

Chapter 2

A Woman in Berlin: Red Army's Assaults on the Women of Germany

Introduction

Germany and Russia engaged in brutal warfare during the Second World War. Germany laid a heavy attack on Russia, passing through and tearing into its territory, and engaged in a prolonged attempt of sacking of Leningrad with a dreary force which cost millions of Soviets their lives due to both physical attacks and starvation. However, after Hitler's erroneous attack on Moscow, his forces were pushed back from its occupied territory and later were followed back into Germany. Both the attacks from the opposing forces into the other's territory were inextricably linked with sexual assaults on women. The focus of this chapter is the sexual assault of German female civilians. It is suggested that somewhere around 125,000 women were raped in Berlin only during the siege and occupation (Naimark 201). There were absolutely no works published in the first five decades of the post-war period to talk about these sufferings and hardships in their entirety; the work that did try to come out in the "rubble literature" (written in Germany during the aftermath of WWII) was curbed under its own weight, and the focus remained mostly on the prisoners of war or the German struggle to make peace with its despicable heritage or the effort to build a new nation from ruins that were left in the wake of receding the Russian army (205). If the woman issue was ever discussed, the rapes remained unacknowledged. It can be speculated that the German silence was because of the double-edged sword of colossal shame at having suffered a defeat that was never expected in the bright oracular orb that Hitler had held

for the populace and for being seen as monsters who had persecuted the less perfect non-Aryans and fated them to gas chambers. In this glaring reality, it was difficult for the Germans to see themselves as victims, for the past had burdened them with a collective shame as a heinous, sordid, and cruel perpetrator. About the shameful German crimes, Thomas Mann had declared, “Humanity shudders in horror at Germany!” (qtd. in Brockmann 8). Germany’s victim status was not explored in the post-war period because of the global accusations and its collective guilt of having its own hand in the creation of misery and inhuman death. All this had metamorphosed into the fear of being “accused of revanchism” (205 Naimark). The other reason could be, more than these highly politicized ones, niched in the maintenance of a countenance of a flimsy veil of ‘honour’ gained by keeping the details of the testimonies of the rape victims hidden. “[I]t was all the same [...] as long as [the] husband didn’t find out”, expresses a raped woman in *A Woman in Berlin*; it becomes evident from the woman’s decision to hide her story, what was to become of post-war relations between men and women— men will never ask women about the rapes and women will forever hold on to the silence (Anonymous 257). German men behave and act in a similar fashion going by the multiple examples that are present in the diary. They often choose to leave the spaces of rape acts, and if the circumstances do not allow an escape, either from the actual act or the mere hearing of the trauma from a woman, they react in an affronted and wounded manner— a few of these examples are detailed and meditated upon in this chapter.

A Woman in Berlin is a diary written by a German journalist who was caught in the crossfire with many other women like herself during Germany’s occupation by the Soviet army. The diary recounts her survival tactics and interactions with other women over an eight-week period of suffering from sexual assaults, hunger, and the morbidity

of a life that functions on a day-by-day and step-after-step survival. In this chapter, an effort is made to analyse the different aspects of the narration and the form of the text in relation to the represented sexual violence in the work. The chapter is divided into sub-sections that deal with different themes of sexual violence.

Language and Semiotics: Gallows Humour, Laughter, and the Absurd

The first thing that one might notice about this war diary is its use of shrewd humour in the war-made ineluctable situations. The humour is not limited to the narrator; many other women around her use it too. Laughter is used as a method to cope with, adjust to, and survive war atrocities. The writer finds the pathetic absurdly amusing, and, therefore, her writing is not over-sentimental and at times quite unsentimental. This kind of stylistic depiction emerges more from the narrator's nature, which appears to be the result of her situation, than a conscious choice. Her reactions to the situations emerge solely from inside of her body and are displayed without any guilt in her writing.

The diary, by being the form it is, provides a space for free-play of the narrator's psyche. She is uninhibited and guilt-free. Hence, a manifestation of the "dark continent" that Helen Cixous encourages in the women through her essay "The Laugh of Medusa" is evident in the diarist's writing. According to Cixous, every woman even after the repeated moulding by patriarchs has managed to be unique; her writing is not limited to the artistic but invades every experience achieved through the body. Because of the patriarchal trends, every time a woman creates a space out of the ordinary, she is veritably turned into a monster and her compositions into a sickness. Cixous asks the

women to turn into composers who defy the phallogentric language and turn to “the true texts of women— female-sexed texts”. These, according to her, scare the men the most (Cixous 877). And this is what the writer of *A Woman in Berlin* does. Her writing is set in a world that offers her very limited control over her body (and whatever little control she gains, she acquires by herself), and, therefore, she chooses to free herself through her writing by creating a work that does not portray or reproduce the classical sacrificing angel. Her uncensored writing style and the dark humour in her work set her free.

According to Sigmund Freud, jokes, just like dreams and slips of the tongue, are a manifestation of our repressed desires. Based on our understanding of society, whatever is deemed to be unwanted or in excess is curbed. Humour for Freud is not based on resignation and defeat, rather it is seen as a form of rebellion (Myers 452). From the instances in *A Woman in Berlin*, this research tries to trace the courage that is mostly missed in gallows humour: a form of humour, where the amusement arises from the dark realistic material through the use of intellectual cynicism. The morbid jokes in the work became a survival tactic and a way to acquire agency through language in the inner-circle of women in the diarist’s world.

There is a convoluted seriousness garbed and disguised as a dark, twisty sense of humour in the work. These women in *A Woman in Berlin*, most of them, if not all, have found a way to humorously ignore or tackle the imminent trauma that lurks over them. Frau W.’s joke “[b]etter a Russki on top than a Yank overhead” is one such example (Anonymous 37). The risqué humour thus created does not redeem the reader or make the reading experience humorous. Therefore, it can be inferred that the joke is created for the women in the immediate vicinity or for oneself. The joke effectively expressed the double threats the women suffered: one of Russians’ rape sprees and the

other of Americans' carpet bombs. Frau W.'s comment also drives home the point that according to her (and by extension many women) death was a far worse state to have been in; rape can be survived, but death is final. Interestingly, she mocks both the Russians and the Americans (Yanks), for a sexual encounter whether forced or coerced will be only a slightly better situation to be in than the American bombardment which will cause immediate death. The cost-benefit analysis yields survival at any cost to be the only acceptable outcome of this dire situation. Unquestionably, the urgency to survive at any cost becomes a major theme in the work. The writer never mentions how the joke was received, but the atmosphere is described as of "nervous merriments" originating from all kinds of comments, stories and anecdotes being exchanged (37). Whether or not this joke caused amusement, it certainly did become axiomatic by the end of the diary. Ordinarily, jokes do not find an originator: the creators are "anonymous and the jokes are merely borrowed and retold by numerous others" (Oring 40). Frau W.'s joke is not original; it was picked up from somewhere. This joke makes a complete journey. The same words are uttered by a washerwoman whom the writer meets close to the end of her diary. It is an axiomatic joke which builds grit to survive and subverts the patriarchal belief of death over honour. If one believes Frau W to be the originator of this sardonic axiom, it must have an inherent pervasiveness for it to turn into a subscription. Even in reuse, such jokes cannot be renounced as insignificant utterances. Unlike the dreams, the jokes do not originate in the unconscious (that one has no control over) but are carefully constructed by drawing material from social conditions and are accompanied by a "condition of intelligibility" (Oring 38).

In the same setting of awkward mirth, another girl suffering from eczema is introduced. An engaged woman (as far as assumptions go), she tells others women that she has secured her wedding ring in her pants. Her naivety becomes an occasion for

further jokes and levity. A woman responds, “If they get that far then the ring won’t matter much anyway”, and the reply is met by general laughter (Anonymous 38). The ring, as an emotional artefact or a material one, is secured within the pants, the last barrier that also hides her privates. The hidden morbidity in the off-handed comment clearly reflects on the loss of the emotional, the material, and the physical agency. The men who will prey upon her would chance the ring for the bodily pleasure which they can derive from the unwilling woman. The woman believes that the only valuable object that she has is the ring, meanwhile, forgetting that her ‘body’ has been historically transformed into a piece of property where men can enact their desires.

The sexual traumas suffered by the victims (who wish to survive the outcome) of war are relatively different from those that are suffered by women during peace. During war, there is a preparation for the inevitable. The randomness of the attack happens only once during the first violation, and thereafter it is seen as a ‘norm’ much like domestic violence and marital rape where the woman would just ignore and acquiesce to the ordinary bouts. Survival becomes essential, and dwelling on the trauma only threatens to take away the mental faculties necessary for it. Conversely, these jokes and subtle double entendres become means of preparation.

The humour turns darker still. The lesbian who dresses up like a man is made the centre of crude jokes by the widow’s tenant, Herr Pauli. He once remarks that she needs, “reschooling [and] how it would be good deed to send some boys her way” — a euphemism for rape (146). The woman’s transgression is two-fold: she has saved herself from the rapes by her bold manly disguise and act, which in Herr Pauli’s prejudiced view is a territorial infringement, and the second is done through her sexual preference for women. Herr Pauli, a homophobic man, sees her as someone who has lost semblance of discipline and which is improper for a woman. According to him,

only a forced sexual encounter with a man, someone like Petka, can make her walk the line. However, his jokes on this woman are different from those of the women in the narrative; theirs are seated in their collective victimhood and Pauli's are centred on creating a victim and on establishing masculine aggression as a form of power. As a German man who has lost his agency by the presence of powerful, weapon-wielding Russian soldiers, he tries to get it back through his crude humour subjected on those who are hierarchically at a lower position than him. By directing his jokes at the sexual abuse of women, he becomes as much a participant as the Russians in the sexually violent acts. The writer mentions that the jokes on this particular woman are created by Pauli. Whereas, she simply acknowledges her condition and status to accept these quips and all "the raping with a sense of humour" (146). Julia Kristeva mentions in one of her letters in *The Feminine and the Sacred* about how men, in general, had deemed certain women as "strong" but never as "masculine: "When things get serious, the artifice that leads you to believe there is something of a man there disappears" (Clement and Kristeva 29). It would not matter that their transgression was helped by the elements and actors that are seen as masculine by society: "despite breastplate, sword, dagger, terrorist bombs", when the moment of judgement comes, every Joan of Arc will be burned in chemise and not the breeches (29). Similarly, even with her masculine attire, the lesbian is chosen to be punished through her sexual identity as a woman. For a woman, there is no other punishment more suitable than rape.

Language is a powerful tool, and the writer, through her knowledge of Russian (the tongue of usurpers) and its myriad uses, portrays the same quite effortlessly. Weaved in her story are many examples that show how a language is rejected, accepted and utilised in such settings. In the diary, certain phrases from the language of the vanquished emerge as a way to instil fear. The Russians had familiarised themselves

with only those words that were necessary for them, and this limited vocabulary throws light on the way they had prioritized their lives as soldiers on a foreign land.

The phrase ‘Woman, come!’ is uttered on the streets and women run to hide themselves “crawling under carts and piles of rubble, squatting to make themselves as small as possible” (Anonymous 248). Many war survivors have mentioned these commands as a preamble that would end in rape. In his well-researched historical fiction, *Winter of the World*, Ken Follet mentions that how in 1946 a new game called “Komm, Frau — Come, woman” emerged in Germany. It was a children’s enactment of what they saw the Russians do to the women in their household:

The boys would team up and target one of the girls [in a game of chase]. When they caught her, they would shout: ‘Komm, Frau!’ and throw her to the ground. Then they would hold her down while one of their number lay on top of her and stimulated sexual intercourse (761).

The Russians learned only a little and only the necessary German. The other word that the Russians familiarized themselves with was ‘schnaps’, a “generic word for [...] distilled spirits”, as is evident from the immediate response of the first Russian who enters the sanctuary (the basement) of the cave-dwellers (Boehm 13). Where the Russians, in general, did not wish to learn the other language, the narrator, because of her work in Russia as a journalist, is familiar with more than the basics of Russian language and tries to interact with the Russian. But she is rebuffed after his initial surprise of seeing a German speaking in his tongue. It is in the entry of 27th April (The Day of Catastrophe)—the day that the Russians’ first wave reaches the writer’s city—that she reveals she has some knowledge of the Russian language. During her encounter with the very first Russian soldier, she breaks the linguistically stamped identity of a

German as a *n'emtzi*, mute, a word used by the Russians for the Germans. The word, the writer conveys, originated some five hundred years ago during the trades between the two countries, where in the absence of a common language, the Germans used sign language.

Her inquiry to the Russian in his language about what he wanted is answered by the man in German: '*Schnaps*' (Anonymous 66). The man's surprise at seeing a German woman speaking Russian is short-lived. His response in German with only one word, is his way of distancing himself from the half-alien woman who threatens his resolve to stay the enemy. Klaus Theweleit, in his work, *Male Fantasies*, analyses such men who feared a possible destruction of their masculine 'self' through the feminine forces that were out there to symbolically castrate them. Therefore, as a way to save themselves, they choose to go through a process of 'derealization': the women in their personal lives dissolve into nothingness as the time away from home passes (Theweleit 196). Unlike Freud who believed in the castrated woman and a man's fear of that same castrated condition, Theweleit deduces that this fear among men is of the woman's ability and her potential to castrate and collect the phalluses just like the mythological Medusa who is represented through the terrifying image of a woman with a head of phallic shaped snakes, emblematic of the defeated men who had dared to confront her (Theweleit 201). In one of the accounts in the book, an encounter between a German soldier and a female Russian spy is touched upon. The soldier, Lieutenant Bewerkron, describes Marie, the spy, as "an evil, erotic woman, untouchable [to him]" (196). These German men are seen as either running away from the women or destroying them. The women's agency in the form of a physical weapon, intimacy, eroticism, and motherly affection instils a fear of castration in these men. Later, the same Marie, in the prison cell, transforms into a nurturing force by taking Bewerkron into her arms and putting

“his head to her breast” (196). In *A Woman in Berlin*, the narrator turns into both the erotic and the motherly force if her actions are probed through the distrustful subconscious of a Russian soldier’s mind. After observing the Russians around her who are more interested in bikes and motorcycles, the writer feels a bit relaxed in her belief that “Russian men, too, are ‘only men’ —i.e., presumably they’re susceptible as other men to feminine wiles, so it’s possible to keep them in check, to distract them, to shake them off” (Anonymous 67). Through such a consideration, she morphs into an erotic woman whose end goal is to exploit the momentary weakness— she is very similar to those who were feared by the Freikorps military men, the one who must be ignored, pushed to the margins and killed if formidable enough. Later, when she inquires the soldier in Russian about the food, her display can be seen as that of a nurturing mother. The soldier’s response in German is his way of pushing away the affection of both the erotic and ensnaring Medusa who uses his own language as a bait, and the nurturer who might favour him with food, and thereby turn him into something different and unrecognisable. The fear is not only of castration but also of what it represents and what it stands for— a complete annihilation of the self. The soldier has to return to his normal state, shunning the amazement and the wiles of the woman; and so, after finding no brandy, he “wanders back ... trying to find his way through the labyrinth of passageways and courtyard” of the psychological world weaved by the castrating woman (67).

The language motif stretches further when the writer, who already knows some Russian, finds a German-Russian dictionary, especially devised for soldiers. She mentions how there were some words that could be helpful, edibles like ‘bacon’, ‘flour’, ‘salt’ – the three essentials necessary to survive. Her search for other words that she needs to know is fruitless as the dictionary does not have them. Words like ‘fear’ ‘basement’, and ‘death’ are missing from it (90). The soldiers need sustenance but they

do not need to know ‘fear’ or ‘basements’— the safe havens for the Others. The basement where these women spend a better part of their day becomes a way to safeguard oneself both from the explosives, and, even with all its literal darkness, from the sexual abuse. This spatial basement becomes a womb where the differences between the German men and women are non-existent, both reduced to the same stature— fetuses devoid of sex, at least before the Russians would reach, disrupting the womb by external force, and expelling the ‘sexual’ inhabitants out.

The deliberate stratification that is created through the barrier of language between the Russians and this woman is symbolically represented through the missing words in this dictionary. The missing words are tethered to the unique situation of German women, as it is their *fear* of death, sexual abuse, and possible starvation, and it is their *basement* with its womb like darkness and protection from the bombs as well as the soldiers who prowl the cities. The basement is breached at intervals but is still a comparatively safe place. When the writer is raped for the first time, it happens on the flight of stairs just outside of the basement; she screams, but the door of the basement closes on her: “I hear the basement door shutting with a dull thud behind me” (72). This represents her inability to crawl back into the safe-space during the danger. She is allowed entry only upon her assurance that the threat is no longer there for the other inhabitants: “Open up ... I’m all alone, there’s no one else”, she assures the people in basement (73).

J. Kristeva in *The Power of Horror* explains the abject as the Other that brings about a feeling of horror and disgust. It is born in the paradoxical feelings about something which originates from the Self but still has a place outside of it. Our reactions to cadavers, severe skin diseases, bodily fluids and faeces, are a few examples of the abject (Kristeva 69). The origin of this feeling is traced back to our process of being

born, when we are expelled from the mother's body. It originates in that pre-linguistic state of first-time interaction with the outside world. The narrator of the diary explains the degradation of the language and how swear words have become the norm. The utilisation of the abject language, with words like 'shit' (which is an abject itself), becomes a medium to help the abjected self, for they have come very close to horrific deaths, have become daily observers of the violent deaths, and their bodies have been violated by foreign body fluids (semen, spit, urine) and quite possibly with unwanted pregnancies. The writer herself explains that they have debased their language: "The word 'shit' rolls easily off the tongue" (Anonymous 52). The assimilation of both the defiled self and the debased language is "beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (Kristeva 1). But through the acceptance of another abject (the language), there arises a tolerable presumption that with every corruption in the language there might happen an "expel[ling of the] inner refuse" (Anonymous 52). This culture of language is created in a place where refined cannot exist.

There are many times when the writer expresses her repulsion for her skin and body. After her encounter with Petka, she desires, a decent bath, a way to wash off her body of all that she has been through. Her own body becomes unbearable to her touch: "I feel so dirty, I don't want to touch anything, least of all my skin" (80). In other place, she reminiscences about her father's instruction to her mother to always remind her (the narrator) to put on the bonnet to prevent the harm from sun. She concludes that it was all a waste; all that love that she had received as a child, all the nuances that were paid attention to, could not help her now when she feels revulsion towards her very skin. Again, the sentiment of rejection of the body resurfaces. She writes, "I don't want to touch myself, can barely look at my body [...all the efforts of childhood wasted] for the filth [that] I am now" (97). At one point in the diary, the writer expresses her

despondency in a pithy phrase about the loss that Russia had suffered by the German attack, and in that same line of thought, equates herself to the ruins of Russia, thus uncovering the war zone paradox, where one form of destruction can only be paid by other form of destruction. According to the diarist, as a result of war, Russia that had been struggling to build itself with its “hastily constructed buildings”, beautiful villages, and its own way of life and history that had brought honour to the Soviets was nothing more than “filth beneath [enemies] boots”— just like the narrator herself (99). In another instance, it is Petka, who spurned by her rejection and physical evasion, calls her “nothing but filth” (110). Somewhere else in the diary, in the room with some Russians, two kids, and two German women, the narrator bands the whole adult group as “mired in filth” as opposed to the children who are innocent and pure (159).

On 22nd April at 2 P.M., after hearing the news of surrenders, the women have as a collective whole decided on an “unspoken agreement” to not bring up the word ‘rape’. The writer, keeping with comradeship, calls it “that subject” even in her written material (Anonymous 35). And with the unspoken, the reader is pushed into the process of Konkretisation; the unwritten becomes too important to be ignored. Sitting in the cellar, the women make conversations around the subject of rape and never mention the word. But their omissions throw a better light on the situation. Just after Frau W.’s crack at the potential threat, there comes a question from another: “Let’s be honest for once. None of us is still virgin, right?” (Anonymous 37). The unmentionable subject of rape stales the air with this two-fold inquiry. The knowledge about what happens during intercourse and not having to deal with the rape as a virgin both are a step closer to survival. As non-virgins, their bodies offer one less obstruction (the hymen) which will get them through the rape/s with at least less physical pain. The emotional trauma is downplayed for there is no space for it to raise its head. The women are only concerned

with the physical trauma they might have to suffer for their reluctance during the act of rape.

When the writer complains about the rapes to an authoritative Russian figure, it is ignored with a nonchalant comment by the Russian lead. The language of the Russian in authority reeks of banal sexism: “Come on, I’m sure they didn’t hurt you. Our men are all healthy” (74). The comment is a result of a lack of understanding or ignorance towards female anatomy. The first part clearly originates from the view that rape does not physically hurt, and it is not the same as getting hit, bayoneted, punched or cut—all kinds of physical impacts that a soldier might understand. It is because men do not recognise the vaginal walls as anything more than a sheath, a hole that in their imagination stretches to hold anything that they wish to put inside—phalluses, sticks, guns, flares. And the latter part in the Russian lead’s comment is offered as a prize. The remark about the health of men is about their sexual performance, the size of their penises, and physical prowess. Their laughs are a message set to inform the listener of their virility which they are absolutely sure of.

Rapes and Survival Patterns: Scrutiny into the Oral Accounts

In the absence of news, the writer relies on the accounts that she tries to fish out of women and constructing a written account of the oral tales through her passive and, at certain moments, cold style of writing. These oral records are filled with social realities that build the character of each narrator/speaker and quite possibly help in understanding the speaker’s “values [and] self-image” (Polishuk 14). Such accounts effectively help in giving voice to those who have remained silent after the war. If the sincerity of the writer’s words is taken at face value, then her interactions with others

become an alternate historical record in which the information provided will be analogous to the real-life testimonies. Her oral records will not be influenced by social expectations, which may be the case with the character of the testimonies in the post-war period. In their article “Histories and Memories in Feminist Research”, Andrea Peto and Berteke Waaldijk discuss the aspects of finding historical knowledge in unlikely places, and this becomes important, especially when one considers female inclusion or exclusion in the available accounts. The writers are accounted for a more integral approach which does not limit history to a mere academic subject: “[t]here was a great variety of often gendered genres which kept alive memories of the past: from telling and retelling stories, singing songs and making quilts to writing novels, family memoirs and academic dissertations” (Peto and Waaldijk 80). Oral interviews are a great way of expanding the stored information and bringing to light that which has been hidden or never countenanced. In the coming passages, such short oral interviews that the journalist-narrator records in her diary have been looked into to find the “missing history” of ordinary women who were rarely given space in the prevalent historical discourse where only the “exceptions and outsiders” (queens, prostitutes, witches) were welcomed (76).

The writer meets Gerti, who was gang raped. She, in her now very typical way, steers the conversation to the attack on Germany and how it affected the young girl. It can be noted from the instances in the diary that the rapists usually don’t stop after the rape and go on to play with the women. After Gerti’s assault, the rapists smeared marmalade on her hair and covered it with coffee (Anonymous 263). The rapist turned prankster had laughed while doing all that. These elements, the extras, which happen to women outside of rape are an indication of a power thrill. A similar but more intense encounter happens with the writer herself. One time, after the narrator was raped, the

rapist forced her mouth open and spat into it. This action is a violation that is not related to rape rather becomes a way to show power and express the disgust the Russians had for Germans in general. The comparatively less vicious act performed on Gerti originates from the same feelings.

Despite the diarist's constant efforts to understand the world around her, especially the female predicament, she is pushed out and her curiosity is doused with silence. Along with rapes and deaths, other threats that loom over these women are accidental unwanted pregnancies. The narrator is almost certain that her body cannot carry something which is so undesired and unacceptable: "I'm simply convinced it couldn't happen to me. As if I could lock myself up, physically shut myself off from something so unwanted" (93). Her visit to the doctor confirms that she is not pregnant and merely suffers from late periods because of malnutrition like many others who had visited the clinic. Her visit to the doctor is an important example of the narratives of silences. The writer is dismissed by the doctor when she inquires about rapes and abortions. She is silenced. The doctor asks her not to speak about such issues (290). According to Anthony Beevor, abortions and the abandonment of the children born from rape was common during the post-Russian invasion period (Beevor 412). Agatha Schwarts published a paper based on her interviews and research that focused on the rape children born to German woman as an aftermath to the Russian usurpation. Renate, one such girl, was born to a German woman and was continually abused both emotionally and physically by her mother. It was only after her mother's death that she was able to unriddle her behaviour. Renate explained how she would have been dead had her mother felt like it. She later found out that she was a rape child (Schwartz 321). In his diary, a German surgeon wrote that he was hired, like many others, by the British and the American authorities to a gynaecological ward for abortions of any pregnancies

that resulted from the sexual assaults by the Russians during the invasions (Grossmann 56).

In another instance, the writer mentions the two companion washer women's evasiveness to her questions. The silence over the horrid details is imperative to the German women; they drape the details in the deliberate use of banal phrases like "it was all the same" and take the first step into that silence that will aid them to hide the same from their husbands and relatives. The women of these times had hidden the atrocities for decades before they were spoken or written about. For the washer-women, the truth of details is more than a secret, and silencing and dismissing it as unimportant becomes a survival strategy.

The writer does not shy away from expressing unsettling beliefs about the sexual violence and its patterns. When the woman suffering from eczema is introduced, the writer is quick to remark that her skin disease might deter the men, even those who will rape almost anything.. At times like these, when the writer is learning about 'unconventional' rapes of women who are too old or too young, she still has a hard time believing that anyone would choose this pus-oozing and sore-ridden woman. The statement about the rare possibility of rape of a woman with eczema might leave the reader reeling, for the writer deliberately chooses to explain the extremities of the eczema through a hypothetical situation that is moralistically and ethically challenging. The act of rape, which is violent, filthy, and a hub of venereal diseases, is conducted by a man. The rapist, who is seen as nothing more than a monster in a general social setting, is set against a woman who is naive enough to not understand how the fall-outs of this war might affect her. Her outer diseased 'filth' is juxtaposed to the inner 'filth' of the monster-rapist. This laconic observation mocks the rapist on a deeper level, where the perpetrator is unable to recognise the sordid depths of his intentions but, most surely,

will be averse to the dermatological condition of the woman. Contrary to the writer's belief, the woman is still raped by two men in succession. It is evident from the introduction of the diary that there were instances where women tried to disguise themselves as men or to look 'ugly' to save themselves from the rapes during Germany's occupation. One such woman hides in the basement too; it is upon a closer inspection that the narrator realises that who she thought to be a "young man" was in fact a woman (Anonymous 24).

The rape of the girl with eczema is important in the discussions of what constitutes rape. After her rape and a cup of burgundy (suggests that she needed something to relax her), she grins looking at the narrator and the widow, "So that's what I've spent seven years waiting for", she says (146). The dialogue and the grin with which it is delivered are intrinsically complicated but do not sound morbid like the usual encounters of rape do. Can it be said that the experience was essentially just sex/orgasm which she had longed for seven years? Through her statement (the semantics) and her half-willing body (experience), the character from the diary complicates the perpetrator-victim dichotomy. Similarly, the widow does the same. She complicates the discourse when she smiles and indulgently comments, "A mere child... no beard...inexperienced" with reference to her rapist (79). The men who rape the eczema woman do so by force, but the grin on her face and her puzzling response of "one and half" times— quite possibly alluding to her having orgasm— when she had to "take it" (the sex, the penis) as a willing victim. Her looks (because of eczema) that have prevented her from having a decent sexual relationship is replaced by a complicated sexual encounter with the Russians. Can we say that she acquired agency through her abrupt unpremeditated orgasm, or used the male bodies better than the way they used hers? The answer boils down to another question: Was there a consent? "She

is jumped on and dragged” into an abandoned apartment, according to her own narration. Her wait for something pleasurable to come through a decent romantic relationship ends in the anticlimactic rapes.

In the original German version, she (the eczema woman) is called ‘*schaf*’ which in German means a sheep. The woman acts like a ‘*schaf*’, a naïve person, by blowing her chance to escape by negating the syphilis implication made by one of the soldiers, who wanted to rape her, after looking at her sores. Her reaction to the inquiry is a shocked ‘no’ alludes both to her inability to conceive herself as someone who would sleep with just anyone and contact STD. If this same narrative is seen outside of this universe of warfare, then it can become a perfect example of how the social projection of rape crime can shift from the perpetrator to the victim: the ideology of ‘she was asking for it’ or ‘she enjoyed it’ can be stamped on her head. The rapist’s behaviour patterns are ignored for the patterns in a victim. The porn industry has a whole genre based in the same set parameter: a man would enter the house and force himself on the woman, and soon after her initial resistance, the woman would reciprocate in earnest. The glorification of rape in these pictures is different from what happens to the woman suffering from eczema. Her statement is her attempt at dark humour; it is her way of overcoming the guilt of having orgasmed (146). The real trauma is hidden in the text itself, the one which she tries to cover with her grin and an attempt at dry-humour. The writer says that the pervasiveness of rape has made all of them prone to gallows humour, especially when it comes to jokes about sexual assaults, and this ‘ample ground’ of ‘experience’ will soon be utilised by the eczema woman after she is raped. Her epiphany turns into a mess of irony during a situation which is cruel in nature. Her outer reaction and the words that she says do not correspond. The disoriented state she is found in should be enough to show the darker depths of her experience: she staggers into the

apartment, is unable to speak for a very long time, and is only able to calm her nerves after having some liquor to dull the senses (146).

It is imperative to talk about orgasms one might experience during the rapes. Many victims who orgasm during rape consider themselves guilty for playing a part. They, along with the perpetrator, believe that their orgasmic state equals enjoyment and a consent of sorts. In an article published on the same subject, the writers discuss the subject of orgasms in both male and female victims. In the absence of primary resources or proper literature, the writers collected data from three different clinicians. A testimony from one of them is given here: “Many of us occasionally see women who experience orgasm during abusive sex and are told by the abused that a comment from the abuser was ‘you must have enjoyed it – so what’s the problem?’” (Levin 85). A quick search on Google would yield a similar result; women confessing their guilt or trying to convince others of their guiltless state. The same paper showed that it is possible for women to have orgasm and lubricating effects in a situation of fear (85).

Why would it matter who these men are raping? Distillers’ chubby wife, the woman with eczema, or women like the writer who willingly sleep with them for food and protection, for men, isn’t a vagina a vagina, just like a “cock’s a cock”, as a Russian crudely explains to the narrator (Anonymous 196). But this is a situation which is only applicable when assaulters are “grabbing” in the dark (79). The writer sees the difference in the thoughts behind all these sexual assaults: the distiller’s wife is raped because she is fat, plum and therefore a better beauty in the eyes of the Russians; the woman with eczema is raped because the lowly soldiers could not find anyone better, and the writer because she offers these men like the Major and Anatol a way to see themselves as more humane, considerate, and as much better human beings than the "hooligans" that ravish with force, for as per their own description, they are “refined,

[men] of tender feelings” (148). The lesbian who dresses like a man is saved not only because of her disguise but because of Russians’ inability to perceive in a woman the confidence of a man (148). But let’s come back to the statement of “a cock is a cock” by the Russian officer who sees no difference between one man’s penis to another. The unseeing of a penis for its girth or size is a typical male way to acknowledge their sexuality. But these same military men differentiate between the vaginas. The man who had raped the widow offers her a ‘compliment’. Using a gesture made with his thumbs and fingers, he tells her that the Ukrainian women have a loose vaginal cavity, and in comparison, the German women are tighter. It is impossible for men to talk about their penis as anything else; it is just a sexual organ which, when erect, serves its purpose: they give it to a woman, and she has to take it. But women, because the troublesome social creation of their bodies, need to talk about the womb, breasts and vaginas in order to shake up the unilateral discourse thus far created by men.

One of the Russian soldiers that the narrator encounters does not stop after the rape. He further disgraces the narrator by forcing her mouth open, with “his finger [...] stinking of horse and tobacco”, and spitting into it (84). This is the point where she starts believing that the worst has already happened, and this time, when she writes the word rape in her diary, she finds that her fear has dissipated. Although it is only after this incident that the narrator decides that the collateral of selling her body to a wolf to protect herself from such humiliation is necessary. If she selects a powerful man to be her only rapist, she will never have to go through the sudden attacks that land her in situations that she finds more despicable. She feels better as soon as she acquires agency through the process of selection of a protector.

The writer’s acceptance of the word and the act ‘rape’ corresponds to her own personal journey. The first time she is raped, she screams for help and only because of

the threat to her life does she silence herself. She later shouts at the Germans in the basement for their detachment from her sufferings as they didn't try to help her. The second time, when she is raped by Petka, she acquiesces without even looking at him, and her only words are a request: "Only one, please, please, only one" (77). The third time, it is only survival that matters to her, which becomes evident through her interactions with the group of women headed by a sobbing widow who had come too late to save her: she laughs at the widow's reaction and informs the group that the only thing that matters now is staying alive (77-78). When she is raped and humiliated, she decides to find her one rapist-protector and launches on her search almost immediately. Seeing, observing, looking, and ranking them, objectifying them in the same way they had been doing to her and other German women, this scrutiny is equivalent to the shining torches of the Russians in the dark basement: "[f]or half an hour there's nothing— no epaulettes with stars [...] shabby mass of green uniforms...I'm just about to give up [...] when I see a man with stars coming out of an apartment [...] Tall, dark, well-fed" (82). She sees this man not as a human but as a way to secure protection. In her eyes, it is only the strength that makes him worth the effort.

The men who are holding the baker's wife are commanded to leave her because of the writer's intrusion with a higher-up Russian soldier. One of the men, in his anger, declares: "They took my sister and...." (72). The soldier is referring to Germany's invasion of Russia and the subsequent rapes that had happened. The speaker barely mentions the subject, but in his incomplete sentence, we sense the reason for his stopping. The man's anger over the rape of his sister is private, but finally he can have his very public revenge. In his twisted mind, he believes that he would be punishing the Germans for the similar kind of crimes that they had done towards Russian women, especially his sister, by raping the baker's wife. What is interesting to note here is that

the man chose a woman to deal with his anger instead of directing it at another man. The German men, who are also present in the same setting, are absentees in the eyes of the Russians. They only see the German women on whom they direct their revengeful sexual aggression. For this crime committed by an unknown German soldier towards his sister, the Russian soldier sees fit to rape an unknown German woman whose husband/brother (physically absent) will suffer the same way he had suffered. In this warped sense of justice, the soldier does not recognise that the role he will be playing will place him in the same category as that of the German soldier who had raped his sister. This soldier, even after recognising the pain and distress of his sister, does not see this 'Other' woman as belonging to the same sex, and as being made to suffer in similar ways.

In the war zone, the lines between 'moral' and 'immoral' women blur. The 'good' woman no longer exists. Men project their fantasies on women by transforming them into prostitutes, lovers, or bodies for their pleasure. It is evident from the interactions that the writer has with the soldiers. There is one who offers her a stolen watch in exchange for sex. The writer never mentions the word used by the Russian to offer the trade. She swallows it in her ellipses. Some other soldier drops a pack of cigarettes beside her as a form of payment after raping her.

Theft has been a common consequence of war. The first boy-soldier who offers her the watch, like all the other soldiers, had partaken in the plunder; and the two watches that he has on his wrist are his bounty. War-like events usually end with the 'plunder' of the bodies too. Such loots became a way to let the fear of rape fester (68). The fear of rape and plunder are revisited when some soldiers barge into the widow's place:

One, two, three, four men. All heavily armed, with machine guns on their hips. They look at [...] us briefly without saying a word. One of them walks straight to the chest, rips open the drawers, rummages around, slams them back, says something dismissive and stomps out. (75)

The similarity between the language used to describe plunder and the rapes is uncanny— the vandalism can turn into rape violence at any given moment, and it does happen. The house is replaced by a woman's body, but the use of language remains the same: the soldier rips her underpants, opens up her jaw, pulls it apart in the same way he had done to the house-chest, and spits in her mouth. Then, after raping her, dismissively, “without a word”, he moves, slamming the door on his way out (84).

The writer's world has not only the protector-rapists but also pseudo-lovers. The former helps the writer navigate dangerous situations, whereas the latter lands her in dangerous quagmires. In order to secure a sexual liaison, some young soldiers are keen to find ways without forcing themselves on women. The younger soldiers are not blunt attackers. They offer trades, deals, romantic promises to secure a woman for sex. Petka because of his volatile tendencies and overbearing possessiveness, is a cross between a rapist-soldier and a pseudo-lover. Petka singles the writer out for his sole pleasure, making her his own Briseis. Petka offers her words of generic love; the writer, in her pithy way, calls it “Petka-Romeo babble” (80). His words are meaningless and his obsession unhelpful to the writer, for he is a lowly soldier who cannot offer her any protection. Another such pseudo-lover appears in the basement with a torch to find a woman to rape. As his light falls on an injured eighteen-year-old girl in the basement, the writer tries to protect her by reasoning with the soldier who soon loses his interest in the bandaged girl and swears his ‘passionate love’ for the writer. Nonetheless, this too becomes a way to establish power over a subject.

Language is pulled again into the centre when the writer offers her lover, Gerd, her make-shift journals where she has written about most of her experiences. The man returns the journal after feeling vexed that he could not find much meaning in the scribbles and abbreviations that the writer has embedded in her text. He points to a word, ‘Schdg’, that had made an appearance many times; the writer’s response is a laugh and explains that the word is a shorthand for the German word for rape, ‘Schändung’. It is an interesting contrast that the writing that empowers the narrator, leaves the lover disturbed and ‘unmanned’; and by that same order, the woman is nothing more than the sordid, discarded leftover in the eyes of her man. The body that has survived the war is impaired in his eyes. His inability to read or make sense of the writings is a typical pathology that men suffer from when reading a work that is based in feminine *écriture*. Gerd’s reaction to the journal is a preamble to how the masculine world will receive the diary, how the women (made a part of the same nexus) will reject the work as a “shameless” display, and thereby become a reason for a ban on it.

Gerd vilifies the women’s experience and their vocalization while conveniently forgetting that his survival which he had achieved by becoming a deserter also precariously hangs on the social idea of cowardice. As a soldier, he had done away with his duty by sneaking off, and he had done it to survive (304). Cixous briefly accounts the problems with men’s writing in her essay, “The Laugh of Medusa”. She writes, “woman must write woman. And man, man [...] it’s up to him to say where his masculinity and femininity are at” (Cixous 877). According to her, men are still tethered to the idea of the masculine so much that their self-expressions are nothing more than a display of authority under which the Other is to be curbed and crushed. The man fantasises and wishes to colonize what Cixous calls the “dark continent”, a space of inhibited energy, and an individually unique space of expression which is outside the

realm of the phallogocentric world. The man tends to asphyxiate not only the women but also himself by “misrecognising the self” (877).

The lack of language is a significant motif in the diary. The men before attacking the narrator, mostly, use stealth instead of brute force: The very first time it happens, she is ambushed by the soldiers “lying in wait” and is silenced with a threat of death delivered through the violent action of a soldier’s hand tightening on her throat;; the second time, she is grabbed from behind when Petka sneaks up on her; and then the third time when the soldiers enter with force to ransack the house and eventually rape the narrator. They avoid speaking and their silence enforces the distance. To the readers, the repeated silence from the perpetrators becomes a source of information. It communicates indifference and impersonal attitudes, especially when the soldiers wish to engage in forceful sexual relations.

More than Revenge: Alcohol, Sexual Repression, and Propaganda

Anthony Beevor in his introduction to the book, *A Woman in Berlin*, explains that Germany, even when it was sure to be usurped by the Russians, was made to fight back an enemy that was far more aggressive and had better ammunition. Himmler, the propaganda minister, even with the Russians’ active infiltration, had a graffiti squad ready to paint slogans with which the populace was urged to not surrender and fight for the protection of women and children from the abuses of “the Red beasts”. Such images and incitements were prevalent during war times. A strong nationalist feeling can be made stronger by hinting at the hypothetical potential atrocities faced by the supposedly weaker sex, females.

Propagandas are not always so easy to determine. Sometimes, they exist in plain sight as irrevocable truths and sometimes as strait-laced ideological apparatuses. In the very beginning, the writer prods the reader's attention to it by a simple incident where a news item becomes something more than the truth. The writer, a journalist herself, relies on the newspaper for her information until later when there are none and she has to sift through the grapevine. Early in the novel, when Frau W. reads to her from a newspaper, the headlines are eerily questioned by the narrator. The headline mentions not only the rapes but also the numbers of times one had been subjected to it: "Old Woman of seventy Defiled. Nun violated twenty-four times". She does not give the readers a chance to be horrified over these details by making a simple inquiry of, "I wonder who was counting?" (Anonymous 21). And the tone of the diary shifts. The two females chosen as the newspaper headlines are important because of the unconventionality of their respective identities. It appears from the headlines as if the rapists' choice of an old woman and a nun is being questioned. Had it been a young woman, would the headline not seem cruel enough? Her conclusion is as hard-hitting—Germany on the brink of loss is using this vulnerable and shocking picture to spur the men of the nation on. This simulation is created to engage them as better protectors of both the woman and the nation. Goebbel, the propaganda master, infused the Germans with a sense of fear and hatred by vivid expression of "atrocities at Nemmersdorf, when Red Army troops had invaded the south-eastern corner of East Prussia the previous autumn and raped and murdered inhabitants of this village" (Beevor 4). The exploits of this propaganda were not limited to newspapers, articles, or speeches, but a special reel of raped women was prepared by Goebbel's media men. The rape issue, though prevalent, was used to incite the German men and the majority public against the Russian leaders. Ilya Ehrenburg, a soviet writer who had been famous for his scathing

articles against the Germans was wrongfully accused and quoted by Goebbel to present him as a rape instigator (Beevor 25). Ehrenburg might be innocent of such deeds but the Russian leaders were not. Sexual repression created by Stalin's rule is still seen as a contributor to the war rapes:

Stalin ensured that Soviet society depicted itself as virtually asexual. This had nothing to do with genuine puritanism: it was because love and sex did not fit in with dogma designed to 'deindividualize' the individual. Human urges and emotions had to be suppressed. Freud's work was banned, divorce and adultery were matters for strong Party disapproval. Criminal sanctions against homosexuality were reintroduced. The new doctrine extended even to the complete suppression of sex education. (Beevor 32)

All this gave rise to what Beevor calls "Barrack eroticism" that had proliferated during the libidinal suppression of Russia; add to this, the revenge propaganda and the illiterate Russian soldier's psyche, and there you have the volatile results. Lev Kopelev represented the wide-spread hatred coloured in nationalism through his memoir titled *No Jail for Thought*. When he had tried to prevent rapes by the Soviet soldiers through his writings, he was accused of displaying anti-national sentiments. He was arrested on the preposterous charges of propagating and supporting "propaganda of bourgeois humanism, of pity for the enemy" and was sent to prison for ten years (qtd. in Naimark 204).

The book's accounts of rapes and the Russians' behaviours point to a very ambiguous but very realistic image. The writer's aim was not to create a villain or to serve an anti-Soviet propaganda but to unburden herself through the process of writing. Her narrative proves that there was never one reason for the soldiers to rape. Revenge

is presented as a motive in one or two cases, but other factors weigh in as well. Beevor illustrates how after alcohol was inside the system, men rarely cared for the kind of women they were going after. Most of the Russians that the diarist encounters come to her in an inebriated state. When Petka, for the very first time, grabs her from behind, the only things that the writer can decipher from her vulnerable position are his “huge paws” and the “smell of alcohol”. The same smell is evident on the breath of the soldier who follows the writer to offer her watches in exchange for sex. Another Russian who had spit in her mouth after raping her was also described as reeking of alcohol. While collecting the food left by Anatol and his men, the writer acutely observes that alcohol was never in the leftovers—it was “always drained to the last drop” (Anonymous 130). In another instance, Her Pauli explains to the widow and the narrator that the Germans had devised plans to use alcohol to impair the Russian soldiers. For this reason, the retreating soldiers of Germany were asked to leave the alcohol stores untouched. The writer, upon hearing this, infers that the decision like this must have come from the minds of men. The inability of men to see alcohol as something which encourages and “intensifies sexual urge” and as something which can result and aid in the victimization of women, can be seen as a patriarchal problem where disregarding women as a part of the system or the social cosmos is second nature. She expresses a deeper resentment towards the men who can never engage and see the world from the perspective of a woman, and acknowledges how their decisions affect the other sex. She writes of the alcohol strategy, “only men could cook up [such stories] for other men” (203). The decision makers, essentially men, never thought of the other effects of alcohol, for women were a mere collateral and propaganda fodder. Alcohol when consumed by the women becomes a mean to help them through the forced or coerced sexual encounters,

but to the soldiers, it offers a sense of abandon to become uninhibited. Based on her experiences, she writes,

[n]ext time there's a war fought in the presence of women and children (for whose protection men supposedly used to do their fighting out on the battlefield, away from home), every last drop of drink should be poured into the gutter, wine stores destroyed, beer cellars blown up. Or else let the defenders have their final spree, as far as I'm concerned. Just make sure there's no alcohol left, as long as there are women within grabbing distance of the enemy. (204)

It is no coincidence that the first Russian man who converses with the writer asks for schnapps and nothing more. Drunken assaults were common, alcohol made the “sober, good-natured soldiers who brought candy and food to young German girls” molesters (Naimark 203).

The posters of the wars throw a visually stimulating light on the propagation of ideas. Russians presented the monsters in the form of men dressed as Germans bearing swastika marks; and for Germans, the monsters lay in the red army soldiers. Though the discussion in this chapter pertains to the German women’s mass rape in war, one should be aware that Russian women had also suffered from the same fate. Many soldiers, while raping the German women, decried that what they were doing was revenge for their own women at home. The propaganda posters throughout the war developed with the developing situation. One such Russian poster had a man-pig face, his head donned with a Nazi soldier cap, drooling over a pale beautiful woman with a noose around her neck; she appears dead and her clothes barely cover her breasts, a dark yellow smudge can be seen on her chest— a way to show the mutilation and the bruising (“Russian World War II Posters”). This poster, along with the startling image

declared, “Kill the fascist monster!”. Another poster has a woman holding a crying child bitterly looking at an absent man who is wielding a spear with the swastika sign, already blooded from a previous kill. The poster asks the Red army to save them (“Russian World War II Posters”). The Russians who had entered Germany were fuelled by the desire to avenge all these victims of the German assault. The creation of a hero or the mangled and ravished bodies of women were a subject that was used by almost every country as their propaganda to garner more support. Germany, like Russia, had engaged in the same thing. The posters had foreshadowed the sexual violence, and the fictitious anti-Bolshevik and anti-German narratives presaged the rapes.

The myth of the hero is a recurring aspect of the book. Hitler and Himmler had both created an image of a hero warrior in the minds of men. Hitler was always a soldier with a political mindset, and with a myth concocter like Himmler, he was a powerful force. He used his rhetoric skills and identity as a soldier for his political outcomes. In his speech, "First Soldier of the German Reich", he famously declared, “I have once more put on that coat [German soldier’s uniform] that was the most sacred and dear to me. I will not take it off again until victory is secured, or I will not survive the outcome” (Hitler). This declaration of a leader must have spurred the youth forward in the early stages of the war against Poland. Every youth must have envisioned themselves as heroes while marching to the tunes of the Fuhrer’s commands.

In the diary, there are times when the protagonist encounters German soldiers, but these are not the men who had first heard Hitler’s speech about donning on his coat of a lance corporal, rather they are the dejected scarce groups of soldiers of odd ages walking towards their deaths— bowed-backed carrying heavy gears with unkempt faces and starved bodies. Seeing one such group, the writer asks them, “Where are you headed?”(Anonymous 36). To which the first reply from them is inaudible and then one

of them mumbles again, “Führer, command! And we will follow, even unto death”: a mere slogan fed to them at the initial stage of war (36). It is ironical that a statement that must be made with a high note and fervour is only muttered as a rote axiom. The writer observes the soldiers: “They all seem so miserable, so little like men any more [...] They already look defeated, captured” (36). The reason for their fight is no longer there. The women and the children, the fodder of propaganda, cannot be protected without numbers; these men are merely following the mechanics of their making. The image of the hero is shattered and from it rises the emboldened woman who succinctly calls them “[t]he weaker sex” (11). The German soldiers at the brink of loss were not the “three hundred Spartans” who stood behind their king in the battle against the Persians. The selection of WWII soldiers was random, forced, and their patriotism was coerced out of them. In a battle where death was inevitable, many chose survival. Nowhere do we find the so-called ‘protectors’ or ‘heroes’ of Germany in the diary. The German men who do appear in the diary, weaved into the margins of the narrative, are either neutral to the plight of women or feed off of them. The only German man who has a steady presence is widow’s tenant, Her Pauli: a man who uses both the widow and the narrator for his advantage. Her Pauli economises the favourable relationship of these women with the Russians to partake in their resources and form friendships with the Russians. He is easily seen as offering a similar kind of protection that a higher-standing Russian would offer: “His simple male presence keeps things somewhat in check [...] The widow swears by him”, but ironically, every time the women are attacked, Her Pauli is an absentee (88). He is the representation of the German man, who either ignores or is unable to understand the true nature of sexual liaisons that these women form. His ‘maleness’ untethers him to the plight of German women; and this is why during one of his drunken revelries with the Russians, he is unable to read the

distraught expressions of the widow and the narrator, who had just been threatened with death and raped, respectively. Where men like Her Pauli and the Russians do connect over their strong love for their previous jobs and alcohol, there the Russian women soldiers never occupy the space as a solid presence. They are mentioned a few times by the narrator, but their role is limited to just being present and, therefore, they never become part of the action. They are only described by the narrator in passing for her surprise of seeing women in uniform (89). The two female sides never intersect.

Her Pauli's inability to do physical work is not something which troubles the widow. She does it all for him. Her Pauli excuses himself by declaring his neuralgia, which the narrator does not believe in. She calls his disease in question by calling it a malady of soul and not his leg. Her Pauli understands the power he wields over the widow and using that he enjoys the fruits of her labour, and later ostracises the writer when she is no longer useful to procure food items and becomes dependent on the widow. The sisterhood that had thrived during the obliteration of German male authority is demolished by the return of the patriarchal order in the wake of the retreat of Russian soldiers.

In the beginning, far removed from the war, women's only job was to care for men. As the war progressed, civilians were pushed out of their usual roles; the men were asked to turn into soldiers and the women, in the absence of the male workers in commercial spaces, were pushed into a role which was earlier denied to them. Germany had always been afraid of the breaks in traditional roles of households had rallied the cry of "Kirche, Küche, Kinder" (Church, Kitchen, Children) to bring back the ambitious women deserting their homes and to restore the masculine order of things (Bridenthal 148). It is not uncommon to find women in Nazi posters sitting in blue gowns with an infant suckling on their breast. The progenitor of Aryan race was to become a

reproductive machine to birth Hitlers, Goebbels and Himmlers. But the role was shifted to different forms of national service when Germany had started to struggle. From the innocent by-stander waving goodbyes to sons and lovers in the WWII posters, then to factory workers to assuage the war-driven demands of uniforms, weapons and food, and then by employing women directly into the war as army's auxiliaries and prison guards in Nazi camps, the women were utilised to maximise the national interest. The roles were still defined by a patriarchal-Nazi order. The women had not initiated this change nor were they free to deny any roles assigned. The shift was a result of the economic deterrents that Germany was facing. The shift was justified by the Nazi-Germany that had been adamant to confine women to kitchens and gardens with the idea of "[n]ationalist socialist principle of common good before the individual good". And by this logic, "the ideal Nazi woman owed service to state above all else" (Gupta 43).

Assuaging the Hunger

In her dissertation "Female experiences of Rape and Hunger in Postwar German Literature, 1945-1960", Anja Wieden discusses how *A Woman in Berlin*, even with a possibly deliberate style of writing, becomes a work that deconstructs the power dynamics between males and females, and engages to represent the sufferings related to coerced rapes and hunger. Hunger as a theme of the German experience of war has been highlighted in many works according to Wieden, but she criticises those works where the writers present the unilateral image of suffering by depicting hunger and omitting the rapes—the two cannot be separated (200).

Hunger is a persistent motif in the diary. There is a hunger for female bodies that the soldiers want to ravage, and then there is the literal one that the German women suffer from in the war zone. To assuage the hunger of soldiers, these women present themselves as willing victims in hopes that they will be offered food and other items for sustenance. A trade of one hunger for another. The writer and the women around her are always busy securing food items. Sexual favours are granted and asked for with food as leverage. A peculiar instance takes place when a sailor asks the narrator to give him “a nice clean girl, respectable and kind” and adds that “he’d bring her food, too” (Anonymous 138). The polite way in which he asks the narrator to find a woman contrasts with the deed he wishes to perform. The suffering of hunger among German women and the satiation of it by any means is a common theme in the diary. Hunger is pre-dominantly a female pathology and the food is a sign of Russian male power. The writer surmises young boys like the sailor and Vanya, the sixteen-year-old who had raped the widow, as keen followers who wish to impress the aged comrades around them, who go on performing feats of sexual ‘prowess’. Their behaviour is not in tune with their age (for they are quite young) or the action (because they do not wish to rape forcefully or regret the action as soon as they do it). Their wishes’ contradictory nature rises from their observations of the other war veterans, and their belief in the ability to get an easy and hassle-less delivery of women. But along with everything that the sailor boy says, the importance here is of his offer of food. Offered in a polite way and as an exchange, this kind of *quid pro quo* is just another form of manipulation. A more modern concept of sexual bartering is different where both the parties hold equal power, but here, a woman dying of hunger and with survival on her mind would be coerced and pushed into a corner till she gives in.

Her Paulli emerges as a leviathan who eats and eats and becomes another kind of threat in his image as a faux protector. The narrator calls him a “Mephistophelian spirit that always denies” (199). Her Paulli is more than happy to consume these women indirectly through the food and offers a similar kind of protection (albeit weaker) like that of Russians. He rejects the supplication of alms by widow to the narrator as preposterous after the narrator’s body can no longer be used for gaining food items. On one hand, Russians take sexual pleasure from these women in exchange for food, on the other hand, Her Pauli emerges as a perpetrator by partaking in that food and offering a pseudo protection to these women who are already suffering from coerced sexual liaisons. The decision to throw the narrator out of this make-shift family comes from Pauli. He rages at the widow about the dwindling supply and asks her to get rid of the narrator. The writer understands that the absence of Nikolai, a Russian who provided her with food supplies for sex, undermines her value in the eyes of a new powerful patriarch, Her Pauli. When the space for the patriarchal lord is relinquished by the Russians, it is soon occupied by Her Pauli. The widow’s conversation and dialogues show us her connection of sisterhood runs deeper with the narrator, but with Pauli’s male presence, she feels physically protected. Her conviction is simple— she acknowledges the feelings of comradeship with the writer who she had got to know in the worst situation of her life, but Pauli, a man, emerges as a victor in this relational puzzle; thus, breaking the female solidarity by this gargantuan presence.

The writer, after the Russians pull back, goes out to her attic and overeats and stuffs herself. She explains how her act of eating had nothing to do with hunger but was an instinct, because she believes that without the Russian provider in the picture, she would have had scarce or no food at all. The notion of woman as a caretaker and the stereotypical image of her staying hungry to feed others by disciplining her body is

broken here. In the narrator's world, it is the starving body that is more insufferable than the sexually abused one. In these situations where food is scarce, it becomes a source of power. Every soldier who has it uses and offers it differently. The supplication of food transforms these women's status to that of prostitutes. Rape in the face of hunger becomes a tolerable atrocity. It is not only the writer, but the other women also use sex to gain food. The narrator tells the reader/s that here where language fails, food becomes the language; a "language of bread and bacon and herring", especially when the one in power knows and exploits the dire needs of the Other (139). Men, even in these circumstances, are afflicted by property disputes and trespassing of the same; and here that property is any woman in question that they have claimed for themselves. This tradition is not a new one, the famous cry in Christian weddings of "to Talassius" originates in ownership of a woman during war times who has been claimed as a masterpiece delivered specially and only to the master, Talassius (Branche and Virgili 1). The tiff between Agamemnon and Achilles was largely based in the same obsession over Briseis. But here along with being a spoil of war, the situation turns less violent with women turning into coerced sexual objects for survival. Here, there are fewer women being carried off of the road on shoulders of lower rank soldiers screaming the name of their commanders.

Anatol is replaced by Major both due to the circumstances and because of writer's calculation of Major being a higher up officer than Anatol which would definitely mean more food and supplies. The narrator actively seeks the men who can offer her both food and protection by offering them sex as a payment. By engaging in sexual liaisons with one powerful man, she hopes to save herself from the other more violent and perverse soldiers like she encounters in the beginning. With Major's entry, her situation with the food supplies changes— she mentions the sweets and

concentrated food items that she receives from him and engages in eating to her hearts content with the widow and Pauli: “We spread our butter finger thick, are extravagant with the sugar, want our potatoes browned in fat” (Anonymous 149). There are downsides to her position as a keep woman too. The writer’s agency is threatened and thwarted many times, and her position becomes both a safe harbour and a potential hurdle. With her switch between the Major and Anatol, she worries that a run-in between the two will only land her in problem. Before the Major leaves, after giving them the sweets, he gives the writer “a sharp look”, a look to inform her that she is still a subject and he is the master, and the food is merely a generous gesture and not a payment. A payment would make the relation to be between equals, whereas there is no equilibrium here. The extravagance of food enjoyed by the narrator and Pauli are unacceptable to the widow, who is a hoarder. Unlike the narrator, she does not have anyone to supply her with food. Her only ownership that gives her some leverage with the narrator and Pauli is her house, where they both live and, in return, provide her with what they can. The Widow realises that with the Major, the narrator’s chances of getting a good supplication of food increases: “She sees things in terms of the larder, and prefers the major, who leaves more of a mark on her cupboard shelves” (150).

When the widow and narrator are visited by Frieda, a woman staying with the widow’s nephew’s pregnant wife for some food, the widow is quick to give her some advice: “Well, my child, couldn't you find some halfway nice Russian and give him a pretty smile? So that he'd bring you girls a little something to eat?” (167). The girl is not offended by the suggestion and explains how there are not many Russians around her block. This clearly shows that, given a chance, Frieda too would have engaged in such an arrangement. Starvation was not how these women wanted to die.

The writer, through her liaisons, risks unwanted pregnancies and STDs; she survives by risking her survival. When Gerd, her lover of a long time, leaves after reading her make-shift diary, the writer says that she will survive this too, because all the emotions that she might feel are nothing compared to the hunger and it will dull the feelings in comparison. Maybe this is how she felt even when she was offering her body to satiate her hunger. Her responses to situations are utterly raw and, so clearly, distanced from the profound philosophies of life.

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