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“Ordinary Women” or Female Perpetrators?

The German Female Employees in the German Courts of the General Government (1939–1944)

Abstract

This article provides an initial overview of the German female staff who were employed in German courts across the General Government during the Nazi occupation of Poland, through the prism of twenty-four women and their personal files. At the onset of the occupation, the occupiers quickly established a dense network of legal institutions with the purpose, as this article argues, to establish a sense of “law and order” and normalcy within all spheres of society. With a focus on the Special Courts and German Courts across all five respective districts, this article traces the demographic, personal, and professional background of these German women. It inquires why they were transferred to the General Government and eventually returned to the Reich as late as in the summer of 1944, when the German legal institutions were evacuated. In a further step, their careers and lives throughout the occupation are outlined, through which networks among the German administrative staff become visible. This prism is especially insightful since the German legal sphere in the General Government was a male-dominated work field. However, these women played a decisive role in maintaining and operating the German prosecution of defendants of all ethnic backgrounds. In this way, this article explores the extent to which the female staff can be considered as perpetrators similar to their male counterparts, or what Hannah Arendt coined as “desk murderers”.¹

These men and women of the German administration made a significant contribution to the implementation of the Holocaust, challenged, promoted and largely organised it themselves. Without them, the genocide of the Jews would not have been possible.²

After the invasion of the Second Polish Republic by the German Reich on 1 September 1939, and the subsequent capitulation of Warsaw, Adolf Hitler decreed the establishment of the so-called “General Government for the Occupied Polish Territories”³ on 12 October 1939. Furthermore, he appointed his personal legal adviser and primary lawyer of the National Socialist German Workers Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, NSDAP), Hans Frank, as the Governor of the General Government. It was inhabited by approximately eleven million people and di-

- 1 First mentioned in Hannah Arendt’s introduction to Bernd Naumann’s report on the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt between 1963 and 1965. Cf. Bernd Naumann, *Auschwitz: A Report on the Proceedings against Robert Karl Ludwig Mulka and Others before the Court at Frankfurt* (New York, Washington, and London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), xx–xxvi.
- 2 Stephan Lehnstaedt, “‘Ostnieten’ oder Vernichtungsexperten? Die Auswahl deutscher Staatsdiener für den Einsatz im Generalgouvernement Polen 1939–1944”, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 9, no. 51 (2007): 701.
- 3 Karol Marian Pospieszalski, ed., *Nazi Occupation “Law” in Poland*, Selected Documents, Part II, The General Government (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 2019), 50.

vided into four districts for administrative purposes, which were named after its largest cities: Warsaw, Cracow, Lublin, and Radom.⁴

As a result of the occupation, one of the several administrative areas that underwent significant changes was the jurisprudence under which Poles, ethnic Germans, and Jews were summoned to live. Frank decreed the establishment of a German legal infrastructure within just months of occupying these Polish territories – at first primarily in its district capitals, after which they were expanded to include larger cities across all districts, resulting in over a dozen German courts which operated during the war years.

Bearing in mind the limitations of this article and the limited existing research on the role of women in the German judiciary during National Socialism, this article seeks to give a first insight into women's contributions to these judicial operations alongside their male colleagues. It aims to explain the role that gender played in this facet of prosecution, considering that the women's lives and careers were socially, culturally, and economically influenced by the ideologies, propaganda, and subsequent demands of National Socialism.⁵ As the war front travelled east, so did the German staff, first to annexed and occupied Poland and then, towards the end of 1941, to the occupied Soviet territories, such as the district of Galicia. As Rachel Century laid out, the female staff perceived these areas as less favourable compared to deployments to Denmark, which they referred to as the "cream and bacon front".⁶

The network of German legal institutions was operated by German lawyers, judges, barristers, and state prosecutors, who were transferred to the General Government by the Reich Ministry of Justice from various legal institutions in the Reich. They passed thousands of legally binding verdicts, which were largely based on newly formed wartime decrees that would nowadays be classified as unlawful. As such, the question arises as to what extent they can be considered perpetrators in what Hannah Arendt coined a "bureaucracy of murder", which turned the legal staff into "modern, state-employed mass murderers" in the form of "desk perpetrators".⁷ As further alluded to in its title, this article also challenges the spectrum of the female employees of German courts across the General Government, from being "ordinary women" to perpetrators of the Holocaust. They became perpetrators through obedience, discipline, and the following of orders – especially bearing in mind the power and brutality of these courts and their legal decisions in occupied Poland, ranging from the passing of monetary fines to extensive prison and penitentiary sentences, and thousands of death penalties. These categorisations of and debates on German perpetrators lean on Christopher Browning's compelling findings on the "ordinary men"⁸ of the Reserve Police Battalion 101 in the Reichsgau Wartheland, and they further challenge the extent to which his approach and theories also apply to women. Wendy Lower estimated that, overall, at least half a million German women went east, and 14,000 women and men were employed in the administration of the General Government alone.⁹ As Stephan Lehnstaedt so poignantly points out in the opening quo-

4 Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims: The Establishment of the New Order* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974), 86.

5 Cf. Wendy Lower, *Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 9.

6 Rachel Century, *Female Administrators of the Third Reich* (London: Palgrave, 2017).

7 Alexandra Tacke, "The Desk Murderer and the Corporate Executive: (Re)Concretizing the 'Banality of Evil' in 'The Specialist' and 'The Himmler Project'", *New German Critique* 41, no. 3 (2014): 75.

8 Christopher R. Browning, *Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (London: Penguin Books, 2001).

9 Cf. Lower, *Hitler's Furies*, 38.

tation, this article discusses the extent to which the German judiciary and its female staff supported and expedited the Holocaust in the General Government. Through their participation and involvement in recording and documenting severe court verdicts, especially against Jewish defendants, the German legal sphere further criminalised these Jews. Simultaneously, the German administration passed dozens of orders and decrees which ordered the Jews' imprisonment in ghettos for several years before their eventual forceful and brutal extermination.

State of Research

As the Second World War progressed, German women took up various roles as “female helpers”¹⁰ since they needed to fill the gaps German men left behind as a result of increasing drafts into the Wehrmacht. These roles ranged from nurses, welfare workers, teachers, camp guards, as well as secretaries and communicators for the Gestapo and the SS – where they replaced the male workforce as SS- and *Wehrmachtshelferinnen* (female SS and Wehrmacht helpers) and *Nachrichtenhelferinnen* (female news assistants)¹¹ – the air force or the Red Cross, operating radios or telephones. Several studies of German women in the NS-workforce conducted over the past decade, foremost by female historians, broke ground for the thematisation of their contribution to the destructive National Socialist state and the Holocaust. This further applies to studies of the role of German women as the wives of SS men in positions of power.¹² However, that they were also employed in German courts in the Reich and its annexed and occupied territories has heretofore remained outside the scholarly focus – which is where this article ties in as it perceives women as active participants and contributors to the German processes of legal prosecution in the General Government.

Following Franka Maubach's approach of “female participation in the National Socialist war”,¹³ the group of women discussed in this article was directly involved and aware of the courts' operations and power – although these were operated and controlled by men, they were fundamentally staffed and kept running by women. It is difficult to estimate the amount of German legal staff members across all districts due to insufficient documentation. In December 1941, twenty-one men and seventeen women were employed in the Department of Justice in Lublin, thus making up almost 50 per cent of the total German staff. This is also why Maubach claimed that women were “complicity trained in the male disposition to crime”¹⁴ whilst trying to situate them between perpetrators and “ordinary women”, as they actively contributed to the *Volksgemeinschaft* and its campaigns through their employment in the East, including the Holocaust.¹⁵

Lower raised similar debates about women “just doing office work”, clarifying that they were neither just “doing women's work” nor were they “just secretaries”.¹⁶ In this regard, the nature of these German courts in occupied Poland is crucial as they sentenced thousands of defendants of varying ethnic backgrounds to death – and

10 Century, *Female Administrators of the Third Reich*, 6, 17.

11 Ibid., 3–5.

12 Ibid., 131–150; Lower, *Hitler's Furies*, 61–74.

13 Franka Maubach, *Die Stellung halten. Kriegserfahrungen und Lebensgeschichten von Wehrmachtshelferinnen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009).

14 Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, 8.

15 Lower, *Hitler's Furies*, 11.

16 Ibid.

the women discussed in this article were responsible for the administrative work behind these verdicts. They were present during court hearings and investigations, took notes and protocols, typed and signed the verdicts, and disseminated the respective paperwork. Lehnstaedt's introductory quote concerning the contribution of German administrative workers to the Holocaust ties into Century's description of "typing orders for murder".¹⁷ The women working in the German courts saw some everyday crimes, imprisonments, and fines – but they were also present for the most severe prosecutions of thousands of defendants. Although they did not have legal influence, they became part of this "bureaucratic approach to fighting crime",¹⁸ especially since they were stationed in larger cities which housed large ghettos, which German teachers in Poland reported visiting, as Elizabeth Harvey has discussed.¹⁹

Similar to the generally understudied German legal aspects of the General Government, its staff – be it Polish or German, male or female – has so far received very little scholarly attention. The history, structure, and activities of the Special Courts and German Courts in the respective districts were first properly studied by Polish historian Andrzej Wrzyszc. ²⁰ Jan Grabowski researched both the Polish and German courts in occupied Poland, with a focus on the experience and treatment of Jewish defendants in the Warsaw district.²¹ However, the members of their legal staff and their wartime activities or post-war lives have remained unstudied – apart from Lehnstaedt's work cited in the introduction, which dealt with the German administrative staff, recounting their recruitment and employment process in the East.

This article is primarily based on an archival collection of German state records of the former "District- and County Administration in the General Government"²² kept in the Federal Archives in Berlin. It contains hundreds of correspondences between the former five districts and their temporary administrative locations during the years of occupation.²³ These documents serve as a prism through which the eventual collapse of the Nazi occupation of the General Government, and simultaneously its administrative and legal structures, can be followed. Furthermore, this collection contains dozens of yet untapped personnel files of the Reich German and ethnic German staff of several administrative institutions across all five districts of the General Government. These files were transported back to the German Reich upon the evacuation in the summer of 1944, albeit heavily damaged and incomplete. According to the Governor of the Warsaw district, the files were primarily of those members of staff who had ended their employment in the General Government before the evacuation – the files of the Reich and ethnic German staff who were on duty

17 Century, *Female Administrators of the Third Reich*, 106.

18 Lower, *Hitler's Furies*, 53.

19 Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 191–231.

20 Andrzej Wrzyszc, "Z problematyki segregacji narodowościowej i rasowej ludności w systemie prawa i sądownictwa niemieckiego Generalnego Gubernatorstwa (1939–1945)", in *Spoleczeństwo a władza: ustrój, prawo, idee*, eds. Marian Józef Ptak and Jacek Józef Przygodzki (Lublin: Kolonia Limited, 2010), 791–808; Andrzej Wrzyszc, "Nadzór niemiecki nad sądownictwem polskim w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie w latach 1939–1945", in *O prawie i jego dziejach*, ed. Marian Mikołajczyk (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 2010), 417–432.

21 Jan Grabowski, "Jewish Criminality and Jewish Criminals' in the Warsaw Ghetto: German Courts, Jews and the New German Order in Warsaw, 1939–1942", in *Lebenswelt Ghetto. Alltag und soziales Umfeld während der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung*, eds. Imke Hansen and Katrin Steffen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 117–129; Jan Grabowski, "Jewish Defendants in German and Polish Courts in the Warsaw District 1939–1942", *Yad Vashem Studies* 35, no. 1 (2007): 49–80.

22 Federal Archives Berlin-Lichterfelde (BArch), R 102 Distrikt- und Kreisverwaltungen im Generalgouvernement.

23 BArch, R 102/183 Räumungsgut anlässlich der Räumung des GG, 6.

in Warsaw during the evacuation period were still in preparation as of 22 November 1944.²⁴ As these personnel files were kept by the local administration offices, they solely cover the period of the staff members' employment and, as such, do not extend beyond the war years and only contain limited documents and information about individuals upon their employment in the East.

Since the focus lies on retracing the lives and careers of those German women who were employed in the German and Special Courts, as well as in the State Prosecution and the Departments of Justice across the General Government, their personnel files form the central source basis for this article. They provide a first insight into these women's professional lives and careers before and during the war. Unfortunately, their lives and careers after their deployment in the East remain largely unknown, which also applies to their male counterparts. In contrast to insightful studies conducted by Wendy Lower, Rachel Century, or Elizabeth Harvey, the twenty-four women covered in this article were not indicted in a post-war trial, so their voices have remained buried and unheard. Thus, while this article can only provide an overview of their time in the General Government, it delivers first insights into the roles and employment of German women in legal institutions during National Socialism, regardless of their location.

The Establishment of German Judicial Institutions in the General Government

As governor general, Hans Frank oversaw and administered the four districts of the General Government from the Wawel Castle in Cracow, the capital of the General Government. In June 1941, after Operation Barbarossa, a fifth district was incorporated into its territory and named the district of Galicia, with Lviv as its capital.

On 15 November 1939, Frank ordered the establishment of Special Courts (*Sondergerichte*) in all four districts. They first emerged in the Kingdom of Prussia in the nineteenth century to counteract politically motivated criminal offences and pass harsh verdicts with a tangible deterring character for both the defendants and the general public.²⁵ As such, their establishment and operation in the General Government can be considered a colonial measure of the National Socialist judiciary. According to the initial decree, the primary task of the Special Courts was to "protect the people and the state" and to defend the Reich "against insidious attacks".²⁶ Thus, their investigations and proceedings were finalised under extreme pressure and urgency, since preliminary investigations were substantially restricted to reach rapid verdicts.

Alongside Special Courts, Frank further decreed the establishment of German Courts (*Deutsche Gerichte*) on 19 February 1940. Since, according to Frank, the "race" of the offender played the main role for the investigating authorities, he deemed their introduction necessary across the occupied territories since they supplied Reich and ethnic Germans with legal protection through German jurists and German law.²⁷ As such, the German Courts concluded thousands of proceedings in

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Cf. Helmut Kramer, "Die juristische Aufarbeitung der Sondergerichtsbarkeit", *Nationalsozialistische Sondergerichtsbarkeit (Juristische Zeitgeschichte Nordrhein-Westfalen)* no. 15 (2007): 151.

²⁶ Reichsministerium des Inneren, *Reichsgesetzblatt*, no. I, Berlin, (1933), 138.

²⁷ Cf. Jan Grabowski, "Jewish Criminality and Jewish Criminals", in *Lebenswelt Ghetto. Alltag und soziales Umfeld während der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung*, eds. Imke Hansen and Katrin Steffen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 118.

which they perceived the rights or interests of Reich and ethnic Germans to have been violated.²⁸ Ludwig Fischer, the governor of the Warsaw district, supervised the staff, who were instructed to apply German laws and decrees in cases in which German security or economic interests were affected.²⁹ Thus, violations of German wartime regulations were heard by either Special or German Courts, whereas common crimes were still heard by Polish courts, ultimately resulting in a two-tier judicial system in which German law prevailed. Consequently, Polish law remained in force in cases involving or pertaining to solely Polish defendants, plaintiffs, or injured parties.

The German legal sphere was supposed to create a “façade of legality”³⁰ and, arguably, a sense of normalcy and order for the inhabitants of the General Government. However, the Jewish population specifically had to adhere to increasingly dehumanising and antisemitic orders, while being deprived of any legal protection. According to archival collections and the *Verordnungsblatt für das Generalgouvernement*,³¹ German or Special Courts operated in at least the following cities: Chełm, Cracow, Lublin, Lviv, Ivano Frankivsk, Radom, Rzeszów, and Warsaw. Following the establishment of the district of Galicia, three Special Courts were opened on 15 October 1941³² and the German Court in Lviv started operating on 17 July 1942.³³

In late December 1941, twenty-one men were employed in the Department of Justice in the Lublin district, out of which sixteen had been called into the Wehrmacht in previous years.³⁴ The female staff was excluded from this overview but, according to archival sources, at least seventeen women were employed in Lublin during the winter of 1941.³⁵ In comparison, when the General Government was evacuated, the Department of Labor in Warsaw had forty-six employees.³⁶ Arguably, the German judiciary was established as a controlling tool of order, extermination, and exploitation, and as a deterrent for its residents, so that they would adhere to the rules and laws of the occupiers. Thus, the General Government can be grasped as an exceptional legal sphere, since the German administration was able to continuously pass legally binding decrees according to racial ideologies, occupational and economic aims, or the course of the war, revealing its ambiguous approach to law, legality, justice, and politics. This political demand is also emphasised by Frank: in a speech addressing German legal officials in Cracow in early December 1942, he stated that “the jurisprudence in the new Reich must be political or it is not, it must no longer be politically neutral but must be politically oriented towards the goals and objectives of National Socialism”.³⁷ He further justified the introduction of German courts in the

28 Cf. *ibid.*

29 Cf. Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak, *The Warsaw Ghetto: A Guide to the Perished City* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 27.

30 Judith Vöcker, “Criminality in the Face of Life and Death: Crime and Criminal Prosecution as a Part of Everyday Life in the Warsaw Ghetto”, *Journal of East Central European Studies* no. 71 (2022), 228.

31 Full name: *Verordnungsblatt des Generalgouverneurs für die besetzten polnischen Gebiete* (Decree Newspaper of the General Governor for the Occupied Polish Territories).

32 Special Courts were established in Lviv, Ternopil, and Ivano Frankivsk. Cf. *Verordnungsblatt für das Generalgouvernement*, 30 October 1941, 603.

33 Cf. *Verordnungsblatt für das Generalgouvernement*, 14 August 1942, 436.

34 BArch, R 102/234 Personalaufstellungen beim Gouverneur des Distrikts Lublin, 4.

35 German Court Lublin: Asta Pogge, Maria Reinhart, Marianne Schön, Maria Wesche, and Gertrud Zimmermann; Special Court Lublin: Mina Jacober, Eva Krull, Anita Lohkamp, Erna Querndt, Anneliese Schuschenk, and Elisabeth Spenker; Department of Justice: Margarethe Bugdahl, Gerda Meyer, and Ruth Schulz; State Prosecution Office: Irmgard Dewenter.

36 BArch, Räumungsgut, 48.

37 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), RG-15.041M Amt des Distrikts Krakau, Abteilung Justiz, 21.

General Government by claiming that “implementing the respect for a strict but correct and careful jurisprudence is a valuable asset in the control of a foreign people”.³⁸ Furthermore, the General Government was exceptional and legally different from the German annexed territory Reichsgau Wartheland, encompassing areas of western Poland, as it operated according to the Reich Criminal Code and the *Verordnungsblatt for the General Government*, which contained hundreds of additional legal decrees and laws, released and introduced throughout the five-and-a-half years of the German occupation of eastern Poland. Several racially motivated decrees were also not introduced and implemented by the German jurisprudence, foremost the German People’s List.³⁹

The Employment Process of German Public Servants in the East

The work of the female legal staff encompassed varying writing tasks by stenography or typewriter, especially writing protocols during court hearings and verdict pronouncements. However, what these processes looked like and where they took place remains largely unknown. The few leads that the German legal and administrative staff left in the court records and verdicts from the General Government do not reveal any information on the reasoning behind why these employees were transferred to these German courts. They were only mentioned by their position and last name, with no further information mentioned in any of the court records. This vital part of the prosecuting body was, thus, made largely invisible during the occupation and even more difficult to retrace the careers of German legal officials during the war years. Very few of the personnel files of those jurists formerly stationed in the occupied territories are preserved in the archival collection of the Reich Ministry of Justice and, subsequently, do not exceed the war years as the ministry ceased to exist from 23 May 1945 onwards. Thus, their post-war careers and professional lives remain largely unknown, as few were prosecuted in war crimes tribunals in West Germany and most continued practicing law until retirement.⁴⁰

The archival collection entitled “Employment of State Servants in the General Government”⁴¹ allows for detailed insight into the process of seeking employment in the occupied territories up until eventual relocation to the General Government. Reich Germans who wished to obtain such employment had to fulfil a range of qualifications and adhere to a plethora of regulations and rules, which were repeatedly amended and supplemented – resulting in limitations that primarily affected their personal lives. One of the most striking orders was the “Decree on the Organisation of Working Conditions in the General Government”⁴² from 31 October 1939 which pertained to the work hours and discipline of so-called *Gefolgschaftsmitglieder*, namely German salaried workers, apprentices, and trainees. They were ordered to “start the work assigned to [them] immediately and do it to the best of [their] ability”,⁴³ and were not permitted to “refuse or withhold work assigned to them [...] even if they had been assigned additional work at night, Sundays or public holidays”. In

38 In German: *Fremdvolk*. Cf. USHMM, RG-15.041M Amt des Distrikts Krakau, Abteilung Justiz, 35.

39 In German: *Deutsche Volksliste*. Cf. Gerhard Wolf, *Ideology and the Rationality of Domination, Nazi Germanization Policies in Poland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), 114–120.

40 Cf. Ingo Müller, *Furchtbare Juristen. Die unbewältigte Vergangenheit der deutschen Justiz* (Berlin: Knaur, 2018), 264–265.

41 “Einstellung von Beamten im Generalgouvernement”, BArch, Einstellung von Beamten.

42 “Verordnung über die Gestaltung der Arbeitsbedingungen im Generalgouvernement”, BArch, Thiem, 49.

43 *Ibid.*

terms of their duties and discipline, the staff were not permitted to “remain absent from work without a sufficient excuse, repeatedly arrive to work late or without sufficient reason, or to leave the workplace without permission”.⁴⁴ Lastly, all signees were obliged to not “disrupt the orderly flow or work through behaviour contrary to discipline, such as assaults or rude verbal abuse”.⁴⁵ In April 1942, employees were asked to sign a declaration entitled “Declaration of Kinship with Poles”,⁴⁶ according to which they declared that they were “neither related by blood nor by marriage to members of the former Polish state who do not have German citizenship”.⁴⁷ In a similar vein, staff members also had to sign a declaration concerning the “Principles for the Behaviour of the Germans in Poland”⁴⁸ which was drafted in April 1940 by Josef Bühler, Frank’s deputy and the state secretary of the General Government. It entailed that Germans should “reject social connections with Poles or Jews” since “intimate relationships between German men or women and members of the enemy nation are particularly undignified and hazardous to their health”⁴⁹ – even “sharing tables with Poles or Jews should be avoided”.⁵⁰ In July 1943, employees had to sign a declaration on the “betrayal of secrets by non-civil servants”,⁵¹ in which they declared that they “had been instructed in detail about the ordinance against bribery and disclosure of secrets by non-officials in the version of 22 May 1943”.⁵²

Seeking Employment in the East

As Lower has argued, “for ambitious young women, the possibilities for advancement lay in the emerging Nazi empire abroad”.⁵³ For some, this involved receiving training in the East to prepare, such as by taking additional courses for typewriting and shorthand writing, or advance their careers, resulting in some women developing “boundless egos”.⁵⁴ For the twenty-four women who served in the General Government, their applications were neither part of their *Pflichtjahr* (compulsory year), introduced in 1938, or the *Osteinsatz* (deployment in the East), nor were they a result of the “General Mobilisation Decree” of January 1943, since only a handful of them were transferred to the General Government in 1943. Apart from a few senior staff members between the ages of thirty and forty years who primarily followed their husbands to the General Government or had no commitments in the Reich, five women who sought employment in the East stand out.

Eva-Maria Krull contacted the Department of Justice in Lublin in early December 1940, which prompted the main judge of the Special Court, Heuer, to address her employer in Schwerin:

[t]he major tasks facing the German administration of justice in the easternmost part of the Greater German sphere of influence require particularly capable and reliable staff. This absolutely necessary staff requirement is cur-

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 BArch, Spenker, 32.

47 BArch, Schuschenk, 41.

48 Ibid., 28.

49 Markus Roth, *Herrenmenschen. Die deutschen Kreishauptleute im besetzten Polen – Karrierewege, Herrschaftspraxis und Nachgeschichte* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), 34.

50 Ibid.

51 BArch, Thiem, 50.

52 Ibid.

53 Lower, *Hitler’s Furies*, 34.

54 BArch, Querndt, 60; BArch, Thiem, 43; cf. Lower, *Hitler’s Furies*, 35.

rently not even close to being met. I would therefore be particularly grateful if you would make Ms. Krull available for a secondment to the Lublin district to the division of the German judicial authorities to begin her duties as soon as possible.⁵⁵

In her cover letter, Anneliese Schuschenk stated that she “voluntarily gave up her position in the Reich to pursue employment in the General Government”.⁵⁶ She was subsequently released from her position and left for Lublin already in late February 1941. Upon her arrival, Heuer met her at the train station, a special treatment which was not extended to male staff members. Else Anna Diesing was referred to the Warsaw district by Kurt Sender, the first state prosecutor at the Special Court in Warsaw, for whom she had worked back in the Reich and who stated that “Diesing has completed paralegal training and is ready to follow a conscription order”.⁵⁷ Carola Wächter and Margarethe Bugdahl heard about potential employment opportunities through their friends. Wächter was referred to the State Prosecution in Lemberg by her friend Mary Singer, who was already employed there. Within two months, Wächter relocated to the East and commenced her employment in December 1942. Bugdahl applied for a position at the German Court in Chelm since her “best friend Anneliese Schuschenk was already working there for several months”.⁵⁸ However, her employer at the time – a bank in her hometown of Werder – was reluctant to support her application since “she is only 18 years old and is therefore not eligible for employment in the East”.⁵⁹ Furthermore, due to the ongoing shortage of staff, her superior would only agree to her relocation if “a member of staff would be exchanged from Lublin”.⁶⁰ Heuer could not facilitate such an exchange. Regardless, Bugdahl eventually left the Reich without permission and commenced her service at the German Court in Chelm in March 1941. The Reich Trustee for Labor in Brandenburg sentenced her to a fine of 130 Reichsmarks “due to unjustified early termination of the employment relationship”,⁶¹ which she paid off throughout her first two years of service. Furthermore, she and Schuschenk requested to share an apartment in Chelm.

As becomes apparent, these women were desperately needed, regardless of their exact place of deployment, to replace male workers who were already or would be drafted into the Wehrmacht. Eventually, as Lower has pointed out, several institutions were “controlled by men but also staffed by women”.⁶² This created a counter-development or even a conflict with the ideal of the National Socialist German woman, who was destined to be a wife, homemaker, and caretaker of children. However, with the beginning of the war and as it intensified, an urgent need developed to mobilise women to continue filling the voids men left behind. In describing so-called “war women”, the historian Birthe Kundrus has stressed that “times of war represent a social challenge because they required a new formulation of the traditional roles assigned to men and women”.⁶³ Women were accused of weakening Nazi ideology and family traditions and “failing to meet their obligations as a wife and mother”,⁶⁴

55 BArch, Krull, 17.

56 BArch, Schuschenk, 14.

57 BArch, Diesing, 2.

58 BArch, Bugdahl, 19.

59 Ibid., 12.

60 Ibid., 13.

61 Ibid., 42.

62 Lower, *Hitler's Furies*, 5.

63 Birthe Kundrus, *Kriegerfrauen. Familienpolitik und Geschlechterverhältnisse im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, 1995), 13.

64 Ibid., 13–14.

which was why the regime was hesitant to conscript women for labour due to ideological reasons until early 1943. It was then that increasing Wehrmacht drafts and losses made the forced employment of women necessary to uphold and perpetuate the German war effort. However, as we will piece together later on, women were also aware of ways to counteract either conscription or long-term employment both in the Reich and the East.

On 12 December 1939, twenty-four-year-old Ingeborg Randel commenced her position as a stenographer at the Department of Justice in Lublin: with that, she was the first known female employee in a German legal institution in the General Government. Within the first year of occupation, five women from the analysed group relocated to the east: Ruth Schulz to the German Court Lublin in January 1940, Rosa Thiem to the Department of Justice in May, and Elisabeth Spenker, Margarete Hüsemann, and Mina Jacober to the Special Court in Lublin between August and September of the same year.

Personal, Educational, Political, and Backgrounds

From the selected sources, it appears that two generations of women sought employment in the East: half of them (twelve) were between sixteen and twenty-one years old, with the average time of deployment in the General Government amounting to twenty-one months. Only three women were in their forties when commencing their positions: Marie Wesche was the oldest member of staff, born in 1896 in Cologne, and she relocated to Lublin at the age of forty-four. Furthermore, when they relocated to the East, six of the women were married, sixteen were unmarried, two were widowed, and three had children. Almost half of them were deployed from cities in eastern Germany, whereas only five were born in the west and four in southern Germany. However, none of the women covered in this article originated from the same administrative institution or area in the Reich. Therefore, no clear tendencies or networks crystallised when questioning whether their demographic background was a tangible influence on their deployment to the East.

None of these women had a legal background and only four had completed an apprenticeship, primarily as bookkeepers or general assistants. On average, they had left school at sixteen – several even at fourteen years of age – whilst only a few had attended a commercial school. However, no clear correlations between the level of education and subsequent position, salary, district, and institution of employment were evident among the target group. These circumstances contradict the employment and recruitment procedures of the male legal staff and further underline the fact that female employees were employed as shorthand typists (stenographers), secretaries, registrars, telephone operators, and court clerks. The clerks were present during court hearings and signed all subsequent verdicts, alongside the presiding judge and first state prosecutor. Furthermore, their male counterparts and colleagues almost always had a party affiliation, whereas only Elisabeth Spenker had joined the NSDAP in 1932 when she was only twenty-one years old. Within the first year of the occupation, four women went on to join the party: Irmgard Dewenter,⁶⁵ Emmi Siekmeier,⁶⁶ Mina Jacober,⁶⁷ and Maria Wesche.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ 1 September 1939, cf. BArch, Dewenter, 33.

⁶⁶ 1 December 1939, cf. BArch, Siekmeier, 18.

⁶⁷ 1 January 1940, cf. BArch, Jacober, 2.

⁶⁸ 1 September 1940, cf. BArch, Wesche, 6.

Lengths of Service and Transfers

The personal circumstances of these women had a significant impact on the length of their service in the East, although some of these staff decisions were contradictory. In March 1943, the Department of Justice of the General Government revoked the contract of nineteen-year-old Gerda Zang at the Special Court in Chełm after almost a year of employment, since “following a decree by the Führer, according to which underage female persons may no longer be employed in the General Government, Miss Zang had to be dismissed by 31 March 1943”.⁶⁹ In late January 1944, the court reached out to Zang again, stating that “if after having reached the age of twenty-one, there would be a possibility of re-employment as of September 1944”.⁷⁰ However, in the same month, eighteen-year-old Marianne Högnier was employed at the Department of Justice in the district of Galicia, and seventeen-year-old Helene Surmund was employed at the State Prosecution in Lublin as a telephone operator, where she remained until the evacuation.⁷¹

Several women were transferred within the General Government, first and foremost due to changes in their personal lives. Out of all twenty-four women, ten were transferred, and primarily within the same district; only in rare cases did they cross district borders, mostly due to “security concerns”.⁷² No clear patterns were detectible as to why specific staff members were transferred, as they could not influence the length or duration of their deployment in respective districts. Rather, they were transferred according to current demands and court traffic, as the German administration noted significant staff shortages across all departments throughout the occupation. In only one instance was a female staff member granted a transfer: after serving at the German Court Warsaw for several months, Else Diesing applied for a transfer to the district of Galicia for severe health reasons.⁷³

Love, Marriage, and Pregnancies

During their service, several women got married or fell pregnant, which significantly impacted their service in the East, based on varying legal decrees and changes in their personal lives. Only a few women were married before their deployment and joined their husbands in the East: Margarete Hüsemann’s husband worked in a “public economy”⁷⁴ firm in Lublin in the fur industry, Erna Lerwick’s husband Otto Lerwick was a court clerk at the German Court in Lublin,⁷⁵ and Helene Surmund’s husband Hermann Surmund was a state prosecutor in Lublin.⁷⁶

After just three months at the German Court in Lublin, Emmi Siekmeier got married in the Reich in June 1941. Subsequently, according to a decree from May 1941 on the “continued employment of wives of civil servants and employees”,⁷⁷ she was

⁶⁹ BArch, Zang, 99.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 84.

⁷¹ Cf. BArch, Högnier, 34; BArch, Surmund, 32.

⁷² BArch, Hecht, 21.

⁷³ BArch, Diesing, 50.

⁷⁴ BArch, Hüsemann, 17.

⁷⁵ BArch, R 102/296 Verzeichnis der Gefolgschaftsmitglieder der deutschen Justizbehörden im Distrikt Lublin 1944, 6.

⁷⁶ Lower describes similar developments in major cities across German controlled Eastern Europe. Cf. Lower, *Hitler’s Furies*, 7.

⁷⁷ BArch, Siekmeier, 18.

forced to leave Lublin. The same applied to Gerda Meyer, however, as she fell pregnant out of wedlock she was “released from her employment at the Special Court in Chełm due to indiscipline”⁷⁸ in late June 1942. In her official resignation letter, she stated that “due to health reasons, I find myself forced to give my notice of termination for 30 June 1942”.⁷⁹ She subsequently left Chełm without officially signing off or informing her family about her whereabouts. In contrast, twenty-year-old Anita Lohkamp left the Special Court in Lublin in December 1942 because she was expecting her first child. Her husband Dr Albert Lohkamp was the deputy head of the Lublin Chamber of Commerce and Industry and sent the resignation letter on her behalf.⁸⁰

Anneliese Schuschenk married a Wehrmacht soldier on the Eastern Front during her service at the German Court in Chełm through marriage by proxy. She initially intended to leave her position but remained in the Lublin district until the evacuation. Her husband never returned from the Eastern Front. In May 1942, Marianne Schön from the German Court in Lublin married the inspector of justice, Helmut Schön from the German State Prosecution in Lublin, who was drafted into the Wehrmacht in July 1942 and requested “unpaid leave for July and August”⁸¹ for his wife – which was granted, however she never returned to her workplace. In July 1943, Eva-Maria Krull got engaged to Georg Böger, who was the film operations manager for the German weekly affairs news broadcast in the General Government. Upon their marriage, he addressed the Special Court in Lublin, asking for her release so that she could join him back in Berlin, which was later approved by the Reich Ministry of Justice. In April 1944, Carola Wächter was transferred from Lemberg to the Special Court in Warsaw after her marriage to district court director Brix from the same institution.⁸²

Historians Kundrus and Maubach have argued that some women chose to either get married or become pregnant as a way of getting out of contracts or avoiding work altogether – which could otherwise also be achieved through “misconduct”,⁸³ as we have observed in the case of Gerda Meyer. This especially applied after the introduction of the “Mandatory Reporting Decree” (*Meldepflichtverordnung*)⁸⁴ in January 1943, according to which unmarried and childless women between seventeen and forty-five had to report for labour assessment as a response to the defeat of the Wehrmacht in Stalingrad. Maubach has therefore stressed that getting married or having a child even turned into an act of resistance against the “total war system”,⁸⁵ war economy, and the labour conscription of women, under the guise of fulfilling one side of the ideological coin by procreating.

78 BArch, Meyer, 71.

79 Ibid., 70.

80 BArch, Lohkamp, 25.

81 BArch, Schön, 10.

82 BArch, Wächter, 37.

83 Kundrus, *Kriegerfrauen*, 254; Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, 23.

84 BArch, Meyer, 72.

85 Maubach, *Die Stellung halten*, 23. Furthermore, historians Jill Stephenson and Tim Mason have argued that public rejection – since privacy was considered a privilege – was the main cause behind the Third Reich’s hesitancy to conscript women into public service. Hitler especially, for ideological reasons, was against their employment and was slow in passing labour mobilisation orders for women. Cf. Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany* (London: Routledge, 2001), and Timothy Mason, “Women in Germany, 1925–1940: Family, Welfare and Work”, parts I and II (conclusion), *History Workshop Journal* 1, nos. 1 and 2 (1976).

Benefits, Salaries, and other Perks

As part of their deployment in the East, the women received a variety of privileges and benefits. These included twenty-five days of paid annual leave, travel subsidies for their spouse or children to visit them, a daily allowance of 2.5 Reichsmarks, travel reimbursements when travelling from and to the Reich, and the allocation of fully furnished flats or rooms in “female residence halls”⁸⁶ – bearing in mind that these were the official benefits they received.

Exemplarily for these living arrangements, Else Diesing was allocated “an officially assigned private apartment for unmarried German members of staff”,⁸⁷ which included furniture for all rooms, kitchen machinery, fabrics, and textiles. As of September 1943, “all state servants and employees of the General Government who require rest”⁸⁸ were offered recreational stays at health resorts – such as the Krynica State Spa. This offer was also extended to their family members if they had permanent residence in the General Government, and to members of the Wehrmacht. Elisabeth Spenker spent several weeks in the Krynica and Zakopane state spas with her mother in June 1941. Upon her return to Lublin, she requested from the German administration a financial reimbursement for all of the accumulated costs, including all train tickets, hotel accommodation, treatments, meals, and even tips, to the value of 1,214.90 zlotys, which was more than her monthly wage. In fact, she was the highest-paid female staff member of all the twenty-four women.⁸⁹

In addition to their salary, the four youngest women received “child supplement payments” (*Kinderzuschlag*), which equated to more than half their salary. Sixteen-year-old Gertrud Zimmermann received a monthly salary of 289 Reichsmarks and seventeen-year-old Helene Surmund from the State Prosecution in Lublin received 281 Reichsmarks; 180 Reichsmarks of both of their salaries consisted of their child supplements. Eighteen-year-old Marianne Högner from the Department of Justice in Galicia and Gerda Zang from the Department of Justice in Lublin received slightly lower sums of child supplements, amounting to 168 Reichsmarks per month.

Overall, there are no clear patterns visible among the lowest- or highest-paid women within this group, as Zimmermann, Surmund, Högner, and Zang were employed as court clerks, telephone operators, and stenographers and received almost identical salaries. The highest earners were Elisabeth Spenker (378 Reichsmarks) from the State Prosecution and Special Court in Lublin, Eva-Maria Krull (361.56 Reichsmarks) from the Special Court in Lublin, and Carola Wächter, who initially received 301.38 Reichsmarks at the State Prosecution in Lemberg before being transferred to Warsaw. Spenker stands out among these three women as the secretary of the director of the State Prosecution in Lublin, thus perhaps explaining her higher wage. Moreover, her superior justified her salary, stating that she should be “properly reimbursed so that she should not be worse off during her work in the General Government compared to the salary she received at home” and to receive further surcharges “considering the expensive living conditions in Lublin”.⁹⁰ However, Wächter and Krull worked as stenographers but received significantly higher wages than Zang or Högner, although they were only two and four years older. Most other women earned less than 300 Reichsmarks per month, with an average monthly sala-

86 *Warschauer Zeitung*, 15 October 1943, 5.

87 BArch, Diesing, 10.

88 BArch, Spenker, 14.

89 *Ibid.*, 9.

90 *Ibid.*, 10, 12.

ry among all the twenty-four women of 280.40 Reichsmarks. In contrast, the highest-paid male legal professionals received up to 1,300 Reichsmarks monthly, excluding additional payments for housing, spousal and child supplement payments, or “local surcharges”, demonstrating a clear gender divide and underpayment of female labour. Although employed at the same institution as Spenker, forty-one-year-old Gertrud Sperlich was paid a monthly salary of 168 Reichsmarks for her services as a court clerk. Most striking is Else Diesing’s monthly salary of merely 130 Reichsmarks, regardless of her position as the first secretary at the German Court in Warsaw and irrespective of her paralegal training, which she completed upon her deployment to the General Government.⁹¹

Contracts, Future Visions, and Resignations

Several women were given prolonged contracts, indicating the future visions and plans of the Nazi regime for the General Government. Anneliese Schuschenk received a six-year contract until 22 January 1947 at the German Court in Cholm, Carola Wächter for five-and-a-half years until March 1948 at the State Prosecution Lemberg, and Gerda Zang’s contract was supposed to last for almost seven-and-a-half years until September 1949 at the Special Court in Chelm. Similar to the prolonged prison verdicts pronounced in the spring and summer of 1944, these decisions signify that the regime had a future vision of occupying this territory further, which was echoed by the courts’ staff members. Upon returning to the Reich in September 1944, former court clerk Christian Blödorn from the German Court in Lublin voiced to his former superior: “I hope to soon be reinstated in the General Government when the situation improves.”⁹²

Several women decided to leave the General Government before their contracts ended, mostly due to family and personal reasons. Ingeborg Randel and Maria Reinhart from the Department of Justice in Lublin left in October 1940 because of “family reasons”⁹³ and “urgent personal matters.”⁹⁴ Marianne Högner requested to terminate her contract in March 1944 due to “the exceptional circumstances in the district Galicia,”⁹⁵ which her superior commented on as follows in her recommendation letter: “[t]he Department of Justice is very reluctant to lose Ms. Högner especially since her cheerful nature made her popular with her colleagues and superiors alike.”⁹⁶ Erna Querndt left the Special Court in Lublin in August 1944, after submitting several requests to leave the General Government since February 1943 to raise her nephew with her sister-in-law after her brother fell in Stalingrad. In her “certificate of service”, the head of the Special Court stated that “Miss Querndt had to be careful of occasional arrogance.”⁹⁷ Lastly, and this was a much rarer occurrence, Elisabeth Spenker was released from her position at the Special Court in Lublin to commence a position in the Reich for the Women’s Deployment Section of the NSDAP. Only five women worked in the General Government for more than three years, and only left their positions in the Lublin and Galicia districts when the General Government needed to be evacuated.

91 BArch, Diesing, 2.

92 BArch, Blödorn, 201.

93 BArch, Randel, 5.

94 BArch, Reinhart, 46.

95 BArch, Spenker, 43.

96 BArch, Högner, 34.

97 BArch, Querndt, 60.

The Evacuation of the General Government

Following meetings of the heads of the German administration between 23 and 29 July 1944, the evacuation of the German legal infrastructure was announced due to the “current military situation”⁹⁸ necessitating their immediate withdrawal. It was first described as a measure of alleviation (*Lockerungsmaßnahme*),⁹⁹ and the German staff members were advised to return home on various routes. Furthermore, this operation was communicated on extremely short notice, and most German courts had already been minimally staffed as Wehrmacht drafts had accelerated and operations subsequently decreased. Already on 18 July 1944, Gertrud Zimmermann received the following letter from Kiel, the president of the Department of Justice in Lublin:

[n]ow follows the time of evacuation of the Lublin district. The “Gefolgschaft” of the German judicial authorities of the city of Lublin will – but a remaining few – left Lublin on Friday, 21 July 1944 with an evacuation train to Radom. Subsequently, the staff members are on leave to the Reich.¹⁰⁰

Thus, Zimmermann was considered “retired from the judiciary”¹⁰¹ on the same day that the evacuation trains left Lublin. Simultaneously, Mina Jacober, Gertrud Zimmermann, Anneliese Schuschenk, and Rosa Thiem left, albeit in different directions. Jacober left Chełm on 18 July 1944, and Gertrud Zimmermann and Anneliese Schuschenk were evacuated from Lublin on 21 August 1944.¹⁰² Rosa Thiem was likely one of the last remaining female staff members. She left Lviv on 15 October 1944 after almost four-and-a-half years of service, which she summarised in her letter of resignation: “I was the only female employee at the German State Prosecution from start to finish.”¹⁰³ She inquired about being considered for the Order of Merit for her “many years of serving the German judicial authorities in Galicia.”¹⁰⁴

Conclusion and Outlook

By following the lives and careers of these German women throughout the five districts of the General Government over the years of German occupation, we have received a first insight into their personal, demographic, political, and educational backgrounds and how these circumstances shaped and influenced their service in the East. Contrary to their male counterparts, most women voluntarily and actively sought employment in the General Government instead of being forcibly transferred by their employer. Arguably, this was due to the vast variety of professional benefits, such as higher salaries and professional training, which supplied them with more professional opportunities than in the Reich. Several women received higher salaries, local surcharges, allowances, and recreational vacations, which overall provided them with a substantially more comfortable standard of living than the local population. In the Reich, the majority of women were either housewives or received much lower salaries in comparison to the incomes of the women portrayed in this article.

98 LASH, Abt 352, Nr 525.1, Leitsmann, Martin, Dr., geb. 06.11.1889, Landgerichtsdirektor i. R. aus Lübeck, und Andere. Verdacht der Beihilfe zum Mord (NSG): Verhängung von Todesurteilen gegen Juden 1941–1942 als Leiter des Sondergerichts in Warschau, 110.

99 BArch, Hecht, 48.

100 BArch, Zimmermann, 61.

101 Ibid.

102 BArch, Schuschenk, 106.

103 BArch, Thiem, 55.

104 Ibid.

Upon relocating to the occupied territories at an average age of twenty-four, several women working at German legal institutions were both mothers and wives. However, the majority of the female staff was unmarried and childless, transferred from eastern German cities, and with a limited educational background, as only a few had been professionally trained as bookkeepers or administrative assistants. Only a small fraction of women had political ties to the NSDAP before the beginning of the war – in stark contrast to the male legal staff who, as far as the sources tell us, were usually members of the party and additional affiliated units.

Apart from their personal, professional, and demographic background, this article has also revealed the further connections and relationships that were formed among the staff, including marriages and close friendships. Most prominent was the friendship between Bugdahl and Schuschenk, who even expressed a wish to share an apartment, with Bugdahl having left the German Reich illegally to pursue employment in the East. However, their experiences working in a predominantly male work environment also revealed unequal power dynamics within their professional and personal relationships. This was especially expressed when their husbands communicated with the women's superiors in professional matters, or when female staff members had to relocate to their husbands' cities of residence upon their marriage, which was regulated by law. In other instances, their husbands would draft and send potential letters of resignation in cases of marriage or pregnancy. Furthermore, their income was far below the average salary of a male member of staff, especially since they were employed at the bottom of hierarchical court structures.

These varying personal, professional, and power dynamics reveal the importance of studying the women's role within these structures. They were under the influence and control of Nazi ideology, societal expectations, and scrutiny, as well as the male gaze and power, since changes in their personal lives could decisively impact their professional lives – often without their immediate choice or agency as they were legally bound to live in the same city as their spouse, as seen in the case of Emmi Siekmeier. However, as this article has revealed, we have to grasp the women as a vital part of the administrative structure and executive legal power of the Nazi persecution in occupied Poland. As such, the consideration of their participation in mass murder and the Holocaust is twofold. The role and function of these German courts play a crucial role in determining to which degree these “ordinary German women”¹⁰⁵ can be considered “desk perpetrators”, and which agency and influence they held. To what extent can we describe their actions as involvement in these courts and their thousands of death penalties? Through their voluntary deployment, these women became part of the Nazi machinery and regime – and their social involvement turned political and eventually contributed to Nazi government institutions by recording and administering thousands of court trials and documents. Thus, they ultimately participated in sentencing Jews, Poles, Ukrainians, and ethnic Germans to death within a judicial system of prosecution and murder. Their agency within these court operations still needs to be properly challenged; as Lower stated: “[t]he number of ordinary women who contributed in various ways to the mass murder is countless times larger than the relative few who tried to impede it.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, this area of research requires further attention and study in order to determine the women's influence through their voluntary employment within the broader Nazi machinery and the occupation of the East that ultimately led to the Holocaust in occupied Poland.

¹⁰⁵ Lower, *Hitler's Furies*, 11.

¹⁰⁶ Lower, *Hitler's Furies*, 82.

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