

## Female Perpetrators during the Holocaust

00:30:

Dr. Simone Gigliotti (SG):

Excellent, thank you. Welcome to this evening's panel on female perpetrators during the Holocaust, an event that is co-sponsored by three research institutes at Royal Holloway, University of London. Those institutes being the Gender Institute, the Holocaust Research Institute and the Centre for International Security. My name is Simone Gigliotti and I'm senior lecturer in Holocaust Studies and deputy director of the Holocaust Research Institute.

00:57:

It's a pleasure and a privilege to chair the panel which brings together leading scholars of gender, war, conflict and aspects of the Holocaust perpetration unfolding across time and space. Although this panel specifically advertised and focused on the Holocaust, we very much acknowledge that victims of the Nazi regime, its perpetrators and collaborators fell into many categories, including gay, lesbian and queer victims, disabled, mentally ill, forced laborers and that the perpetration of genocide occurred in many different locations.

1:31:

Panellists are welcome to share insights about the pathways, gender specific involvement and impacts of Nazi persecution on all victim groups and the responses that they have prepared or which come up, come to their mind as they participate in the ensuing discussion.

1:47:

By way of format, I will introduce each panellist and then each of them will outline in three to four minutes their research preoccupations with respect to this panel's theme. We will then return to a panel discussion of pre-circulated questions before opening up the discussion to questions and answers from the audience. Let me turn to the biographies presented in alphabetical order. Thank you so much.

2:12:

So, first we have there, from left to right in clockwise, the top left corner, Dr. Sarah Cushman. Sarah's director of the Holocaust Educational Foundation at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois and a lecturer in the History Department at Northwestern. The Holocaust Educational Foundation of Northwestern University advances Holocaust education at the university level throughout the world by supporting scholarship and teaching. Dr. Cushman has been involved in Holocaust education scholarship for two decades, serving as director of Youth Education at the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Centre of Long Island and as head of educational programming at the Strassler Centre for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Clark University. Her research centres on women's experiences during the Holocaust and the history of women's care in Auschwitz-Birkenau. She's currently working on her first book, *Auschwitz: The Women's Camp*, which is an adaptation of her dissertation. Dr. Cushman has written several articles related to this topic, including an overview of the history of the women's camp, an analysis of Jewish women

prisoner functionaries and an exploration of women's experiences of sexual violence and sexual agency.

3:25:

Our second panellist is Professor Elizabeth Harvey on the top right-hand corner. She's a professor of history at the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom. She's published on the history of gender in twentieth-century Germany, particularly under national socialism and in Nazi-occupied Europe and on the history of photography. Her publications include *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization*, published by Yale University Press in 2003, and the recent edited volume, edited with Yohannes Hürter, Maiken Umbach, and Andreas Wirsching, *Private Life and Privacy in Nazi Germany* with Cambridge University Press in 2019. Her current research is on the Nazi labour administration in the Second World War in relation to the labour conscription of German women and the conscription coercion of foreign women workers. She currently seconded as project leader to the project producing the English language version of the multi-volume edition of documents on the Holocaust called *Persecution and Murder of European Jews by Nazi Germany 1933-1945*, published by De Gruyter.

4:37:

Our third panellist is Wendy Lower in the bottom and to the left on the screen. Wendy is the William Rosenberg Senior Scholar at Yale University this semester. Normally, she is the John K. Roth Professor of History and Director of the Mgrublian Center for Human Rights at Claremont McKenna College in California in the United States. Professor Lower chairs the academic committee of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and served as acting director of the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the USH and then from 2016 to 2018. She's the author of *Nazi Empire Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* in 2005, *The Diary of Samuel Golfard and the Holocaust in Galicia* in 2011, and co-edited with Ray Brandon of *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization* in 2008. Her book, *Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields* published in 2013 was a finalist for the National Book Award and has been translated into 23 languages. Her next book, *The Ravine: A family, a photograph, a Holocaust massacre revealed* will be published this month in February 2021 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and a review has just appeared in the *New York Times*.

6:01:

Our final panellist is Laura Sjoberg, a British Academy Global Professor of Politics and International Relations at Royal Holloway, University of London and Professor of Political Science at the University of Florida. Professor Sjoberg holds a PhD in International Relations and Gender Studies as well as a Juris Doctorate in Law. Her research addresses issues of gender and security, with a foci on politically violent women, feminist war theorising, sexuality and global politics and political methodology. She teaches, consults and lectures on gender and global politics and on international security. Her work has been published in more than 50 books and journals in political science, law, gender studies, international relations and geography. During her tenure at Royal Holloway, as the British Academy Global Professor, she'll be working on a research project about sexual relations as international relations and building a Gender Institute. This research project asks about the ways that states affected by affect people's sexual relationships. Most of her research has

addressed gender in international security, from politically violent women to theorising about war. Her recent publications include 'Women as Wartime Rapists' from New York University Press in 2016, *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Security* published in 2018 with Caron Gentry and Laura Shepherd. And finally, *Gender and Civilian Victimization in War* written with Jessica Peet, published by Routledge in 2019. So, it's a pleasure and a privilege once again to welcome this very distinguished panel. And now I'll call upon each panellist to introduce their research on gender and perpetrators paying attention to themes, findings and related publications and each panellist will have around three to four minutes to speak about their research so I will call on Sarah first, if that's O.K. with you.

8:05:

Dr. Sarah Cushman (SC):

So, before I get started, I'd just like to thank Laura Sjoberg for inviting me to be a part of this discussion. I'm really honoured to be here with this amazing panel of scholars who I also thank for being here. And thanks also to Simone Gigliotti for moderating our discussion and also to Josephine Carr for administrative and technical support. And finally, I want to thank all the attendees for spending you time with us on what I think is a very important topic.

8:30:

My scholarship has always centred on women's historical experiences. As an undergraduate I researched black women's experiences in the U.S. particularly in the twentieth century. I explored how black women fiction writers illustrated black women's history as part of an informal effort to highlight the unique and underground ways that black women produced and shared knowledge. As part of a ten-year hiatus from the academy, I returned to graduate school to pursue a PhD in Holocaust History at the Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Clark University. I knew that I wanted to focus on some aspect of women's experiences during the Holocaust but not solely on victims. I aim to explore intersections of race and gender at that dynamic space in which at least part of the Holocaust took place. When I had learned that no-one had written any history of the women's camp in Auschwitz, I jumped on the topic. In Auschwitz a broad array of women found themselves in a variety of positions in a space that was predominantly female. Here is an opportunity to look at the ways women participated in and responded to genocide because there was a men's camp as well, there was also an opportunity for comparison, even as comparison was never the centre of my work. Three general groups of women, prisoners, prisoner functionaries and SS-affiliated personnel lived and worked at Auschwitz. Each of these groups, however, was diverse. Among prisoners there were Jews and gentiles from most countries in Europe, but these categories were also diverse, by language, age, education, political perspective, previous socioeconomic status, all of these shaped how individuals responded to existence in Auschwitz as well as to each other. One response among many was to try to secure privileged positions or functionary jobs, as a cop or a block leader, positions in which prisoners received more space, food, hygiene, power in exchange for daily operation of the camp. These positions offered prisoners a greater opportunity to survive. The deal, however, was not an easy one. Prisoners often had and many chose to treat other prisoners with violence. Again, these groups were diverse... Great thanks, so I'll just pick up. So, the positions, these positions, so the functionary positions offered prisoners a greater opportunity to survive. The deal, however, wasn't an easy one. Prisoners often

had to and, in many cases, chose to treat other prisoners with violence. Again, this group was diverse in terms of both behaviour and background. Until recently, most of these positions in Auschwitz were thought to be held by German criminal or anti-social prisoners. My research shows that some Jewish women were able to gain such positions within months if not days of the establishment of the women's section of Auschwitz at the end of March 1942. Their survival was not guaranteed, the only Jewish women prisoners to survive Auschwitz were right before the spring of 1944, were women who secured such positions. Finally, and I will focus on these women for the rest of discussion, there were women affiliated with the SS who filled several functions in Auschwitz. Those included guards, telecommunications experts, nurses and SS wives. And I'll stop there.

11:48:

SG:

Great, thank you so much, Sarah. Our next panellist is Professor Elizabeth Harvey, I'd like you to join the conversation, please. Responding just, introducing your research concerns, thank you.

12:02:

Professor Elizabeth Harvey (EH):

O.K. I'd like to echo Sarah's thanks to the organisers. I'm delighted to be here and I'm looking forward to our discussion. I'd like to pinpoint a particular lightbulb moment that triggered my work on German women who were involved in Germanization policies in Nazi occupied Poland. It was in the early 1990s when I picked up a memoir by a woman called Hildegard Fitch in which she quite unapologetically talked about her time in occupied Poland as a BDM activist. She published this book in 1986. The title in English is 'Lambled My Land, Peasantry and Rural Service BDM Eastern Assignment Settlement History in the East.' So, I've been researching young German women nationalists in the 1920s and their involvement in anti-Polish borderlands activism and suddenly I was reading about how a few years later such activism had given way to full-blown population displacement and colonisation in the annexed territories of western Poland with young women, young German women enthusiastically pitching in to support German settlers and to fend off the Poles. So, 40 years on, Hildegard Fitch was still gushing about what she and fellow activists from the bone torture medal had achieved in western Poland. So, this was my starting point. But in the 1990s I was working in, at a time when there were some quite important developments in historiography that were helping me develop my questions and the first was the new research on Nazi perpetrators. So, away from the generalising and pathologising tendencies towards specifics of who had done what to who and where. And there was the work of Christopher Browning, the work of Klaus Baumann and Gerhard Powell and many others. They were rethinking the notion of the desk murderer. They were highlighting the ideological drive of these people, of these bureaucrats, their individual agencies and the group dynamics of the bureaucrats of murder. And Christopher Browning and others added to this detailed knowledge of the men who had perpetrated face to face murder in the mass shootings from summer 1941 onwards in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union and in the general government. So, there was much new work on male perpetrators but there was also some emerging work on female perpetrators, women who had been involved in

sterilisation, in the so-called euthanasia programme, there was work on women concentration camp guards and on SS wives. So that was one context, my work. The other was the growing debate about the wider roles played by women in Nazi Germany generally. There was Claudia Koonz's very suggestive but quite sweeping arguments about Nazi women cultivating the supposedly separate sphere. There was Gisela Bock's work on sterilisation and the notion that the sexism of the Nazi state was a form of secondary racism. Work by [unknown names] and others about policies towards women and non-German women's responses and their involvement in Nazism. So, it's clear from all this that Nazism despite its character is a masculinist and viciously anti-feminist regime did offer German women many opportunities for careers. But this work was focused on the territory of the German Reich itself and didn't talk about what happened when Nazi Germany expanded in the Second World War. So, my topic grew out of this curiosity about so, what happened about German women who were involved in implementing Germanization in Poland. So, I worked on settlements, advisers and helpers, teachers in schools and kindergartens and I explored what they wrote at the time and what they told me about it personally in the 1990s. And I would start asking how far the system of racist domination enable women, German women, to gain status and authority on the basis of being German. I was asking how far the boundaries between men's work and women's work became blurred or stayed in place in the context of this territorial expansion. And I was asking how far German women who are sent to this frontier zone were expected or allowed to join in the violence against Poles and Jews. This work that I then published in 2003 in *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses*. And I'll stop there, and I hope I'll be able to pick up more points later on.

16:36:

SG:

Great, thank you so much, Professor Harvey. Now, I would like to welcome Professor Wendy Lower to talk about her research. Wendy, if you are there, please.

16:47:

Professor Wendy Lower (WL):

Great. Thank you. You know, I want to acknowledge how much Professor Harvey has influenced my work on gender and on German women as perpetrators. Her work on Nazi women, the women who went east was absolutely formative in my thinking at a time, I think we had similar trajectories, actually. A couple of things that I just want to add to her presentation was the fact that the scholarship as it moved east, you know, was able to put ordinary German women on the map of what were kind of the killing sites and the sites of the mass Holocaust as listed in her work and that was also propelled with a kind of post-colonial approach. We started to look at women and the Nazi occupation of the east as a kind of colonial project and once we opened up that understanding of the presence of ordinary Germans in these occupation zones as a full on, kind of demographic revolution, women and even the Hitler Youth and full families, German families, you know, then became part of the social history of those sites, of those spaces, of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe. So that was something that was another, I think another part of our common trajectory and they grew out of my early work on Nazi empire building and the Holocaust in

Ukraine. I think, also, as we were working on this in the nineties, the field of Genocide Studies started to also develop and we looked at more sociologically, at issues of genocide and participation and genocide more broadly and that involved women as participants. I think we were also influenced, I was, in the rise of feminist studies and feminist interpretations of the history that restored agency to women and placed women in history on that blind spot that was so persistent. So, suddenly we started to think about agency as it intersected with the crimes of the Holocaust and perpetration as the act of killing and the agency of that. What are the roots of that? What are the ideas driving it? And what are women actually doing in that, in that so-called project? And Professor Harvey mentioned perpetrator studies more generally and how it was so focused on men who were predominantly the perpetrators but not looking more at a more nuanced way women's roles and their interactions with their male partners, not as a kind of binary formulation of separate spheres, but as Liz mentioned, the kind of blurring that was going on both in relationships and how that, those relationships could escalate or could de-escalate in a particular situation. And I guess the last thing I would add is issue of testimony and that we had an increasing number of testimonies, source material and we started to pursue different ways of analysing it, not only victim testimony but perpetrator testimony. And one moment for me that was really important in terms of this subject grabbing my attention and keeping it for a long time was the testimony of women in these, kind of, West German cases, in these East German cases and various investigations after the war and the fact that that material had been utilised, the fixed descriptions of events that women gave similar to the memoir that Professor Harvey was talking about, but rather unfiltered, rather kind of unabashed, the continuity of their convictions and anti-Semitism. And that was important for registering, I think it is needed. And historians say this testimony of women had to be taken very seriously. And that's all I would like to add at the moment. Thank you.

20:48:

SG:

Thank you so much, Wendy. So, we will continue now to Laura Sjoberg.

20:56:

Professor Laura Sjoberg (LS):

Sure, thanks. And I'm really honoured to be on the panel with all three of the other panellists who influenced whose work really influenced mine and made me think a lot and it is great and fascinating. I come from a slightly different background in politics and international relations with a general interest in significations and representations and frames of women's political violence. So, to me I came to reading about female perpetrators in the Holocaust as one of a number of cases in general research on women's perpetration. Particularly in terms of how women's perpetration is framed and understood in the mainstream media and academic literature. Particularly academic literature and politics. So, we've done some work mapping out three major narratives of the framing of women's violence that simultaneously blame women's violence on an exaggeration or exaggerations of femininity separating violent women from 'real' women. 'Real' with scare quotes, obviously. And also separate violent women from their agency and their violence. Although we've tried to complicate notions of agencies. So, those narratives that we found, we call

them 'mother, monster and whore' narratives. And the mother narrative is how women's loss of husbands or sons or their need to mother people cause them to get involved in violent political organisations and do political violence. The monster narratives kind of come from, I don't those of you who are familiar with the phrase, 'kill the women first', which is the idea that violent women are scarier than violent men because there's some normalisation to violent men, that something is terribly psychologically broken and really scary about violent women. And then the whore narratives are about the word used in some of the terrorism studies link, those are to 'erotomania'. So, the notion that politically violent women are also sex crazed and that it's their sex craziness that drives their violence, craziness, or the other way round. In this narrative are also notions that women are unable to perform heteronormative sexual functions and therefore are violent, so it kind of goes either sex-crazed or sexually inadequate and they all kind of fall in these stories.

23:34:

So, I wrote a book a couple of years ago called *Women as Wartime Rapists* that was particularly interested in these framings of women's sexual violence during war and conflict and then also kind of work on women's political violence more generally. And I found a number of the representations of these narratives in studies of female perpetrators of the Holocaust. So, one of the examples of the monster narrative are the stories of Herta Oberhauser and the kind of surgeries and the collections of skin and things like that. And often she's talked about as someone nuts and psychologically unstable in many of the same terms as the monster narrative is used in their place. Also, there are a number of instantiations that we would classify as the horror narrative, particularly talking about commandants and other soldiers with wives being under the sexual control of those soldiers and therefore committing the crimes that they committed kind of around those. And then there's also instances of the mother narrative, particularly in how nurses would justify their participation in eugenics programmes and things like that. So, we kind of find all of these narratives in the academic and kind of mainstream media coverage of some of the perpetrators of the Holocaust. So that's where I come to this research from and have kind of engaged in a lot of the histories of it really, to try and understand how it's framed and compacted and understood as people read and digest it. So, I'll leave it there for now.

25:21:

SG:

Excellent. Thank you so much, Laura. And while I have you, I think we can start with the questions now that will be posed to the panel and for people to answer these questions and I'll put them into the chat as well, but Laura, the first question I'd like to put to the panel is, 'what is anything does gender have to do with perpetration?' You foregrounded, you know, several of the studies that you've done but also across different, you know, across time and space. So, this is the opening question that I'll post, so Laura, would you kind of mind starting off with that?

25:58:

LS:

Sure. I think that to me, one of the things that is strange sometimes about theories of political violence is that they were written thinking that men were the only people who do political violence, and some people try and stretch those theories to include women, some people try and make a different theory of women committing political violence as if women would do it for completely different reasons than men could possibly do it. To me, gender analysis as a whole is important to apply to these questions, so women and men and gender non-binary people who commit political violence here in Holocaust context and more generally do so in a gendered world and a gendered world that's full of gendered power, gender tropes, gender-based expectations of behaviour and I don't think we can understand anyone's perpetration without understanding the gender role expectations and gendered framings in which they live. So, to me that's something that's kind of important to think about because across most of the context that we do research, there are gender trope expectations, even though they differ pretty significantly in different contexts. So, to me when I'm interested in why someone perpetrates, I want to know a little bit about the gendered atmosphere in which they live as a kind of starting point for understanding what's going on.

27:25:

SG:

That's really interesting, thank you. I'd like to invite the other panellists now to answer that questions, 'what, if anything, does gender have to do with perpetration?' So, Wendy, would you like to comment, please?

27:40:

WL:

Well, I think it really has like, everything to do with perpetration because we're talking about behaviour of men and in women that is, already is, as Laura mentioned, kind of pre-defined by existing cultural context of what it means to be a man, what it means to be a woman and how violence is in the case of violence as a topic, how that is filtered through that kind of lens. I mean, all historical events and phenomena, including genocide, are gendered, they're driven by concepts of manhood and femininity and biological procreation and I think that, you know, in our study of the Holocaust, where we've kind of lined up or genocide more broadly on these various isms, right? Imperialism, nationalism, racism, militarism, that sexism is, you know, a part of that. And that was, you know, in studies of sexism and feminist literature we've seen that kind of narrative, but it didn't quite, kind of make its inroads into genocide studies or the theories of the Holocaust until rather recently. So, we could pose a lot of questions, older questions anew, one could write a history of the Holocaust that charts escalating persecution as that led to sexualised mass murder. You know, you could say, O.K., at this point the Nazi leaders, all men, removed Jews from the Civil Service, impacting male heads of households, forcing German women or Jewish women into new roles. So, we could kind of write that history in that way. But I wouldn't, you know and that should be done I think, but once I think we would get to that point we would also then want to think about how important it is to show the intersectionality of these various categories, whether they're gender categories or these isms. To what extent does the gendered lens, you know, tell us more about the imperialistic drive of the Nazis or their



nationalism, or their racism or their militarism. So, I you know, would make the plea for a kind of rethinking of Holocaust history with these kinds of questions.

29:57:

SG:

Great, yes. Thank you very much. So, Liz, would you like to comment, please? Based on your research what, if anything, does gender have to do with perpetration?

30:08:

EH:

Well, I think I'd definitely echo what the previous two speakers have talked about. About the, you know, that everything has a gender, everything comes through a gendered lens. Perhaps I would also just add, specifically, if we're talking about Nazi crimes, the Holocaust but other also crimes committed against the populations of the occupied territories and against Germans who were thought to be unworthy to live. These were crimes for which, that the whole of German society was potentially being mobilised. I mean, so to speak, the *volks-gemeinschaft* was to be mobilised in pursuit of these crimes and therefore, they are, there's an enormous division of labour going on and an enormous spread of institutions and agencies involved in these projects, if you like. And I think if one is then trying to sort of breakdown, O.K., where are the women? Where is gender? Which parts of this enterprise are being decided upon and executed solely by men, which parts of these projects, so to speak, require women to be involved? Allow women to be involved? And I think, you know, just for example, I mean, and of course, it's not just Nazi gender ideology that determines where women are and what they can do, it's long-standing cultural conventions about what capacities and roles of men and women. But, I mean, for instance, women are clearly needed as propagandists to spread lies about Jews, about Poles, about inferior peoples. They're also required to be part, as Wendy just explained, of the German colonising enterprise. You can't build an empire without women and families. The presence of women and families in a colonised territory indicates that you're there to stay. It indicates that it gives you a sort of, a picture of what you're fighting for, and in the case of the colonisation of Poland with German settlers, it gives an urgent imperative and additional drive to the drive to expropriate and displace the Poles and the Jews because you needed their space, you need their property, you need their land to give to the German settlers. So, women were a part of that, but they were not, for obvious reasons, in promoted positions in the ministerial bureaucracies that were drawing up the blueprints and the laws that excluded Jews and put, you know, paved the way for euthanasia killings. Women, you know, Rachel Century, you know, we know the women were there in the Reich security main office, but they were typing, and they were not deciding. So, I think we can play through the different, as it were, institutions and agencies involved together in bring about these crimes and ask where the women are allowed to be, where they pushed to be, where they are excluded from, and of course, when we come to the actual face to face killing, the general men retain more or less. But of course, Wendy has shown where that wobbles and where it doesn't hold true in the end. On the whole they retain the monopoly of violence. But of course, in these exceptional territories in the occupied east where, like she says, you know, the world

turns upside down in a way. This territory of impunity, women can also get drawn into and they push their way into more direct acts of violence.

33:55:

SG:

Great. Thank you very much. And there's a lot to unpack in each of the responses to far. So, before doing that I'll ask Sarah for her comments, please.

34:09:

SC:

Sure, thank you. So, basically, I agree with everybody so I'm gonna say practically the same way in a slightly different way. So, this part goes without saying, but I'm gonna say it anyways. Sex, biological sex, has little to do with perpetration. And what I mean is that I don't think that women are essentially or biologically any more or less likely than men to perpetrate anything. Men's gender, I think is a different story, if we understand it as – well I'll skip that part. Gender roles shaped opportunities available to men and women in Nazi Germany and during the Holocaust as well as how appealing various opportunities were. And just for example, women could not serve in most positions in the military and in the SS and these were the two largest groups responsible for carrying out the actual genocide. Some military and civilian roles related to ethnic cleansing in the East were available to women and many women seemed to have jumped at these opportunities which were understood as advancing German racist and racialised policies. And these are the roles that Elizabeth and Wendy describe and analyse so brilliantly in their work. Most of these positions were white-collar but some offered violence at the margins of workplace and some women took initiative, participate or instigate violence.

35:25:

Concentration camp service seems to have been much less appealing to women. While some women volunteered for this work there was always a shortage of women guards and eventually the SS had to resort to conscription. This was not a problem for men. Men often sought camp guard jobs as a way to avoid the front. So, camp jobs very appealing to men, not so appealing for women. Even so, for women in the guard corps, violence was part of the job and few of those who took up the role whether as volunteer or as conscript refused to participate in violence. In fact, many displayed a violent creativity that paralleled that of their counterparts, humiliation, degradation, psychological and physical torture, including sexualised violence at the hands of women guards were among the quotidian experiences. Experiences of camp internees. Still, gender limited some of the forms of violence that women participated in. Elissa Mailander has shown for example, that women guards in Majdanek, even though issued guns did not shoot prisoners and we see the same kind of think happen in Auschwitz as well. Women use their pistols, but they use them to beat prisoners, not to shoot them. So, shooting, actually using the gun for its purpose seems to have been an option available to men only. And I'll stop there.

36:40:

SG:

Thank so much, Sarah. Sarah, would you mind starting us off on the next question? 'By what routes did women become perpetrators?' Because, I mean, each of the responses so far is locating women's actions in particular structures and spaces. So, it might be good to start with this question about the routes, by which routes do women become perpetrators paying attention to biography, social structure, occupations, etc.?

37:08:

SC:

Sure. So, I'll focus on Auschwitz, and in Auschwitz women affiliate with the SS filled several roles as I mentioned before, guards, telecommunication experts, nurses and wives. The only group that seems to have had no regular contact with prisoners were the telecommunications corps. So-called SS Auxiliaries. In short, they had no opportunity to be violent. Nurses interacted regularly with some prisoners. Most of them were male and most of them were Polish and these were in SS infirmaries. There seems to have been little violence towards prisoners in this particular context. Most women guards, as probably many of you know, had regular and ongoing association with women prisoners and they used physical, psychological and sexualised violence against them. They regularly participated in gas chamber selections of Jewish prisoners by both violence, the daily violence and the gas chamber selections often led to immediate or imminent death and both could be characterised as murderous, genocidal violence. SS wives utilised prisoner labour, primarily of Jehovah's Witnesses in their homes for childcare and other household tasks. These relationships were by nature exploitative. The inmates had no choice in the matter and were not paid for their labour. At the same time, these arrangements seem to have been largely free of physical violence, a less debilitating than many other work assignments and offered the internees greater access to food and hygiene. Access that was critical to survival. So, in short, women guards seem to have been almost universally brutal towards prisoners with some variation based on responsibilities and relationships with the prisoners they were interacting with. Wives were generally exploitative but not necessarily violent while telecommunications experts and nurses had little opportunity to be violent.

38:56:

My research indicates, however, that when the opportunity arose for women in these last two categories, so telecommunications experts and nurses, they displayed similar levels of violence to camp guards. I uncovered evidence that briefly after the women's camp transferred from Auschwitz to Birkenau in August of 1942, camp nurses worked in prisoner infirmaries. One camp nurse who eventually connected with the resistance movement in Auschwitz, testified that another worse beat starving women with a whip. Very soon thereafter, camp nurses were recalled from prisoner infirmaries. But there is some indication from at least this one testimony that some women from this eclectic group of nurses would behave brutally if given the chance. In the January of 1945, as Auschwitz was evacuated in the approach of the Soviet Army, one of the telecommunications women was pulled into guarding a group of women prisoners as they evacuated the camp. These were amongst the evacuations that eventually became known as 'death marches'. And so, I would say that this is circumstantial evidence that someone, that this woman from this

telecommunications corps may have become violent at one point in her career. I'll stop there, thanks.

40:10:

SG:

All right. Thank you very much. It's a lot of information to think about in terms of opportunistic situation or participation and also talking about the broader approach I think in purpose traded studies about the biographical, kind of, studies that try to map out routes to route, criminal wrongdoing or participation. So, Liz I'd like your insight, please, on that question. By what routes did women become perpetrators.

40:40:

EH:

O.K. Thank you. I've got a few comments that relate, I think, to the broader picture of female perpetrators including concentration camp guards. So, sort of trying to pick up on what Sarah's just said, and a few comments that relate more directly to what I talk about. I mean, the women that I worked on the whole, were not violent perpetrators but they were involved. They were perhaps more, what you might call accomplices of, yeah, essentially robbery and exclusion, displacement, dispossession. But just in terms of the, for instance, in the case of the concentration camp guards, I wonder what perhaps Sarah could sort of comment on this. What difference it made or perhaps it's made no difference to whether, due to the short, given that the shortage or a relative shortage of personnel in terms of women as concentration camp guards, whether it made much difference to how they behaved if they had actually volunteered and gone willingly into this role or whether they'd been more or less nudged, pushed, conscripted by their employers into a role as overseeing women poisoners working often in sub-camps. Because I've picked up in the literature a little bit of the sense that perhaps morale and enthusiasm was not quite and commitment to the Nazi project was not as strong amongst these conscripts. And therefore, that gave perhaps opportunities for prisoners to survive and withstand the experience. If their guards were perhaps less violence because less committed? Now maybe that's, maybe I've got that wrong? But I would be interested at some point if somebody could pick that up, if Sarah could perhaps pick that up and say if she has the impression that that's a hypothesis.

42:34:

So, in a sense that the sort of ideological drive that might have led people into these roles in the first place also affected how they behaved once they were in them. I'm also interested, just on a slightly different tack, in the sort of professional routes into becoming perpetrators. Where particular cultures of obedience, for instance, in nursing and in hospitals, or particular cultures of perhaps disdain or scorn for the clients of social welfare could then interact with Nazi ideology to make, you know, social welfare experts willing to send youngsters to quite brutal correctional facilities or even later to concentration camps. Or health workers to collaborate in pushing candidates for sterilisation towards the coercive operation. So, I feel that sort of professional cultures and professions, as it were, pre-existing dispositions towards particular attitudes towards clients then meshed with Nazism to make it possible for these people in these so-called caring professions to commit crimes.

Just, finally then, coming onto my own, as it were, cohort of young women, mostly young women who were working in Poland, I suppose I was interested in how the situation of being a Roshe German in Poland elevated women somehow to the status of masters overcame the sort of gender subordination and enable them to, so to speak, on the basis of their ethnic and racial status to exert authority in ways that they might not have done in the old Reich. Of course, a shortage of personnel, you know, the overstretch, the imperial overstretch actually also opens up opportunities for women simply to step up and take on roles that they might not otherwise have taken. I mean, my sense is that the gender division of labour did still apply in many contexts that, you know, men were still given the job of direct coercion and violence and women were sort of brought up the rear and then sort of cleared up and made things ready for the sceptres. But sometimes it seems to me that simply, the staff, you know, something happens rapidly, you're short of staff. The police take along a group of women who actually get involved in expelling Poles from their farms and homes, who are there to stop the Poles from taking the stuff with them. So, they become actually quite hands on alongside the police at the scene of expulsions. And these seem to me moments where the boundaries between male work and female work start to break down. Partly because of this sort of supposed urgency of the task and partly because of the status of Roche Germans in this colonised territory.

45:34:

SG:

Great, thank you. Sarah, would you like to comment and respond to Liz's question before we move on to Wendy?

45:43:

SC:

Sure, yeah. I think just with regard to Auschwitz, I have not seen a whole lot of it. I haven't been able to discern a difference that they divide necessarily a strict divide between women who were conscripted and women who weren't. There seems to be just a pretty high level of violence all around in Auschwitz. But that could be different elsewhere. I'm not quite sure about that. And I did want to just comment briefly on the idea of this opportunity for racialised violence as sort of subordinating the gender hierarchy. I definitely see that happening in Auschwitz where women participated in sexualised violence against men and also against women. And I think that's sort of a demonstration, at least in part, of women taking a stake or taking a prerogative that's allowed by them being in a racially superior category.

47:00:

SG:

Thank you very much. So, we're still answering, discussing the question by what routes did women become perpetrators. And I'd like to bring in Wendy please for this question.

47:12:

WL:

In Hitler's Furies I tried to kind of delineate that by taking the biographical approach and show how these women kind of made their way to the Eastern territories. To these crime scenes and the paths that they took, different career trajectories, different ambitions, voluntary or actually, you know, deployed because they had the labour requirement in the German system. And I, so I think that these biographies are really important for showing that transformation and that change over time and that kind of awakening or even the moments of these women's lives where they had, the quote, opportunity. They had to make a decision on the spot, kind of ad hoc involvement. But mostly through these different professional tracks. And so, I think that first of all in this history, it's important to look at the biographies because we see we can then chart that transformation and we're not isolating the events of the Holocaust in a kind of freezing them at the crime scene and suddenly people are there and they're active. So that's important for a historical, kind of, biographical explanation. But also, to think about women's history more generally in this case in Germany in the twentieth century, which I was keen on trying to do and that's the emergence of a kind of modern state, the emergence of these different professions, emergence of women as politically active having gotten the vote after the First World War. The generational differences that are there and this overlay of kind of traditional women's history to what extent that intersects with the Holocaust or is transformed by the Holocaust, and those existing, you know, preconceived, kind of, gender roles or gender tracks, how they are transformed or how they're maybe potentially tested. Right? As far as what women are supposed to be, how they're supposed to be behaving as kind of nurturers or so forth. So, the perversion of that during the crisis and the extreme violence and revolutionary kind of upheaval of genocidal state-sponsored programs. So, these professional tracks are really important. Within them they have their own kind of cultures, you know, whether it's nursing of the growth of the modern bureaucracy, welfare work, missionary work, women in, you know, in all sectors of society feeling like they are making a contribution to something greater than themselves but actually also asserting themselves. Now, I had thought in my book when I traced some of the violence of two perpetrators, Petri and Altvater, I looked at their violent acts, Altvater, who was killing Jewish children in the ghetto and Volodymr-Volynskyi and Petri who killed Jewish children on her estate in western Ukraine as a kind of moment of self-assertion and perverse attempts at self-fashioning because they presented themselves in different ways that would be the Erna, for instance, was a kind of typical house frau with her husband on the estate and Altvater was this secretary who was also very trying, she embraced the colonial, kind of, mentality of being part of the occupation. So, I thought of it in that way, a kind of perversion in a time of normative upheaval and then a colleague Elisa von Joeden-Forger she kind of tested me out on that and got me thinking about a different way of understanding it that she saw that these kinds of acts of violence are exercises in genocidal powers, she called it, were about the space in which they operated and what kind of gender, domestic spaces and spheres. I mean, these are blurred in her interpretation as we all agree, these are, we can't draw these hard lines between the public and private as such. But the women who, in this case, killed children or felt that they had the authority and the ability to beat, you know, weak Jewish men or Polish labourers or Ukrainian labourers or the mentally and physically disabled, that that was part of an extension of what they thought was a, kind of an extension of the domestic sphere. The fact that these sites of violence were often domestic settings, the households of the commandants, so the wife of the commandant, so that setting or Petri's estate in western Ukraine in the household or Johanna Altvater going to the infirmary and

the children's section of the infirmary. Those were, when we talk about the opportunities, so to speak, exerting this, manifesting this violence and this power, it's important to look at the settings. And obviously the eastern zones are absolutely key to that as well because suddenly women in this kind of hierarchy of power, whether, you know, existing within a patriarchy but suddenly there's a new pecking order and they can in fact exert their power over this racial kind of inferior enemies, which my colleagues have been talking about.

52:44:

So, the settings, the professions, the various roles and the perversion of those roles but certainly trying to understand that under a broader history of the entire century or across generations, not focusing too much on the event, but putting it in that bigger context.

53:07:

SG:

Thank you. It's so interesting what you say about the attention to spaces and micro spaces across time and place as opposed to event driven narratives. So, as a non-specialist in this area, I'm looking forward to seeing how gender studies and gendered approaches can kind of disrupt, also approaches to how perpetrators are studied more generally. And given the approaches to how they have been written by mainstays in Holocaust historiography, for example. So, I'd like to bring in Laura, please, for her comments about what routes did women become perpetrators.

53:46:

LS:

To me, the takeaway from both my research and what's been said is there's no one route but all the routes are gendered, right? And I think that's something that's really interesting to read across all of these different things. And they're often both gendered and sexualised, which is I think something that's really important to pay attention to as well. But I think that I'll let the other people's empirical research speak for the question and let you move on to the next one.

54:13:

SG:

O.K., great. So, the next question, I'll start with you then, Laura, 'what, if anything, do we learn from how female perpetrators were portrayed at the time and/or studied in hindsight?'

54:27:

LS:

I think that we learn a lot about the ways in which gender was understood at the time and the ways in which gender is understood in our own readings. At least for me, what motivated my starting to research politically violent women was actually my own shock at discovering politically violent women because I studied gender long before I studied

women's political violence. And as I started coming across politically violent women it surprised me and confused me. And I realised that I was making the argument that women are capable of everything men are without their flaws instead of understanding gender more holistically even though I didn't mean to. And one of the things that I learned in studying a number of the narratives of women in the Holocaust is that still some of the, especially newspaper articles and magazine articles that describe them describe them in really sensationalist terms. Like, look how crazy it is that a woman did this. And it's no crazier that a woman did this than anyone did this. It's crazy that anyone did any of these things, I mean, that's awful. And so to me, I think we learn what it is you assume the word 'woman' has particular contents in order to be able to say, well this is how women perpetrators are framed, this is why women perpetrators do it differently than male perpetrators and I think that the distinction that was made a couple of minutes ago about biological sex having very little to do with it and gender stereotypes having a lot to do with it shows that a lot of the representations.

56:08:

I also think that the monstrosity is often played up, right? So, like, look how awful this woman is and also the femininity of some of the women's perpetration. So, I use the example of someone using tattoos as furniture and things like that. There's often a domestication of the understanding and presentation of women's crimes. And then that domestication is made to sound it, make it sound worse. Like as if someone for example, who removed people's tattoos isn't gross just because they didn't use it as furniture, right? Or something like that. So, there's some extra added, kind of shock or horror that we as readers are supposed to see when we associate femininity and the violence and to me, I learnt a lot then about what we mean by feminine more broadly by reading those accounts and the ways that they frame gender.

57:08:

SG:

Yes, I agree. I mean, in terms of the rhetoric of representation, scholarly representation but also even legal representation of the law, this would be, I think, a relevant, kind of area for what you talked about. So, I'll go to Wendy, please. What, if anything, do we learn from looking at female perpetrators, how they were represented at the time and studied in hindsight?

57:36:

WL:

Well I don't think that, I mean, when you say at the time, certainly and my colleagues can weigh in on this, I can't think of, you know, within the Nazi context, so contemporaneous as the events from folding the representations of women were, you know, largely dominated by the propaganda machinery and a lot of the, you know, the kind of promotion, a kind of machine and imagery of Goebbels' organisation and, you know, the kind of mass media as it were. And that, you know, those reinforce these kinds of stereotypes, you know, the Aryan woman, the nurturer, the very things of innocence. I mean, even in cinema, Nazi cinema, and some of the cinema after the war, these various characterisations of female innocence



or those who were then brought into the courtroom like Ilse Koch, of these, what Laura was referring to, kind of, freaks of nature, right? Driven by their erotic urges and all of that. So, there were these various representations but there was no kind of language at the time of female perpetrators or you know, the way that we study genocide history in this, in these categories. Or the way we have this historical perspective that I just referred to as far as women entering into these revolutions and into the modern workforce which included a genocidal system. So, that kind of perspective was not there, it was just, you know, the Holocaust is this massive catastrophe, a world turned upside down you know. As it's happening, I think, you know, it's hard to really try to reify and kind of pin these down because it is a time of normative upheaval and so there are these kinds of aberrations or these kinds of revelation in what we're seeing the capability of women or what's possible, you know, in a particular context. And it's been taking us, kind of decades, I think to sort through that. So, if you look at the situation in real time, saying 1945/1946, and then the pursuit of justice the first ten years of the war, which was the most intensive round up. You know, there were some women who are being hauled into the courtroom because they were guards, they were in uniform or they were nurses, there's documentation because they're in the system. We're not getting any sense of female kind of participation in crimes at that time, really outside the bounds of a formal agency, right? But we know they're part of the scene, the mass movement, the support roles, as we've been describing today. We started to get into that more detailed history. So, that, you know, this is a discovery in a way of both, you know, rereading existing sources, scholarship, the various currents in scholarship that kind of brought us to this point. So, we can't really go back, given that we're kind of figuring this out to say a prosecutor, when I think about prosecutors who question some of these German witnesses, including the perpetrators, that's not, that perspective is not there. I mean, that understanding, and they are existing in a very gendered, patriarchal environment within their own generation. So, if they're questioning one of my accomplices, in my, for instance, one of the women that I spoke to who was a secretary in Lida and you know, she's talking very, in rather stark terms, vivid terms about what she witnessed to the Jews that worked in the workshops there and the thousands who were killed near [Leda?] and the interrogator notes at the end of the file that this German woman was crying as she was giving her testimony. Well, first of all, I don't know about my colleagues, but I have not seen notations from interrogators in the West German system, the East German system. Austrian, or Soviet system in which they make these notes about women defendants crying and the way that these questioners interacted, you know, it is just a kind of soft approach, O.K., you can go home, and the reality is that this particular woman was actually not a defendant but was being questioned about her boss's crimes. She was in love with her boss and she was crying because this was part of a wartime relationship, a love affair that didn't work out and after my book came out, the daughter contacted me through a journalist and provided their love letters all this. So, that was her, that woman's perspective of the war and that, you know, kind of lost love. So, that's just, you know, I think very interesting to also, or very important to, as you're reading the trial testimony and the interrogations and looking at the trial history, looking at how notions of guilt and innocence are very much on gender and very much filtered through kind of the stereotypes of the day. And many of the women, actually were rather skilled if they were guilty of serious crimes like Sabine Dick the secretary of the Gestapo office in Minsk, knew very well how to play that game with the interrogators as far as what their expectations were and could kind of play up to that, which I also think is interesting on that self-awareness on the part of the women.

1:03:25:

SG:

Thank you so much, Wendy. I will bring in Liz to examine this question: what, if anything, do we learn from looking at how female perpetrators were presented? And at the time, if relevant or studied in hindsight, please.

1:03:41:

EH:

Yeah, thank you. I think just following on from what's already been said, I think, I mean I think the weird thing, and I haven't quite, sort of, thought the whole thing through but perhaps the others can help. It seems to me that gender stereotypes in the courtrooms and in the press in the post-war period were working in actually – they could work in contrary directions, both in the courtroom and in the press, I mean, women could be considered because they were associated with Nazi crimes, as so transgressive that they were aberrant examples of femininity and therefore get, as it were, treated more harshly or stigmatised more strongly, or they could and I think that was what Wendy was sort of indicating to us at the end perhaps. They could slide out of responsibility by playing the card of unpolitical woman, ignorant, not interested in politics, not really to be taken seriously as a political actor and therefore somehow infantilised and that was quite a, that was quite a useful strategy to, as it were, exonerate themselves that they weren't actually really to be taken seriously and they had to have no particularly important role.

1:05:10:

So, I think, you know, on the one hand, women could be, as it was, stigmatised more strongly than men or they could be taken less seriously, so it could work either way, I think. I think, obviously, the press went to town on a few spectacular cases but I'm not sure quite how the press reporting of the more run of the mill concentration camp guards who didn't have a sort of big personality or story to tell. Terms of what we learnt today, what does it help us understand? I think it helps us understand generally Nazi crimes and as I say it, and the Holocaust as a project for which the entire associate society was mobilised. I think it shows us the ways in which the dynamic of heterosexual coupledom can be bound up in the with the perpetration of violence. That's very much where Wendy has contributed really important insights. And also, here too, I think we've both got this interest in the colonialist/imperialist context where female agency has been enlarged in the name of the national future or historic destiny and that enables the sort of roles as frontiers woman standing their ground along with their families but also on their own terms. I'll stop there.

1:06:39:

SG:

'What types of frameworks have you adopted in your research for interpreting women as perpetrators, persecutors, and accomplices?' And/or how has your research problematised those categories and/or introduced new descriptors? So, the aim of this question is really to get to the discussion about how we interpret women's role and also deconstructing the idea

of the perpetrator, so to speak. And what kind of language to do you think is appropriate descriptions?

1:07:16:

SC:

Yeah, thanks. So, I haven't adopted particular frameworks for interpreting women's roles in Auschwitz instead I've start to recognise and understand different groups of women affiliated with the SS and Auschwitz and their degree of commitment to the project of genocide. And thinking about this question, of course, thought of Wendy's framework of witnesses, accomplices, perpetrators. I think that framework works really well in the context of the killing fields with particular behaviour shaping each category. In Auschwitz we see a similar range of behaviour from women, from watching to supporting to outright murder. The issue at Auschwitz, though, I think, this relates in some aspects to perpetration in general, male perpetrators as well, is that the most violent group was not necessarily the group that was most committed to Nazi ideology and genocide. So, I think what I'm saying is that there's a difference between legal guilt regarding specific acts and historically, the difference between legal guilt and then historical responsibility for creating the space for broad array of such acts to take place. So, when we talk about perpetration, I think we need to take both of those things into account. In Auschwitz, the most violent group of SS affiliated women, the guards were comprised arguably at least of the least committed people to the project of genocide. The qualification standards for a tangent of the Guard Corps were low and many guards were conscripted. Few were enthusiastic volunteers and even though – ultimately, many of them became enthusiastically violent once they became guards. SS wives to varying degrees for sure, supported their husbands work in Auschwitz. They ostensibly had to meet racial and other standards in order to marry into SS families although some of these people were older and so had been married before the Nazi movement came to the fore. And many certainly bought into Nazi ideology. The SS auxiliaries, the telecommunication experts, so-called *SS aufseherin* were actually female members of the SS. They were part of a corps of women that was recruited from Nazi organisations and meant to offer a pool of potential brides for SS men. They had to meet similar racial criteria, volunteered for their positions and they received extensive training and indoctrination. They also had to exhibit enthusiasm for the Nazi cause before admission to the corps. These are the women who appear in the hooker album eating blueberries and frolicking with the SS men. Actually, one of the photos from that album was on the cover slide for this panel discussion.

1:09:45:

In many ways, these women, even though non-violent were perhaps the most complicit with genocide. I see them as even though less powerful, akin to Eichmann and other mid-level bureaucrats whose hands were not red with blood per se, but whose minds and hearts certainly were stained by the death of many. I'll stop there.

1:10:05:

SG:

Right, thank you very much. So, we'll turn to Liz, please.

1:10:14:

EH:

O.K. So, when you asked me to talk about frameworks, I suppose, I actually went right back to the eighties and the nineties because when I, and Claudia Koonz, because when I started my research, I was both intrigued and dissatisfied with clarity. Koonz is a use of a classic feminist trope which was set separate spheres to analyse women's role in Nazi Germany, and as she saw it, using women's role to show how actively women helped construct the Nazi state. And she used it, as I read it, in a dual sense. Both to mean the older idea of a gendered public/private divide in which women were assigned to the home. And in a slightly different sense, to suggest that there was a female zone and a public sphere within which Nazi women created a sort of world of womanly politics focused on welfare and education in the Nazi sense. So, that was sort of the, you know, the 1980s and for me, I'm thinking about it now, there's some mileage in this of course, but I think we've got further on. And I suppose I just wanted to make a couple of points about where I think we might be further on.

1:11:35:

Firstly, in terms of thinking about the private sphere and privacy in Nazi Germany, I think we now have a more differentiated view of the function played by private life, thinking of the regime, private life both as around to be controlled and policed, obviously, but also as a privilege to be granted and upheld for Germans deemed loyal and valuable. So, you know, private life was something of a reward and, you know, I suppose that, you know, the girls and the men eating their blueberries frolicking is also part of a sort of private life to be enjoyed as a reward.

1:12:16:

Claudia Koonz also talked about women creating as refugees for Nazi killers. Now, of course, there's some mileage in that to this day. We can think about those cases, but Wendy also showed how the wives of Nazi killers were not necessarily just consoling and propping up their men folk but actually sometimes stepping over a whole lot of lines, becoming active partners in crime.

1:12:40:

And when I was looking at women, German women working in occupied Poland, I was thinking about well, is there a female sphere here that they are creating? And I suppose in terms of spaces and settings, I felt that in some cases, yes, they were creating a sort of female world in this occupied territory. The *ostinsatz* camp or the school for settlement advisors and sometimes that was a womanly world and sometimes it was a refuge I think from the dirty work and the violence that was going on outside their walls. But of course, sometimes they were part of a village and they were exerting authority in the village. There was no sort of separate female sphere at all. So, I suppose when you encouraged me to think about frameworks, those are the sort of frameworks I was thinking about and that's sort of where I've got to since.

1:13:42:

SG:

Wendy, would you like to comment, please?

1:13:45:

WL:

I think the field has started to expand the ideas of female participation in a much broader kind of nuanced way which is, and of course, Liz is just talking about the spheres argument that goes back to Claudia Koonz's work although she was a great, she did some masterful work, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, and she did tease out, as did Gitta Sereny the kind of dynamic between the men and the women and started to understand that as a force unto itself. Whether it was a normalising force or a radicalising force. But that was important to show the importance of those relationships. But this idea of women participating in all these different ways is important to delineate, to find these patterns because we can then look at other cases of genocide and see some similarity as far as spaces where women tend to achieve more power and exert more power and kind of purity and pains and demographic campaigns. Education and indoctrination, so active in the schools, active in the propaganda ministries, in the administration of persecutory measures, kind of bureaucratic functions in the consumption, the looting of victims' property and its redistribution. Also, in the suppression of the crimes by destroying the evidence as a kind of clerical undertaking as well and providing alibis after the war for their perpetrator colleagues and mates. I don't think that women's perpetrator motivation differs much from men's. I mean, they're human beings. They share similar emotions, ambitions and desires, fear, hate, greed, status seeking, attention seeking, ideological convictions, nationalism, imperialism, anti-Semitism, racism. So, to try to, you know, draw comparisons between men and women and argue, you know, overstate some of those differences is potentially not. I think the patterns are useful to discern because I think it will help us in these other cases. We look at Cambodia, you look at Rwanda, you look at ISIS and terrorist organisations. How is it that in these other contexts, women kind of find their way.

1:16:11:

And lastly, I really liked Sarah's comment, too, about being clear about legal culpability versus kind of, more broad responsibility for being, participating in these regimes. So, although my book had those categories, victim, perpetrator, bystander, accomplice. And those are useful when you're trying to determine that kind of criminal guilt. It's not helpful as historians and also in our work trying to compare to other genocides. And even for the women who come out of those regimes, to accept responsibility and participate in the redress and participate in the post-war aftermath history in more active ways of memorialisation and education so forth. So, the Nazi example, I think when we move into a broader understanding of the history of women's responsibility for the Nazi debacle, you know, instead of narrowly defined by these criminal categories, that I think is really important for prevention and for writing the histories of other genocides as well.

1:17:20:

SG:

All right, excellent. Thank you. So, we will turn to Laura, please, for your comments.

1:17:26:

LS:

I think that one of the things that I've learnt both from the work of other speakers on the panel and more generally from my research is that there's a deep problem with the kind of taking for granted the victim perpetrator dichotomy. So, that is in political science, at least, sometimes there's victim status which is used to excuse perpetration. So, like, this person isn't a perpetrator because they were victimised first, or if you're a perpetrator your victimhood is not understood and if you're a victim then your perpetration is excluded. And, to me, one of the overlaps in a lot of these categories are important to pay attention to, right? It doesn't make you without agency to have been victimised and then become a perpetrator. Likewise, many people in the course of perpetration also endure significant abuse and that's the case in a lot of these accounts especially of women in prison guard positions, lower prison guard positions, things like that. So, one thing I think that I've learned is that I kind of got into the field telling myself stories of idealised victims and idealised perpetrators and when I go looking for any of those they don't really exist. And instead, you see these very messy stories where victimhood, perpetration and moral responsibility kind of overlap and end up being messy and confusing much more often than they're straightforward. And I think that that to me, along with thinking about the world that these people live in, is a gendered world like the world that we live in. I think they're important kind of frameworks to me.

1:19:16:

SG:

Excellent. Thank you so much, Laura, and to all the panellists for answering these questions and I would like to in the time we have left, open up the discussion to attendees and you can ask a question either by raising your hand or typing a question into the chat. So, we'll have around ten minutes or so for questions or comments. If there are any, but I think I would just like to ask a general question to the panel. I think, you know, from listening to your discussion tonight, it's so varied and so rich and deep and it's kind of impossible to kind of generalise about the topic. And as Wendy said as well, in terms of casting a long net, a historical temporal view, but also situating women's kind of, roles in so far as the particular context but opportunities and structures in which they operate. So, that's just putting a comment to the panel. But we have a question that I'd like to ask. And it's, I was very interested from Kate Docking by Professor Lower's comment about linking the history of female perpetrators with the move towards recovering women's history. Traditionally, this style of writing has praised the action of women. Can we then apply this approach to female perpetrators of the Holocaust given that the behaviour doesn't deserve celebrating? Is this perhaps a new brand of recovery history with different aims?

1:20:58:

WL:

So, I think that undertaking this work is not, well should not be driven by a sense that any of our subjects should be celebrated, or it's an attempt to kind of reconstruct what happened as much as possible and those subjects of the past, you know, we can judge them once we put the story together. We can pass some judgement on them, especially these women who committed this violence, and committed these crimes. But I don't think of agency in that qualitative way or even women's history as a story of while there's been much progress in the twentieth century in particular, that is not the only story. And we know in historical studies more generally that to buy into a kind of teleological narrative of advance and progress, you know, overly, too rigidly, obviously is a distortion of the past and we're looking to represent it as close to reality as possible which is obviously not that simple. So, I don't think of women's history or men's history or the history of western civilisation or global history as having any kind of underlying spirit to it. Good or bad, but to look at these episodes and these events in this case of genocide as growing out of this history of both an idea of a utopian progressive world or one that fights against that. So, we can't really – there are modern forces here, anti-modern forces, progressive, liberal, illiberal forces and where we situate women in that historically is really about how they behave in their terms in the documentation we can find of their actual behaviour but not whether or not it conforms to some sort of expectation of nurturing or progressive or success. The march of the empowerment of women is about increasing agency and examining to what extent that empowerment was utilised for good or negative.

1:23:37:

SG:

Thank you, Wendy. We have a question, a raised hand from Jonathan Leider Maixner, are you there please, Jonathan? Could you please ask your question?

1:23:48:

Jonathan Leider Maixner:

Yes. So, I'm a comparative scholar of genocide and mass killing, and I work on them – I'm just finishing a book on the role of ideology and in a lot of this scholarship there's been renewed emphasis placed on the link between processes of militarisation and securitisation in genocide and mass killing. And obviously militarisation and securitisation itself is highly gendered as much of your work between you shows. And I'm wondering if this means that the role of, as it were, war-waging, multiple short calls, genocide, a form of degenerate war – I'm wondering if the role of war-waging is very different, sort of female perpetrators precisely because of the way in which war-waging is gendered? So, put really bluntly, is female perpetration of the Holocaust much less linked to the notion of waging war than male perpetration of the Holocaust? Or is this a bit of a false distinction? Is that not a helpful distinction to be made? It was a really great panel discussion as well. So, thanks very much.

1:24:46:

SG:

Thank you so much, Jonathan. Who would like to answer that question? We have Wendy, Liz, Sarah or Laura?

1:24:54:

LS:

So, I think that my answer to it has a lot to do with thinking about the way that war at home rhetoric ends up playing a significant role in women's behaviour in war and conflict more generally and certainly in the Nazi war effort, right? So, like, one of the trends that international relations scholars recognise is that women have a more active role in all aspects of society often during war and conflict. And they do because there's some gender role exceptionalism that comes up during conflict that says 'alright, well this situation is desperate enough that women can be people, too.' Right? And then that's probably a crude generalisation but I think that, in a lot of sense it's actually exactly the militarism and the kind of war attitude that ends up causing the openness of places for women to get involved. Right? In more ways than maybe they would have when war rhetoric wasn't happening. So that's, I think my related observation.

1:26:05:

SG:

Thank you very much. We'll just move on to some additional questions given the time. Theoretically at the end but hopefully take a few more questions. This one is a Holocaust related question from Marion Kaplan. 'Thank you all very much. I'm interested in how these women treated children, Jewish and Roma. I assume incorrectly? That women may have had some jobs related to children, those who were not immediately murdered.' Would Wendy or Liz or Sarah like to comment on that?

1:26:

WL:

What if I say that I mentioned this a little bit in the other part of the programme as far as this pattern of, which goes back to pre-existing kinds of roles and spaces and women in the household, women as the nurturers, the maternal figure and how that kind of overlaps with these professional tracks, right? So, the welfare work, the work in that we know, we know one of the few defendants in government in Nuremberg, she was in the Race and Resettlement Office and was involved in these massive kidnapping operations and bringing the children into German adoptive households and administering that and you know, as a welfare worker, Professor Harvey knows more about this than I do but yeah. This pattern and I alluded to it before as well with Elisa von Joeden-Forgery of the women and children, whether they're the captured children who are then going to be put into German homes and Germanised or the Jewish children in the case of some of my perpetrators and their targeting of Jewish children is kind of the most vulnerable or the fact that the Jewish children maybe in these cases felt safer around a kind of maternal figure and didn't expect this German woman to lash out and be violent. But the presence of children within a kind of orbit or sphere of these women's lives and to what extent that they lived up to that gendered role of being nurturing or whether they transgressed it because that child was considered a kind of enemy of the Reich or a parasite, kind of a racial view.



1:28:23:

We also know that child-rearing practices were really important. There's some new work by [unknown], child-rearing practices and socialisation of children in Germany and the perpetuation of very abusive and violent child-rearing practices that pretty much influenced generations that were very violent in the Holocaust. So, it's a really important part of this history and I suspect that if we look more closely again at other genocide research, we'll start to see some of these patterns in either the abduction of children, abuse of children in ISIS camps, sexual slavery of children. It's you know, there's quite a lot there to study.

1:29:11

SG:

Thank you, Wendy. I'm just going through a few more questions. I'm conscious of time. One question is 'where do women prisoners as perpetrators/accomplices fit into the studies and analysis of women perpetrators during the Nazi era?' It's a very big question but I'm not sure if we can answer that succinctly. Who would like to answer or have a comment on that?

1:29:39:

SC:

So, I was actually initially in my comments, but it would have gone over the time allotted. I was going to talk about violent women and functionary and privileged positions and yeah. This is tough. I am reluctant to call them perpetrators but then you sort of, getting to what Laura was saying earlier, I think it's important not to, not to sort of gloss over the idea that some victims, you know cross the line into perpetration and not to discount the sort of, some of the horrible experiences that perpetrators had. So, I don't know what I want to say about them, except that in Auschwitz, women functionaries, prisoner functionaries were in charge of the daily operation of the camp and many survivors recall more instances of violence at the hands of other prisoners than even at the hands of women guards. So, I think in some ways, I think, I guess, you know, at the end of my comments I was talking about the sort of, in terms of thinking about, you know, individual violence, you know, guilt for individual violence versus historical responsibility. And I would say in terms of historical responsibility for genocide per se, that these women are very low in the hierarchy of responsibility. But they do have, some of them were extremely violent and some of them murdered other people. I don't necessarily think that they are among the group that should have been, and they were in this group, a group that were put on trial and executed in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust. But I think there are important people to talk about. So, I feel like they complicate our understanding of the dynamics of violence but at the same time I think it's really important that we not identify them as sort of like, as really critical perpetrators of the Holocaust. I think that's what I wanted to say. Although I go back, you know, I argue in my head about this, too.

1:31:51:

SG:

So, we will go to our next question. Wendy, did you want to comment before we go on?

1:31:57:

WL:

The only thing I wanted to mention is that prior question about Martin Shaw's work on degenerate war or talking about social political responsibility. None of the women, obviously, at the time self-identified as a perpetrator. It was really, like, making in a way, a kind of big conscious decision to, you know, 'now I'm going to commit this crime.' I mean, they're within a historical context of being at war. Of being a patriot, of standing up against the enemy of an existential war, not this where you know, a campaign that bleeds literally into the civilian zones that you know, is behind the lines and on the frontline and you know, so that whole context of you know, survival of the nation, survival of women who are part of the survival strategy because they are to reproducers, or the biological role that they, you know, were expected to carry out on behalf of the regime. So, you know, if they're not understood and we know this from genocide studies as part of this massive reality of mobilisation and participation as a national, even totalitarian kind of participation. If the Holocaust kind of is cordoned off in one corner and the crime during one part of the occupied territories and all these things are kind of segmented, or this person's a perpetrator, that person's a victim is not history writ large. And as long as we don't see it as that kind of broader history, then women can and all of us who look back on that history, can continue to perpetuate that notion of innocence or separateness. And that isn't, just doesn't, isn't real and again, is not going to help in terms of future study of genocide and genocide prevention.

1:33:54:

SG:

O.K. Thank you, great. The next question from Cheri Robinson, 'what are your thoughts on Michael Rothberg's idea of an implicated subject? Would you consider this an additional category that is an additional category that is in addition to perpetrators, victims, bystanders, witnesses and any combination of them all?'

1:34:13:

EH:

I will have to go and do my homework and find out more about Michael Rothberg's idea of the implicated subject. It's new to me I'm afraid.

1:34:26:

SG:

Thank you, we'll move onto possibly our last question because of, we're just out of time. There's quite a few more. So, one of them is 'the study of race, rescuers, upstanders, detailed contextual training skills, opportunity and character traits such as the altruistic personality as factors leading to action. Can these categories be applied to understanding female perpetration?'

1:34:57:

WL:

I'm not sure, maybe he can clarify the connection between altruism, you know, being a positive trait and how, that's how I want that to illuminate actual perpetrators.

1:35:11:

Harold Marcuse:

Basically, that the altruistic personality but that there's a trader personality, as sort of a suite of personality traits that are more common among female perpetrators than amongst the population at large or the female population at large.

1:35:30:

WL:

So, we know from these various studies that they're, you know, a minority and are the, you know, if you look at the proportioning, proportional against the side, a minority are like, the hardcore killers and a minority are the, you know, courageous, kind of rescuers and there's everybody in-between and we're pretty much, even though this panel is about female perpetrators, we talk about women we're pretty much talking about everybody in-between. And although they are obviously represented in those other, kind of, minority categories of, or smaller percentages of the rescuers and hardcore killers on the side of rescue. People have tried to figure out, you know, what is it that drove that behaviour of altruism as you say. In the same way we try to understand motivation of perpetrators and you know, as I mentioned before, the women shared the same kinds of motivations that men did in terms of their emotions and their drives and what they were capable of doing. But it does have this kind of, gendered element whether it's things happening in the domestic sphere or patterns of perpetration vis-à-vis children or perversions of kind of, gendered roles but I don't think that we've come up with any kind of, understanding of a female perpetrator type that, in a way, we've looked at kind of altruistic, the tendency towards altruism in the way that person was kind of raised or so forth. That, to me, I couldn't speak to. Maybe one of my colleagues has a sense of that kind of type?

1:37:16:

EH:

I think it's conceivable. One could develop a typology of that. It's not something that I've tried to do. I think the study of the, you know, Wendy's sort of approach to biographies is really important. I also tried to map common elements and differences in terms of trading and skills and opportunity. But I think yeah, that's an interesting suggestion. I'm sure we can think about, you know, go away and think about it. But it's certainly not a framework that I've tried to use in my own work.

1:37:57:

SG:

O.K., great. Thanks. Just by way of closing this panel, I'd just like to ask the panellists to briefly, if possible, offer if there are any areas in research on gender and perpetrators that merit further studies from scholars and if so, what are they? So, we can start with Laura, if you're there.

1:38:23:

LS:

I think that there are a lot of them. To me, I'm interested in the way that women's sexual violence is framed differently and understood differently than other political violence that women commit. I've recently become interested in the way that sexual violence and reproductive violence overlap. So, those are kind of the questions that I have going forward in the near future.

1:38:48:

SG:

Excellent. Thank you very much. Sarah, do you have any comments about that?

1:38:55:

SC:

Yeah. I'm also interested in women as perpetrators of sexualised violence. And I think there's, to my knowledge there's very little, actually it's very little work that's been done about the Holocaust. But I also haven't seen a whole lot of witness testimony about it either, so that's something that I'm looking into. And then I think also, just for me with regard to Auschwitz, I'm really interested in, you know, both Wendy and then Elissa Mailänder and some others have explored some of the gender dynamics between men and women in the context of killing sites. And I haven't really been able to find a whole lot of information about that, about Auschwitz, but I would love to think, that's an area that could produce some really interesting scholarship.

1:39:49:

SG:

That's great. Thank you very much. And Liz, please.

1:39:55:

EH:

I suppose one thing that occurred to me is that it's not that there's no work being done. Andrea Petó is working on arrow cross women in Hungary but the larger picture of collaboration, women and collaboration across occupied Europe, I mean, thinking still about Nazism and the Second World War. But I think that perhaps there is room for some more comparative work on female collaborators in the occupied countries. However rare they may have been in terms of their activism within the native fascist movements across these different occupied countries or allied countries like Romania.

1:40:38:

SG:

Thank you very much. And Wendy, please.

1:40:41:

WL:

O.K., great. Thanks. So, one of the issues I brought up at the beginning, which I think, just to integrate, you know, to show how gender studies on kind of sexism of the time intersects with these other isms to put this reality, kind of sexism in the kind of, the discourse, the more predominant discourse of nationalism, militarism, anti-Semitism, racism and to you know, have it kind of be part of those explanations in a more integrated and more prominent way. And then Liz mentioned, you know, non-German women and including ethnic German women who were in these territories in the eastern zones and you know, to look more closely at how these women were kind of socialised and those different paths that we talked about kind of biographically. And then I guess, also something, a couple of things I'm intrigued by. First of all, this more in the private realm and more intimate realm, or impersonal realm of relationships and also households you know, domestic violence, marital rape, and things that are going on that are maybe priming certain societies to accept women in violent settings or violence more generally. Whether it's a male head of household needing it out or a woman at home who's kind of complicit in that as well. So that's, those are some of the areas – I also came across some really interesting divorce records in Munich that go from 1900 to 1945. There are all these cases, right? That would be interesting to see how women navigated the situation through these mechanisms of marriage and divorce during the Nazi era immediately at the end of the regime. So, these kinds of, where can women kind of navigate a system, right? Not just professional paths, but what are the spaces where they can actually, or in the churches or something, actually where we can find more full expression of their reaction and their involvement to the Nazi so-called revolution.

1:43:19:

SG:

Well thank you to the panellists for a provocative, informative and enriching panel and also to Laura Sjoberg of the Gender Institute, to the Holocaust Research Institute and Centre for International Security for co-sponsoring this panel. And once again, to the panellists for their preparation and of course, their scholarship. Long may it continue.