: 'Soviet commanders had not ordered that

⁴³ Claudia Card, 'The Paradox of Genocidal Rape Aimed at Enforced Pregnancy', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 46 (2008):187.

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, as quoted in Holly Henderson, 'Feminism, Foucault, and Rape: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention', *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law & Justice*, 22 (2007): 225.

⁴⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 1.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 40.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 257.

mass violence be meted out to civilians as a policy of pacification and certainly not desertification. But it didn't matter'.⁵⁰ As the occupation forces moved into Berlin, writes Slaveski:

The logic of the war did not need to be articulated in orders and, in any case, commanders could do little to change it. Crossing the dead zones, soldiers had learnt how civilians should be pacified. The reams of army newspapers calling for vengeance against anyone and anything German reflected the mood of the troops as much as it exacerbated it. Yet it soon became clear to many commanders in a matter of days and weeks that the violence and the propaganda could not continue, if they were to finish the war any time soon and have any chance of administering the lands they had conquered.⁵¹

As this passage demonstrates, the Russian occupation was also a state of exception, especially when considering how mass rape violates an ethos that most 'civilised' nations share. Deliberation of how life in such a 'state of exception' relates in regards to one's gender and sexuality would provide an apt moment of cross-disciplinary critique. In *State of Exception*, however, no such a critique appears. Agamben's descriptions of bare life and the state of exception tend to gloss over questions regarding female subjectivity or ignore them altogether; and the works do not suggest how life in the state of exception differs for women and men. It is not difficult to find textual evidence which supports a reading of Agamben's theories that insists upon considering sex and gender, for many female authors have detailed living the bare life as it exclusively relates to their sex, and women's writing during WWII and its aftermath is no exception.

Berlin as Bare Life

By the time the anonymous journalist began writing in late April, 1945, Berlin had nearly been reduced to rubble. The catastrophic events of the war had taken the Germans from a state of *bios*, or the good life and into the bare life, *zōé*. Living in a bombed-out, post-apocalyptic Berlin, it appears that civilisation has reached its very breaking point—and that this bare life has severely different consequences for women and men.

The author appropriates images of early humanity, specifically caves, throughout her early entries; a trope which will serve to highlight the pre-historic, if not animalistic, actions of the Russian soldiers. Paying striking attention to the materiality of her dwelling space as she begins writing, the narrator's focus on her living conditions demonstrates the fine line between *zōé* and *bios* in Berlin. 'Back in the attic apartment', she writes:

I can't really call it a home; I no longer have a home. Not that the furnished room I was bombed out of was really mine either. All the same, I'd filled it with six years of my life ... All the souvenirs, the old skins and shells—the residue and the war debris of lived-in years. Now that it's all gone and all I have is a small suitcase with a handful of clothes, I feel naked, weightless.⁵²

The apartment debris serves as an index of both the narrator's past life as well as Germany's.

Her allusions to pre-modernity continue in subsequent entries, highlighting Germany's regression to the bare life. 'Finally we're in our shelter', she writes, 'behind an iron door ... that weighs a hundred pounds, with rubber seals around the edges and two levers to lock it shut. The official term is air-raid shelter. We call it cave, underworld, catacomb of fear, mass grave'.⁵³ This passage

⁵⁰ Slaveski, 7.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Anonymous, 2.

⁵³ Ibid., 6-7.

explicates the dialectal nature of bare and qualified life at the end of the war; the cave refers to the time before what Agamben describes as *polis* (an Aristotelian term, which shares its root with ‘politics’ and is used by Agamben as a metaphor for the city and civilised life) yet the wrought iron, rubber seals, and air raid itself all highlight technologies of war. The shelter is also a ‘mass grave’; the citizens are metaphorically dead and out of time with the world. The cave metaphor also serves as a reference to Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave*. Like Plato’s shackled prisoners, the writer and her neighbours are in a world of shadows, uncertain of their reality, forced to confront the propaganda of the Nazi puppeteers.

In her entries written prior to the Russian occupation, the most primal instincts for sustenance are the journalist’s quotidian focus. There are many other descriptions of life in Berlin in the narrator’s journals which can be understood through Agamben’s concept of *zōē*. ‘Old people are eating grass like animals’,⁵⁴ she writes, suggesting that in order to survive, her neighbours have reverted to ‘herd instinct, a mechanism for preservation of the species’.⁵⁵ Though conditions in Berlin were severely poor for those who remained behind (mostly women, children, and the elderly) a plan for evacuation was not presented. Beevor reports that ‘it was typical of the crazed irresponsibility of the Nazi regime at this time that Hitler rejected any idea of evacuating them while there was still opportunity’.⁵⁶ Hitler was also likely aware of Russian soldiers’ proclivity toward rape. Beevor writes that ‘[i]n the autumn of 1944, Soviet troops had made their first foray into East Prussia,’ and ‘Goebbels had rushed camera teams forward to film the corpses of women and girls who had been raped and murdered by drunken Red Army soldiers’.⁵⁷ Posters were made to warn the German women of the possibility of the attacks but, other than these warnings, few other preventative measures were offered (nor could be) by the failing German army. Only plans for collateral damage were made. Grossman explains:

By the beginning of 1945, the encroaching Red Army had advanced to such a point that the possibility of mass ‘violations’ of German women by Soviet troops was acknowledged and indeed widely publicized. Since rapes were already supposedly resulting in many pregnancies, the Ministry of Interior even suggested the establishment ‘in large cities [of] special wards for the care of such women’.⁵⁸

The women in the narrator’s neighbourhood are well aware of the impending threat and speak in hushed whispers about expected rapes. An East Prussian refugee ‘who otherwise never says a word, starts yelling in her dialect’ in the neighbourhood bomb shelter in order to warn the women. ‘Broken sometimes—she can’t find the right word,’ writes the narrator. ‘She flails her arms and screams, “You’ll find out all right”’.⁵⁹

Once the Russians arrive on 27 April, the vast difference between the bare life as experienced by men and women becomes explicit. This entry is designated by the narrator as: ‘day of catastrophe—wild turmoil’.⁶⁰ This is when the systematic rape of the German women by Russian men begins—and here is where the bare life that women in Berlin must live through becomes much more sinister than that of their male counterparts.⁶¹ Though Giorgio Agamben describes bare life in non-gender specific, universal terms, the horrors that the women and men face in Berlin are starkly

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁶ Beevor, xiv.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, xiv.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁹ Anonymous, 30.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶¹ It is certainly possible that German men were also raped by Russian soldiers, though if so, it would be at a substantially smaller occurrence than the case of women who were raped as many men were still stationed in the war.

different from each other. Beevor writes that ‘certainly, the rapes committed in 1945—against old women, young women, even early pubescent girls—were acts of violence, an expression of revenge and hatred’.⁶² The rapes express the hatred of German people in general; the women’s bodies are the site for such acts of revenge. Diken and Laustsen write:

War rape is perhaps the clearest example of an asymmetric strategy. In war rape, the enemy soldier attacks a civilian (not a combatant), a woman (not another male soldier), and only indirectly with the aim of holding or taking a territory. The prime aim of war rape is to inflict trauma and thus to destroy family ties and group solidarity within the enemy camp.⁶³

Despite the fact that the rapes are committed as acts of revenge against German woman and men, the strategy’s asymmetry between the two sexes demonstrates that the regression to bare life offers starkly different consequences for each.

Many of the attacks occurred in public, but the first time the narrator is raped is by surprise, in the basement of her apartment building. ‘Both men were lying in wait’, she writes. ‘They’re both tearing away at me; instantly I’m on the floor ... One man stands there keeping watching, while the other tears my underclothes, forcing his way’.⁶⁴ Although the narrator attempts to defend herself, ‘It’s no use’.⁶⁵ As the second soldier rapes the narrator, the door opens. ‘Two, three Russians come in, the last a woman in uniform. And they laugh. The second man jumps up, having been disrupted in the act. They both go out with the other three, leaving me lying there’.⁶⁶ This passage is written in the present tense as though the narrator’s trauma is ongoing, rather than an event in the past.

The horror of the physical brutality of the first rape is compounded by the fact that the narrator’s neighbours are too powerless and too paralysed to assist her. She writes: ‘I start yelling. “You pigs! Here they rape me twice in a row and you shut the door and leave me lying like a piece of dirt!” And I turn to leave’.⁶⁷ The neighbours’ paralysis suggests a basic, primal instinct for self-preservation, indicative of life in the realm of *zōē*. Opposing the Russians would likely result in punishment, brutality and even their own deaths.

Despite the fact that the educated narrator is fortunate enough to know a small amount of the Russian language from her work as journalist, her intellect is inadequate to protect her from the rapists. The sophisticated words of *bios* cannot shield her from the violence of the Neanderthal rapist with a back as ‘broad as a bear’ and with ‘lumberjack paws’.⁶⁸ To survive, the narrator is forced to meet the rapists on their animalistic field of *zōē*. ‘I have to find a single wolf to keep away the pack’, she writes. ‘An officer, as high-ranking as possible, a commandant, a general, whatever I can manage’.⁶⁹ The writer pursues a situation in which she will become the ‘taboo’ of the ‘great big bull of man’ called Anatol.⁷⁰ That is, Anatol claims her as his own, and his status ‘protects’ her from being raped by lower-ranking soldiers. Though she must endure being raped by Anatol, she suggests that being raped by him alone is less traumatic than enduring multiple rapes from multiple aggressors. Some feminist theorists suggest that such an arrangement (which ultimately includes pregnancy) is actually the primary relationship that structures all patriarchy and allows it to function as it does. Adrienne Rich writes in *Of Woman Born* that ‘Susan Brownmiller suggests that enforced, indentured motherhood may be originally the price paid by women to the men who became their ‘protectors’

⁶² Beevor, xix.

⁶³ Diken and Laustsen, 111.

⁶⁴ Anonymous, 54.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

(and owners) against the casual violence of other men'.⁷¹ The narrator's horrific accounts are but one testimony of how a return to *zōé* has far different consequences for men than women, proof that considerations of the bare life warrant the inclusion of gender within their scope.

Is Rape Theoretically Different from other Violent Crimes?

The final portion of this article confronts an argument that Michel Foucault proposed regarding rape in the late 1970s which argues that rape should not be punished as a sex crime. This will be considered in relation to the evidence presented in *A Woman in Berlin*. According to theorist Holly Henderson, Foucault argued that 'the crime of rape should be punished as a form of physical violence and nothing but' in a 1977 roundtable discussion.⁷² Foucault 'argued for the decriminalization of rape as a sexual crime',⁷³ when he suggested:

One can always produce the theoretical discourse that amounts to saying: in any case, sexuality can in no circumstances be the object of punishment. And when one punishes rape one should be punishing physical violence and nothing but that. And to say that it is nothing more than an act of aggression: that there is no difference, in principle, between sticking one's fist into someone's face or one's penis into their sex ... There are problems [if we are to say that rape is more serious than a punch in the face], because what we're saying amounts to this: sexuality as such, in the body, has a preponderant place, the sexual organ isn't like a hand, hair, or a nose.⁷⁴

The evidence presented in the anonymous diary entries, however, demonstrate the obvious problems with this line of reasoning. While a 'fist' or a 'penis' can indeed inflict violence upon the other, it is only the latter that can lead to the pregnancy of the victim as well as the transmission of venereal diseases. Furthermore, whether a pregnant rape victim aborts the pregnancy or carries it full term, her body will be made to endure additional medical intervention and subsequent trauma.

Robin Schott writes that forced war rape:

[transforms] birth into a weapon of death. This is so for women who are raped, who lose a sense of being at home in their own bodies and of having a future, and it is so for the children born of forced maternity, who may suffer expulsion from the mother's community.⁷⁵

Schott also contends, 'war rape can be understood not only as a tool for the unmaking of the social and cultural world, but also a tool for the unmaking of the political world'.⁷⁶

Thoughts regarding this spectrum of secondary consequences comprises the latter half of the journalist's entries. As the rapes begin to subside in Berlin, the possibility of pregnancy is in most German women's thoughts, prolonging the moment of the rape(s) into an ongoing affective state. Working at her assigned task at the Soviet work camp, the narrator hears the women give voice to such concerns:

'They say every second woman is pregnant', claims one voice.

⁷¹ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 14.

⁷² Henderson, 225.

⁷³ Foucault, as quoted in *Ibid.*, 225.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Robin May Schott, 'War Rape, Natality and Genocide', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 13, no. 1/2 (2011): 14.

⁷⁶ Robin May Schott, 'War Rape and the Political Concept of Evil', in *Evil, Political Violence and Forgiveness: Essays in Honor of Claudia Card*, eds, Andrea Veltman and Kathryn J. Norlock (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 86.

To which another voice, a shrill one, replies, 'Even if that's true—surely you could go to anyone to have it taken care of.'

'I heard that Stalin decreed any woman with a Russian child gets counted as group number I', says a third voice.

General laughter. 'Does that mean for group number I you would...?'

'Absolutely not—I'd sooner do something to myself.'⁷⁷

Even though it appears the women are able to engage in a communal catharsis to cope with the rapes and their consequences, trauma continues to manifest in their lives. Many of the victims, including the narrator, feel a sense of self-loathing after the rapes. She writes: 'I'm constantly repulsed by my own skin. I don't want to touch myself, can barely look at my body.'⁷⁸ This sense of shame is in accordance with Diken and Laustsen who write that:

The rape victim often perceives herself as an abject, as a 'dirty,' morally inferior person. The penetration inflicts on her body and herself a mark, a stigma, which cannot be effaced. But abjection has a communal aspect as well: the victim is excluded by neighbours and by family members. Hence the rape victim suffers twice: first by being raped and second by being condemned by a patriarchal community ... In the case of forced pregnancy the child might be seen by some, if not most, women as an abject: an alien and disgusting object. The abject, in this case, is neither fully inside (the child is never hers), nor fully outside (she feels polluted by it).⁷⁹

Though the physical consequences are borne by the women alone, other consequences are felt by all of Berlin. The public dimension of the rapes has been described previously, as a method of emasculating German men. The narrator notes the manner in which the rapes of women are used to torture both woman and man. She writes:

The baker comes stumbling toward me down the hall, white as his flour holding out his hands. 'They have my wife...' His voice breaks. For a second I feel I'm acting in a play. A middle class baker can't possibly move like that, can't speak with such emotion, put so much feeling into his voice, bare his soul that way, his heart so torn. I've never seen anyone but great actors do that.⁸⁰

The baker is at a loss for words and powerless to prevent the attack. The public rape of his wife, as Diken and Laustsen suggest: 'aims to dissolve the social structure of the attacked group', and 'it taints its ethnic stock'.⁸¹ The rape of the civilian woman in Berlin, as Grossmann states, is not a 'universal story of women being raped by men', but 'signaled the defeat of Nazi Germany'.⁸² The narrator's journals support Grossmann's claim; Anonymous writes that 'the myth of "Man" has crumbled ... among the many defeats at the end of this war is the defeat of the male sex'.⁸³

A later account of a meeting with an old friend further demonstrates how the rapes have dissolved the social structure of German society. She writes: 'Ilse and I hastily exchange the first sentences: "How many times were you raped, Ilse?" "Four, and you?" "No idea, I had to work my

⁷⁷ Anonymous, 195.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁷⁹ Diken and Laustsen, 113.

⁸⁰ Anonymous, 51-2.

⁸¹ Diken and Laustsen, 117.

⁸² Grossman, 48.

⁸³ Anonymous, 43.

way up the ranks from supply train to major.”⁸⁴ This blunt exchange appears to be more than Ilse’s husband can handle; he leaves amidst the discussion.

As he left, Ilse grimaced. ‘Yes, well, he can’t really bear to hear about that.’ Her husband is tormenting himself with reproach for staying in the basement and not doing a thing while the Ivans took their pleasure with his wife. During the first rape, down in the basement, he was even within hearing range. It must have been a strange feeling for him.⁸⁵

The narrator herself undergoes the pain of such an encounter with her own partner, Gerd. Much of the discourse in the journal is framed by her thoughts of Gerd, who is stationed in the German army—she doubts he will return, yet she not only writes about him, she writes for him: ‘Gerd needs to read this if he comes back.’⁸⁶ Against all odds, Gerd returns on Saturday, 16 June 1945. ‘Suntanned,’ and in ‘civilian dress,’⁸⁷ yet the narrator’s happiness is short-lived. At first, she is ‘feverish with joy,’ but as soon as the narrator’s friend and roommate makes a coarse joke about the rapes, Gerd is ‘taken aback’ and soon the two are tip-toeing ‘around each other and were sparing with any words of affection.’⁸⁸ It is also difficult for the narrator to engage in sexual activity with Gerd. ‘In the night I found myself as cold as ice in Gerd’s arms and was glad when he left off,’ she writes. ‘For him I’ve been spoiled once and for all.’⁸⁹

Reading through the latter entries, one gets the feeling that a fundamental break has occurred between the narrator and Gerd. ‘If I was in a good mood and told stories about our experiences over the past few weeks, then he got really angry,’ she writes. ‘Gerd: “You’ve all turned into a bunch of shameless bitches, every one of you in the building. Don’t you realize?” He grimaced in disgust. “It’s horrible being around you. You’ve lost all sense of measure.”’⁹⁰ Gerd is disgusted by the coarse jokes and bawdy language, yet the narrator attempts to grant him access to the experience of the rapes and their horror:

I gave Gerd my diaries. (There are three notebooks full.) He sat down with them for a while and then returned them to me, saying he couldn’t find his way through my scribbling and the notes stuck inside with all the shorthand and abbreviations.

‘For example, what’s that supposed to mean?’ he asked, pointing to ‘Schdg.’

I had to laugh: ‘Schändung’, of course—rape. He looked at me as if I were out of mind but said nothing more.⁹¹

Soon after this exchange, Gerd leaves the narrator’s apartment for the foreseeable future. ‘I don’t know if he is coming back at all,’ writes the narrator. ‘It’s bad, but I feel relieved.’⁹² The rift between Gerd and the narrator is emblematic of the distance between many of the German women and men after the rapes. Sander writes that most of the women she interviewed ‘reported difficulties with their fiancés or husbands, or with their fathers as well’, and that overall, the women also felt ‘discrimination by husbands and family members’.⁹³ This discrimination is not simply contingent

⁸⁴ Anonymous., 204.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 204.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 257.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 258.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 257-8.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 259.

⁹¹ Ibid., 260.

⁹² Ibid., 260.

⁹³ Sander, 18, 23.

upon viewing the rape victim as 'abject', or polluted, as suggested earlier, but is also tied to the idea that patriarchy, or the world of man, as the narrator writes, has failed to keep the women safe, and that the German 'fatherland' is ultimately responsible for the very attacks that emasculate its men.

In addition to the breakdown of the family units in Berlin, as described above, about fifty per cent of the German women who survived the rapes ultimately suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) according to Siobhán Dowling.⁹⁴ Relying on Dr Phillip Kuwert's research, Dowling writes that 'the post-traumatic stress can manifest itself in nightmares or flashbacks, where the woman feels she is once again experiencing the attack'. Kuwert explains that the victim 'can smell the alcohol on the breath of the rapist and it doesn't feel as if it is happening sixty years ago, but now'. Kuwert finds that many of the victims can develop other health problems such as depression and anxiety. Grossman also reports that

German women, especially in the East and among refugees from the East in the West, were left with memories that had not been worked through, that had no easy access to public space even as they were, whether directly or indirectly, constantly invoked or alluded to. There were no rituals of guilt and expiation as in commemorations of persecutions of Jews and the Holocaust, no structures of compensation and memory as in veterans' organizations and benefits ... The memories, if suppressed, remained raw and distorted.⁹⁵

Conclusion

The publication history of *A Woman in Berlin*, as well as the intense scrutiny and criticism that it has received, demonstrates how one testimony of the rapes was not suppressed. Despite attempts to disclaim its veracity, *A Woman in Berlin* remains a lasting marker of how the crime of rape necessitates a definition and theorisation of bio-control which is inclusive of considerations of gender. I have demonstrated that bio-power has explicit connections to one's sex and that as such, rape is a mode of control and power that warrants further investigation. War rape is still being used as a means of bio-power and control in various parts of the world. As Nazila Isgandarova writes: 'rape was and continues to be one of the severe forms of violence against women in war'.⁹⁶ If, however, such violent acts against women are considered no different from 'a punch in the face', war rape will doubtless continue to be used as a method of bio-control and power. As feminists and historians continue to reveal and publicise the history of such events, and theorise the wide range of repercussions suffered by both women and men, we will not only aid victims in processing their experiences, but also introduce these issues into a public discourse about human rights violations and war crimes that may ultimately contribute to establishing more protective measures for potential victims of such attacks.

⁹⁴ Siobhán Dowling, 'New German Study Looks at Rape Trauma 60 Years On', *Spiegel Online International*. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,585779,00.html>.

⁹⁵ Grossmann, 62.

⁹⁶ Nazila Isgandarova, 'Rape As a Tool Against Women in War: The Role of Spiritual Caregivers to Support the Survivors of an Ethnic Violence', *Cross Currents*, (2013): 174.