

Project Proposal

Wartime Sexuality: State Policies and Social Practices in Germany and Britain (1939-45)

Theme, scope and rationale

This cross-cultural, trans-nation project seeks to weave a narrative of sexual normalcy and deviance in wartime popular behaviour patterns. State policies, propaganda and opinion generating media will be juxtaposed with acts of ordinary men and women, placed in extraordinary circumstances of war, to examine how high politics and propaganda were received, interpreted, appropriated or subverted by the 'many'. It is a comparative study of Germany and Britain as nations and empires at war with broader implications for global contemporary history.

The narrative would offer a blend of high and low politics; discourses of policy makers, rulers and the intelligentsia on one hand and feminists and post-colonial theorists on the other to study counter currents emerging from the everyday culture of war. In doing so the study would explore histories of sexuality, gender and race relations, citizenship and patriotism, morality and propriety, all of which were inextricable intertwined. The appeal of such a work would be universal because of its relevance for the erstwhile empires and for the colonies or conquered territories alike. Its readership will be vast and the approach global.

My window to the lives of ordinary people would be accounts of ordinary women who ran into trouble with state and society due to their acts of racial, sexual or moral deviance. Through the interaction of these women with the 'alien' men deployed by the two empires as labours, sailors, prisoners or soldiers, the project would delineate aspects of observing, disciplining and ordering wartime societies. The 'race traitors' in Germany and 'good time girls'

in Britain would be crucial tropes of femininity to understand wartime anxieties of nation-empires pertaining to the morale of their national communities. In following their destinies, I hope to explore a sexual-moral universe dotted with welfare and surveillance policies, and their impact on gender roles, which became crucial as the war became ‘total war’ obliterating differences between frontline and home front¹.

Why a cross-cultural, trans-national approach

The idea behind writing a cross-cultural, trans-national history of war is to break free from the traditional nationalist mould within which war studies have been cast until recently. The usual nationalist narrative of the two nation-empires can briefly be summed up as follows: the British entered the war on a moral high. They were fighting a racist dictatorship in order to create conditions for a future democratic order while Germany was fighting to secure more living space for the ‘Aryan race’, occupying territories in the east, enslaving masses of human populations and killing several others on racial grounds. WWII, so to say, was a fight between good and evil.

However, upon scratching the surface, one notices a deep anxiety in the British public sphere related to the fear of ‘aliens’-mainly Black GIs, colonial soldiers and sailors-and the resulting miscegenation on the home front. Contemporary observations and records reflect a preoccupation with this theme as ‘the empire came home’ in Britain. Total war, which was projected as people’s war, in short, was part and parcel of the democratic order just as it was

¹ As Dagmar Herzog points out it is the field of women’s and gender history, which in recent years has provided a new impetus to military history and expanded the field to incorporate social history in its agenda. Examining critically, she argues, the convulsive and transformative impacts of wars on gender relations, as well as the often tenacious hold of pre-war gender arrangements and the post-war attempts to restore them, offer an exceptionally valuable opportunity to theorise the complex interplay of continuity and change in women’s lives. See Dagmar Herzog (ed.), *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe’s Twentieth Century*, (Palgrave, 2009), p.1.

of the totalitarian dictatorship. It was a time of heightened patriotism and a time to revise notions of citizenship.

Nations called upon their citizens to demonstrate their patriotism and loyalty to the fatherland 'for the duration', placing on the back burner the nineteenth century liberal concerns of civil and human rights. All counter- and sub narratives got submerged in this grand national narrative and all forms of deviance came to be treated as unpatriotic. Recent studies, including gender studies, that do go beyond the political-diplomatic history of nations and deal with wartime societies still remain hesitant to go beyond the nationalist framework, especially when it comes to WWII. The dividing line is sharp and uncompromising: a 'progressive people's democracy' fought a 'tyrannical racist dictatorship'. In this context much of history writing has been faithful to the Rankian school.

However, beneath the surface, both the 'people's democracy' and the racist dictatorship aimed to forge a unity of their citizens and to maintain a clear distance from non-natives serving in their country. Both resolved, howsoever differently, to protect their womenfolk from alien soldiers, prisoners, slave labour and civilians. My project aims to study the underbelly of unified nations and searches for forms of deviance and resulting social stigmatisation, moral indictment, legal and criminal persecution of those who did not fit in and thus highlight discordant voices and actions from everyday life. The exploration of wartime sexuality offers a site in the 'imagined national community', in which many transgressions occurred ranging from consensual to coerced sex with the aliens irrespective of ideology, propaganda, prejudice and faith.

Methodological issues and analytical tools

What bearing does this have on our understanding of nations and empires in the twentieth century? The answer would be a rewriting of history of nations and

empires using sexuality, gender and race as central tools of analysis and I shall take them up one by one in the following section.

Scholars suggest that sexual morality has been crucial to delineating the boundaries of the nation. George Mosse famously argued that the control of sexual desire, deeply constitutive of bourgeois notions of respectability, was integral to developing nations². More recently Ann Stoler contended, “Discourses of sexuality do more than define the distinctions of the bourgeois self; in identifying marginal members of the body politic, they have mapped the moral parameters of European nations. These deeply sedimented discourses on sexual morality could redraw the ‘interior frontiers’ of national communities, frontiers that were secured through-and sometimes in collision with-the boundaries of race”.³ A comparative approach enables us to study how these sedimented Europe-wide discourses on race and sexuality were generated afresh during wartime to manage female sexuality and combat the challenge posed by the ‘alien’. The public sphere was charged with the ‘perils of race mixing’ in the presence of Asians and Black American GIs in Britain, slaves and other ethnically ‘inferior’ POWs in Germany. A comparative approach that brings centre stage the colonisers’/occupiers’ sexual experiences, experiments and intrusions into the private spaces of the colonised/captured or the sexual encounters of ‘native’ women with alien men ‘when the empire came home’ would render new ways of conceptualising western sexuality⁴.

² George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison, 1985).

³ Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Duke University Press, 1995).

⁴ Scholars increasingly emphasise on the interconnections between mother country and colony in shaping norm and deviance in European societies, especially in the sexual sphere. See Ronald Hyam *Sexuality and Empire: The British Experience* (Manchester University Press, 1990) for the path breaking argument that colonies provided Englishmen a space for sexual liberation who experimented with homosexuality and other forms of deviance, which may not have been permissible in their mother country where Victorian prudery and hypocrisy were the order of the day. Malek Alloula in *Colonial Harem* (University of Minnesota Press, 1986) argues that pornographic postcards of Algerian women of the *Harem* made the most private space of the natives widely

At the level of gender politics the project would study production and consumption of maternal and welfare state ideologies. The construction of gender identities ‘for the duration’⁵ was a thorny issue that nations at war had to resolve. They had to very carefully work out propaganda strategies and policies regarding gender-relations, blending welfare policies with methods of surveillance and disciplining of the female lot. A negative public discourse on war wives was consciously constructed and publicised by the twentieth century states and their agencies to exert moral pressure on war wives, as also to make families and communities more watchful towards women’s activities. Soldiers were regularly supplied with information about their wives going astray and indulging in sexual promiscuity.

State’s ideology of maternalism faced a crisis across national and political spectrums in the inter war period. A sharp fall in the birth rate, large-scale loss of population in WWI, eugenic concerns about the quality of race and a pro-natal stance were features of dictatorships and democracies alike during the war years. Policy makers sought to promote national health and welfare services. Thus, healthy motherhood, reproduction in the confines of the family, social support and incentives to prolific mothers were goals that all European

accessible, which he considered the most invasive aspect of imperialism. Ross Forman, Race and Empire in H. G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook, *The Modern History of Sexuality* (Palgrave, 2006) pp. 109-132; Mrinalini Sinha in *Colonial Masculinity: the ‘Manly’ Englishman and the ‘Effeminate’ Bengali in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester University Press, 1995) and Angela Woollacott, *Gender and Empire* (Palgrave, 2006) similarly emphasize on the need to bring centre stage the dynamics of race, class and gender in the colonies if we have to fully grasp the meaning of western sexuality.

⁵ I borrow this term from Leila Rupp who argues that everything unusual that happened during the war years from revolutionary changes in women’s work profiles and their relative autonomy at home and in the workplace failed to bring about any long term real changes in women’s lives as the changes were accompanied by a heavy baggage of propaganda perpetuating cultural notions about female inferiority and lesser value in relation to men’s work. See Leila Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American propaganda, 1939-45*, (Princeton University Press, 1978). Similarly a double helix model has been evoked to explain the restoration of normality in gender behaviour in post-war years. See M.R. Higonnet and P.L. Higonnet, *The Double Helix* in Higonnet and Higonnet, *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, (Yale University Press, 1987).

governments pursued as an integral part of their welfare policies⁶. As far as popular practices are concerned, a clear disjunction could be seen between sex for reproduction and sex for its own sake all across Europe. While women were willing beneficiaries of welfare policies they may not have been so enthusiastic to meet state's expectation in the sphere of reproduction. The project would look at this gap through a feminist lens. At the same time it would probe why the granting of maternal benefits exclusively to the desired 'racial stock' at the cost of 'Others' in Germany left even feminists unperturbed.

While racial-eugenic politics were at the core of Nazi State, did the fault line of race totally disappear in democratic Britain altogether? If not, how was the 'self' constructed by the 'imperial masters'? How far were the wartime governments able to insulate their cohesive national communities from social outsiders? How far did their womenfolk go by the state's prescriptions and proscriptions? And if they did not, what were the forms of defiance and deviance? What were the class, ethnic and racial dimensions of it? How did the two states handle this 'crisis'? The theoretical questions that this study would raise are: What bearing did this have on notions of citizenship, patriotism, morality, respectability, and sexual freedom? The question of morality becomes

⁶ Especially instructive in a comparative context are: Robert Moeller, The State of Women's Welfare in European Welfare States in *Social History*, (Vol. 19, No. 3, 1994), pp. 385-393; Lynn Y. Weiner, Maternalism as a Paradigm, and Ann Taylor Allen, Maternalism in German Feminist Movements, in *Journal of Women's Studies*, (Vol. 5 No. 2, 1993), pp. 98-103. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, Womanly Duties: Maternal Politics and the Origins of State in France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States, 1880-1920, in Fiona Montgomery and Christine Colette's, *The European Women's History*, (London, 2002), is perhaps the only comparative account so far. Unfortunately, it does not even touch in WWII. In the national context, cf. Johannes Vossen, *Gesundheitsämter im Nationalsozialismus. Offene Gesundheitsfürsorge und Rassenhygiene in Westfalen zwischen Kaiserreich und Bundesrepublik 1900-1950*, (Essen, 2001); Petra von der Osten, *Jugend- und Gefährdeten-fürsorge im Sozialstaat* (Schöningh, 2002); Hans-Uwe Otto und Heinz Sünker (eds.), *Politische Formierung und Soziale Erziehung im National-Sozialismus* (Suhrkamp, 1991); Winfried Süß, *Der "Volkskörper" im Krieg: Gesundheitspolitik, Gesundheitsverhältnisse und Krankenmord im Nationalsozialistischen Deutschland 1939-1945*, (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003); Susan Pederson, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the State*, (Cambridge, 1993); Geoffrey Finlayson, *Citizens, State and Social Welfare in Britain*, (OUP, 1994).

quite crucial here as the Nazis created new codes for liberating sexual conduct to wipe out any trace of illegitimacy among the racially pure while pushing out genocidal violence from the realm of morality altogether.⁷

The methodology will be synthetic. It will involve a critical engagement with available literature and approaches and incorporate fresh primary source material within a comparative framework. I hope this will offer new theoretical insights into sexuality, gender and race relations, citizenship and morality. Most interesting for me would be a comparison of contemporary documentation e.g. the Mass Observation Archives and media reports in the British case and the dossiers of private individuals persecuted by the Gestapo and the judiciary, the *Lebensborn* clients, *SD* reports and press reports in the German case to elucidate patterns of normalcy and deviance, acceptability and condemnation, respectability and disrepute.

While studying the Mass Observation records, I was struck by the similarity of observations made by German and British observers on normal and deviant behaviour patterns in everyday life, even though their treatment by the state may have varied in each case. While the racial and sexist bias can be quite anticipated in the judiciary and *SD* reports⁸ or in the national socialist media, it is interesting to note how the ‘progressive’, ‘democratic’, middle class Mass Observers in Britain did not shy away from expressing anti-Semitism, class snobbery and cultural superiority. Many among the Mass Observers were middle class women whose comments betrayed condescension towards their respondents from lesser backgrounds. It would be worthwhile to undertake a

⁷ My upcoming article in the *JCH*, Maternalism, Race, Class and Citizenship: Aspects of Illegitimate Motherhood in Nazi Germany’ reflects on some of these issues.

⁸ Heinz Boberach, *Meldungen aus dem Reich 1938 - 1945 : die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS* (Herrsching, 1985)

comparison of British and German surveillance systems, observation patterns and media reports. The crucial issues that would engage me are: How were these everyday patterns of sexual behaviour visualised, observed, constructed and narrated by these overwhelmingly middle class ‘observers’? What kind of language was used to formulate questions and communicate judgements? What were the underlying assumptions that foreshadowed their choices and omissions while observing ‘the masses’ at work and play, in their socialisation, shopping and going about their everyday mundane businesses?

The diverse nature of source material under consideration, I hope, will render a patchwork of wartime realities, which might defy easy classification, but be closer to reality. While the propaganda material, press and popular media were meant to generate unproblematic and polarised images of femininity and masculinity from above, criminal and judicial investigations, letters, diaries, interviews and observations render flesh and blood stories, personal responses and individual experiences, which vary from the state sponsored picture of cohesion. Ambivalences, subversions, and indeed counter-currents found in these sources make a mess of the propaganda and state policies and offer a rich and diversified picture of wartime reality.

Current state of research

No matter how common the anxieties may have been across national frontiers regarding female sexual morality and race mixing at the home front, they have rarely been subjected to a cross-national examination so far,⁹ even though the problem of miscegenation is not new in the context of war and empire of

⁹ Two of the rare anthologies that cut across national boundaries are M. R. Higonnet and P. L. Higonnet (eds.), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, (Yale University Press, 1987) and Dagmar Herzog (ed.), *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century* (Palgrave, 2009). The latter has recently compiled results of a conference aimed to get scholars and views from a cross national perspective on coerced and desired sexual relation in wartimes. It however has no essay on Britain. No authored comparative accounts on the theme exist so far. Most feminist writings on gender, war and sexuality have confined themselves to a national context.

individual European nations.¹⁰ Both in Germany and Britain this subfield of enquiry opened in the 1990s, and has led to a spate of publications. In the German case forbidden relations with the POWs and forced foreign workers was indeed considered a mass crime¹¹. In the British context however, it has attracted far less attention¹². Clearly, Germany's genocidal policies have had their share in the surfeit of publications. A comparison of the two becomes even more interesting when the subject-object positions are reversed in a bottom-up approach.

Time schedule for the proposed project:

I have been working on this project since 2003, and have utilised most of my summer vacations since then for searching relevant material in various archives in Germany and the UK. I have gathered a rich collection of Special Court and Gestapo dossiers from various archives in Germany. Most of this material deals

¹⁰ The literature on 'race relation' in British history is vast. Among others see: R. Benedict, *Race and Racism* (London, 1943); P. Mason, *Prospero's Magic: Some Thoughts on Class and Race* (Oxford, 1962); R. Ross, (ed.) *Racism and Colonialism* (Leiden, 1982); Ronald Hyam, *Sexuality and Empire; the British Experience* (Manchester University Press, 1990).

¹¹ For Germany cf. Birthe Kundrus, "Die Unmoral deutscher Soldatenfrauen". Diskurs, Alltagsverhalten und Ahndungspraxis 1939-1945, in Kirsten Heinsohn, Barbara Vogel, Ulrike Weckel (eds.), *Zwischen Karriere und Verfolgung*, (Frankfurt, 1997) pp. 96-110; Jill Stephenson, "Triangle: Foreign workers, German Civilians, and the Nazi Regime: War and Society in Württemberg, 1939-45," in *German Studies Review*, (Vol. 15, 1992), pp. 339-58; Antje Zühl, Zum Verhältnis der deutschen Landbevölkerung gegenüber Zwangarbeitern und Kriegsgefangenen, in Werner Röhr, Dietrich Eichholtz, Gerhart Hass und Wolfgang Wippermann (eds.), *Faschismus, Rassismus, Kontroversen um Ideologie und Opfer*, (Berlin, 1992), pp. 342-52; Birthe Kundrus, Forbidden Company: Romantic Relationships between Germans and Foreigners, in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, (Vol. II, 1/2, 2002) pp. 201-222; Andreas Heusler, "Straftatbestand Liebe: Verbotene Kontakte zwischen Münchenrinnen und ausländischen Kriegsgefangenen," in Sybille Kraft, (ed.), *Münchener Frauen in Krieg und Frieden 1900-1950* (Munich, 1995), pp. 324-41, Thomas Kühne und Benjamin Ziehm, *Was ist Militärgeschichte* (Paderborn, 2000). Karen Hagemann and Stephanie Schüler-Schpringorum (eds.), *Home/Front: The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth Century Germany* (Oxford, 2002); Eric Johnson, *Nazi Terror* (Basic Books, 1999) p. 359 among various others.

¹² Some of the works dealing with the British case David Reynolds, *Rich Relations; The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-45* (New York, 1995); Juliet Gardiner, 'Over Here', : *The GIs in Wartime Britain* (London, 1992); Graham Smith, *When Jim Crow met John Bull: Black American Soldiers in World War II Britain* (New York, 1988), Ben Bousquet and Colin Douglas, *West Indian Women at War: British Racism in World War II* (London, 1991); Sonya Rose, *Which People's War: National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-45*, (OUP, 2004), Sonya Rose, *Temperate Heroes: Concept of Masculinity in the Second World War Britain*; Clare Midgley, *Ethnicity, Race and Empire in June Purvis* (ed.), *Women's History: Britain 1850-1945*, (University of Portsmouth, 1995) pp. 247-276;

with women involved in and persecuted for forbidden relations with ‘aliens’. In addition, I have a collection of *Lebensborn*’s dossiers from the International Tracing Services, Bad Arolsen, which offers a clear contrast to the former cases. While racial offenders were imprisoned for extra-martial relations and pregnancies, their *Lebensborn* counterparts were provided special care and a safe refuge to hide their extra-marital pregnancies from the public view.

I would like to complement this material with relevant media reports to study prevailing public and official discourses on this issue. In Germany, this might involve visits to the *Staatsbibliothek Berlin*’s newspaper section, which houses wartime issues of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, *der Angriff*, *Das Reich*, *Der Stürmer* and the *Schwarze Korps* and the digital copies of *Kladderadatsch* at Heidelberg.

In the UK I have already studied the holdings of ‘Mass Observation’ housed in the Sussex University. The ‘Mass Observation’ collected opinions of the ordinary people through interviews for their Directives, which were sent to the National Panel to document popular opinions on a range of themes. Additionally there are wartime diaries, File Reports, and Topic Collections. I have already collected several relevant File Reports, Directives and Topic Collections on a range on themes such as patriotism, moral correctness, good citizenship, sexual behaviour including marriage, divorce, sex outside marriage and prostitution. I would like to complement this with media reporting especially in newspapers such as *Daily Herald*, *Daily Mirror*, *New Chronicle* and *Picture Post*. I hope to carry out some of this work during my research visit planned for April-May 2012 as an IMESS fellow at University College, London.

Because of the comparative nature of my work, I plan to split my time between Germany and the UK, in case my Humboldt fellowship come through. I would like to apply for an eighteen-month-research grant starting July 2012. I

would spend the first six months visiting various libraries and archives in Berlin. Alongside this I would like to gather eyewitness accounts of German women and POWs or foreign workers in question or their family members, who had to negotiate the return of these persecuted citizens. Testimonies of the children of women and men persecuted for illegal contacts would be especially valuable from the point of view of a generational response to the phenomenon. This is an area, which has remained largely untouched by research on this theme so far. I hope to gain new insights into the whole problematic through this ethnographic methodology. This, perhaps, would be the most time consuming exercise, but it is worth its while. The project assumes urgency because the eyewitnesses and victims may totally vanish in the next few years.

In the next four and a half to six months, I would gather the remaining archival material and concentrate mainly on the British part of the project. I would like to make Cambridge my host university because of the presence of Prof. Richard Evans who has acted as my informal mentor for more than a decade now. After my return to Berlin in the last six months I shall focus totally on finishing the project to be able to come up with a tangible product, namely my second monograph. I will be glad to contribute papers to international conferences and participate in the research colloquium of the institute in Berlin