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**FROM ENEMY TO FAMILY:
German War Brides and U.S.-German Rapprochement, 1945-1950**

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Introduction

On August 31, 1997, Gerald and Irmgard “Jackie” Johns celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary in Wrightsville, a small town in southeastern Pennsylvania.¹ He had served in the United States Army during World War II before returning to Wrightsville to work at the United States Postal Service, where he stayed for 30 years. She had been a dedicated hand decorator at a local wholesaler of cast iron products for 46 years and developed quite a favorable reputation in town. “Jackie never slowed down, not even as she got older,” a fellow employee noted upon Jackie’s retirement, which was recounted enthusiastically by the local newspaper in a two-page spread.² She was a devoted wife, mother, and grandmother as well, having raised a son and a daughter as well as six grandchildren. Both husband and wife attended the Locust Street United Methodist Church and were well loved by the community in Wrightsville.³

They were no ordinary American couple, however. For Jackie Johns was a German war bride—one of more than 14,000 German women who married American GIs stationed abroad and followed their husbands to the United States within five years of the end of World War II.⁴ In fact, Gerald and Jackie met each other in 1946 during the American occupation of Germany.⁵ He was the mess sergeant in charge of the kitchen at the Kronberg Hotel, which served as an officer’s club at the time. She worked as a waitress under his command, as some German civilians were recruited to assist the American military government in various capacities. Despite a stiff first encounter—

¹ Gerald Johns and Irmgard “Jackie” Stieger-Johns, interview by Ronald E. Marcello, August 11, 1997, University of North Texas Oral History Collection Number 1200, transcript.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Immigration and Naturalization Service, “Annual Report of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, United States Department of Justice, Washington, D.C., for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1950.”

⁵ Gerald Johns and Irmgard “Jackie” Stieger-Johns, interview.

she had accidentally spilled soup on an officer while he was inspecting the waiting staff—love blossomed.⁶ He proposed eight months later.

In 1945, a year before Gerald and Jackie's first meeting, the United States and its allies defeated Nazi Germany in one of the bloodiest wars in human history. Hundreds of thousands of American soldiers lost their lives in World War II, many by the hands of Germans.⁷ By 1950, however, America had lavished billions of dollars on postwar reconstruction in Germany through the Marshall Plan and become the newly established Federal Republic of Germany's strongest ally.⁸ U.S.-German relations certainly took a dramatic turn during the five short years between the end of World War II and the start of the next decade. Some historians have tried to account for rapprochement by pointing to the advent of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, in which Germany—at least the western half—was prioritized as an important bulwark against the spread of communism.⁹ Others have given comprehensive political and economic explanations.¹⁰

Yet another reason that was previously overlooked but has since been given more attention from cultural historians is the development of personal relationships between occupying American soldiers and German civilians. In particular, German women on the ground were intercultural liaisons for American GIs. As lovers and girlfriends, these women introduced American men to a feminine side of Germany that contested its monolithic image as a nation of guilty Nazi perpetrators.¹¹ Soon, German women also began to move to the United States in the thousands,

⁶ Gerald Johns and Irmgard "Jackie" Stieger-Johns, interview.

⁷ Philip Bump, "Here's How Many Americans Have Already Died to Defeat the Nazis and the Confederacy," *The Washington Post*, August 14, 2017.

⁸ Susan Stern, "Marshall Plan 1947-1997: A German View," George C. Marshall Foundation.

⁹ See Arthur D. Kahn, *Experiment in Occupation: Witness to the Turnabout: Anti-Nazi War to Cold War, 1944-1946* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

¹⁰ Some examples include John Gimbel, *The American Occupation of Germany: Politics and the Military, 1945-1949* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1968) and Benn Steil, *The Marshall Plan: Dawn of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

¹¹ Petra Goedde, "From Villains to Victims: Fraternalization and the Feminization of Germany, 1945-1947," *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 1 (1999), 20.

not as ordinary immigrants but as wives and dependents of American servicemen under the War Brides Act of 1945. This phenomenon would have been unimaginable during the brutal battles of World War II. By acting as transnational agents, however, German war brides helped shape more favorable American policies and perceptions after the war.

But neither diplomatic rapprochement nor personal relationships developed in a strictly linear progression. Especially during the early postwar years, American policymakers remained deeply anxious about the legacy of the Nazi regime and did not meaningfully distinguish between Nazi perpetrators and the German people at large.¹² As one of the main agendas for postwar Germany that were decided among the Allies at the Potsdam Conference, denazification applied to the entire population.¹³ The Nuremberg trials that took place from 1945 to 1946 served in part as a reminder of the atrocities that the Third Reich committed in the name of the German people.¹⁴ German collective guilt was debated extensively, with German philosopher Karl Jaspers famously writing that “[w]e Germans are indeed obliged without exception to understand clearly the question of our guilt, and to draw the conclusions.”¹⁵

Regardless of their validity, perceived fascist affiliations also influenced American views of German women and war brides. At the beginning of the postwar period, American media representations often portrayed them as latent Nazis who were subverting American GIs and taking advantage of thawing U.S.-German relations to better themselves. In some cases, concerns about ideological leanings were not ungrounded. For example, since she came of age during the Nazi

¹² Brian C. Etheridge, *Enemies to Allies: Cold War Germany and American Memory* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 44.

¹³ For more information on denazification efforts, see John G. Kormann, *U.S. Denazification Policy in Germany, 1944-1950*, Historical Division, Office of the Executive Secretary, Office of the U. S. High Commissioner for Germany, 1952.

¹⁴ Anna J. Merritt and Richard L. Merritt, *Public Opinion in Germany: The OMGUS Surveys, 1945-1949* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 93-94.

¹⁵ Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 22.

regime, Jackie Johns was a member of the Bund Deutscher Mädel (BDM), the female branch of the Hitler Youth movement.¹⁶ She was perhaps too young to understand and only participated in the BDM because it was a general requirement, but the rest of her family in Germany supported the Nazis. Jackie's brother, who was ten years her senior, fought in the Afrika Korps. He was captured as a prisoner of war and forced to perform three years of manual labor in the United States. When he finally returned home after the war, he was outraged by Gerald and Jackie's marriage and vehemently opposed it.¹⁷ Antagonism came from Gerald's side too, as a close family friend in Wrightsville disliked the idea of a German wife so much that she did not accept Jackie for a long time.¹⁸ Both of her sons had been severely wounded by Germans during the war.¹⁹

How, then, was America able to reconcile with former Nazi Germany and the American public willing to embrace erstwhile enemy nationals as wives of its soldiers, especially in such a short period of time? This essay attempts to answer the question by following the rapid development of American foreign relations with Germany from hostility to rapprochement and telling that history through a sociocultural lens. It seeks to establish German war brides as the main subjects of analysis and agents of change in American discourse about Germany, a nation caught at the crossroads of a Nazi past and a foreboding communist future. Organizationally, this essay traces the journey of German war brides from their first encounters with American soldiers in occupied Germany to their marriages and finally to their arrival and settlement in local communities across America. The first chapter sets the stage by introducing prevalent American cultural images of Germany both during and immediately after the war, paying close attention to their use of gender. The next two chapters examine the broad effect of cultural feminization and

¹⁶ Gerald Johns and Irmgard "Jackie" Stieger-Johns, interview.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

accompanying changes in the American military's policies toward fraternization and marriage in Germany, relying primarily on military documents from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). They also discuss how GIs and German women used different expressions of femininity to negotiate the policy changes, one of which eventually led to the formation of the German war bride identity. The final chapter looks at oral history interviews and press reports to explore individual agency in countering negative cultural representations during the immigration and settlement process.²⁰ Throughout such a chronological approach to studying German war brides, this essay argues that by contributing to Germany's return to heteronormative gender roles in American discourse about the nation, German war brides were able to deflect anxieties about their collective guilt for the Nazi past and gain acceptance as American wives, helping to establish the conditions for U.S.-German rapprochement. At the same time, as individuals, they also had to bear the consequences of normative femininity—including dependency, inequality, and disempowerment—that ironically seemed to penalize them for their ties to the Nazi regime.

²⁰ The scope of this essay is limited to the discussion of heterosexual marriages between white American men and German women, setting aside questions of out-of-wedlock relations, homosexuality, and race for now.

Chapter 1. Germany in American Eyes: Gendered Propaganda and Cultural Imagery

Throughout history, political discourse has made extensive use of gender. According to historian Joan Scott, “[a]nalyzes of gender imagery in political rhetoric can reveal a good deal about the intentions of speakers, the appeal of such rhetoric, and the possible nature of its impacts. They will also reveal some of the ways gender systems are reproduced.”²¹ American discourse about Germany during World War II was no exception. In fact, cultural representations of Germans in gendered terms were well established before American soldiers encountered civilians in Germany during the last months of the war. Gender, which Scott defines as knowledge about sexual difference, would go on to play an important role in amending U.S.-German relations in the immediate postwar years as well.²² Consequently, it is important to understand how gender figured in American portrayals of Germany, and how those images changed over the years.

During and immediately after World War II, Nazi Germany was abnormally gendered in American eyes: it was hypermasculine and grotesquely feminine all at once. The motivation behind such characterizations was to cast Germany as America’s antithesis and strengthen the resolve of American soldiers to fight and occupy the country. It was appealing because it affirmed American manhood and nationhood, which stood in stark contrast to Germany’s deviant gendering. The images produced to that effect became so powerful that in order to ease postwar tensions and create the conditions for U.S.-German rapprochement, Germany first needed to reclaim more traditionally gendered understandings of itself and its people in American discourse.

²¹ Joan Scott, “Rewriting History,” in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, eds. Margaret R. Higonnet et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 30.

²² Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 2.

When the United States officially entered World War II, the government sought to mobilize the American people for war by creating the Office of War Information (OWI).²³ It was tasked with generating propaganda and creating cultural images of America's enemies in order to justify U.S. participation in the war. Among the most well-known propaganda materials that OWI commissioned was a seven-part film series titled *Why We Fight*, directed by Hollywood filmmaker Frank Capra and released between 1942 and 1945.²⁴ In *Prelude to War*, the first film of the series, Capra depicted the Germans, Japanese, and Italians as hypermasculine and ultra-militarized.²⁵ Throughout the film, he often incorporated real footage of soldiers marching in uniform and homogeneous crowds cheering for their warmongering leaders. In particular, the film noted that "the Germans have an inborn love of regimentation and harsh discipline," explaining that Adolf Hitler simply tapped into this national characteristic when he rallied the Germans to become masters of an enslaved world.²⁶ Because Capra's films were shown to American soldiers as part of an orientation program, many GIs were undoubtedly familiar with his gendered depictions of Germany before they even reached the European theater.²⁷

Women were largely absent from American cultural representations of the German enemy. This can be explained in part by the Nazi doctrine of relegating women to the private sphere, where they were instructed to be good wives and mothers and to carry the Aryan race forward through reproduction.²⁸ In other words, the Nazis had deliberately kept women out of the public's gaze. Another reason for the relative lack of German women in American propaganda was to blur the

²³ OWI was established in the summer of 1942. See "The Office of War Information Was Created June 13, 1942," Library of Congress.

²⁴ Thomas W. Bohn, "Why We Fight," Library of Congress.

²⁵ *Prelude to War*, directed by Frank Capra (1942).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Bohn, "Why We Fight."

²⁸ "Hitler's Speech to the National Socialist Women's League," September 8, 1934, German History in Documents and Images.

distinction between ordinary German men and ruthless Nazi soldiers.²⁹ American GIs were taught to treat all German men as opponents to be eliminated in defense of a free world.³⁰ By extension, the German nation as a whole easily assumed a monolithic identity that was characterized by masculinity and military discipline.

As World War II came to an end, the convergence of the German people with the Nazi regime continued. In 1945, Capra worked with Theodor Geisel, who was more commonly known as Dr. Seuss, to make a short film titled “Your Job in Germany.”³¹ Incorporating scenes of marching soldiers and indistinguishable crowds that were prevalent in Capra’s earlier film series, the documentary was meant to be shown to American occupation forces before they entered Germany.³² Once again, it claimed that the German propensity for war was a national and historical character. As the narrator told his GI audience, “You are up against German history. It isn’t good. This book was written chapter by chapter, not by one man, not by one Führer. It was written by the German people.”³³ Military conquests were explained as behavior inherent to Germany’s hypermasculine identity.

Official propaganda was often intensified by personal sights of the Holocaust. Perhaps the most poignant reminder of the brutality of the Nazi regime was the numerous concentration camps that American soldiers came across as they swept through Germany near the end of the war. In an oral history interview conducted many years after World War II, John Harrison, an officer in the First Army who participated in the liberation of a concentration camp near Nordhausen, could still

²⁹ Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945-1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 5.

³⁰ Brian C. Etheridge, *Enemies to Allies: Cold War Germany and American Memory*, 48.

³¹ *Your Job in Germany*, directed by Frank Capra (1945).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

recall smelling the stench of dead bodies from miles away.³⁴ He did not believe that German civilians who lived nearby knew nothing about the camps and could claim innocence by ignorance:

Man's inhumanity to man was so outrageous there that as you walked out and you saw a German walking on the street you wanted to empty your pistol into him. Of course all these Germans at Nordhausen, they didn't know anything about this. They protested it. They didn't know what was out there...Hell, they didn't!³⁵

After that experience, Harrison said he hated the German people and did not want to associate with them at all. He confessed that he still looked at Germans who were his age and wondered where they were when the atrocities were committed. "I don't believe they're good people...When we came out of Nordhausen I don't think any of us were really quite sane again. It was like looking down into Dante's hell."³⁶ GIs such as Harrison were not so quick to forgive the civilian population after the war and continued to view the German people in masculine and militaristic terms.

American representations of German women connected to the Nazi regime did emerge more frequently following Germany's surrender in May 1945, but their femininity tended to be portrayed in a revolting manner. Several women appeared in American discourse as Nazi war criminals once trials began to take place. In fact, the cases of female concentration camp guards that made headlines in American newspapers became all the more grotesque because the crimes were committed by women. During the trial of Irma Grese, a guard at the Bergen-Belsen camp, the *New York Times* reported that she once beat a woman "until blood ran down her chest" in front of her mother because Grese had caught the mother-daughter pair attempting to speak to each other through a barbed wire fence.³⁷ Maria Mandel, who oversaw the women's camp at Auschwitz, was

³⁴ John C. Harrison, interview by John Terreo, January 29, 1992, Twentieth Century Montana Military Veterans Project, Montana Historical Society, transcript.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "Belsen Tortures by Woman Listed," *New York Times*, September 27, 1945.

executed for “sadistically putting 10,000 of her own sex to death.”³⁸ According to a news article about her trial, she showed no emotion upon learning that she would face the death penalty.³⁹ Finally, among the most perverted representations of female Nazis at the time was the case of Ilse Koch, the wife of the commandant at Buchenwald. Although she did not have a formal position at the camp, she allegedly leveraged her husband’s position to order lampshades and gloves to be made out of the skins of tattooed inmates.⁴⁰ She soon became known as the “Bitch of Buchenwald” for her bestial nature and grotesquely feminine behavior.⁴¹

During the five postwar years covered by this essay, however, there was a visible return to traditional and heteronormative femininity in American portrayals of the German people. Increased personal contact between the American military and German civilians allowed women to return to the public sphere in various capacities. As a result, there was more than one expression of femininity that took hold during the occupation of Germany. For example, the American press circulated images of the rubble women, or *trümmerfrauen*, rebuilding Germany with their own hands.⁴² They came to symbolize a dedicated and peaceful future for Germany. But more importantly, younger German women who interacted with American GIs in heterosexual relationships would bring about a particular kind of cultural feminization that completely upended the soldiers’ understanding of the German people.

³⁸ “Woman, 22 SS Nazis to Die for War Crimes,” *Associated Press*, December 22, 1947.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ “Excerpts from Senate Inquiry Report in Ilse Koch Case,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1948.

⁴¹ Michael Kaufman, “William Denson Dies at 85; Helped in Convicting Nazis,” *New York Times*, December 16, 1998.

⁴² “German Women in Building Jobs,” *New York Times*, July 11, 1946.

Chapter 2. Fraternization: Policy and Reality

American GIs and German women were never supposed to mingle. As signs of Allied victory in Europe became more apparent in late 1944, the notion of the German people's collective guilt for Nazi atrocities—and thus their collective responsibility for retribution—had been advanced by high-level American government officials such as Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau in their postwar plans for Germany.⁴³ Diplomatic rapprochement between the United States and Germany was highly uncertain at this juncture. Equally unlikely was the development of any personal relationships, since soldiers were repeatedly reminded during the war that there was no clear distinction between the German people and Adolf Hitler's belligerent Nazi soldiers. Although German women were not central to wartime portrayals of Nazi aggression, they were still seen as members of the general population. Once American soldiers came into contact with civilians in Germany, women became more relevant to American discourse, especially since they outnumbered German men at home.⁴⁴ Their presence soon evolved into a pressing issue for policymakers who sought to maintain a monolithic image of Germany as the aggressor. In particular, young and appealing German women who beckoned to American GIs on the street had a thawing effect on U.S.-German relations in the immediate postwar period. By recasting Germans into more traditionally feminine roles, they shattered cultural representations that soldiers had absorbed from propaganda and personal experiences during the war. They demonstrated that in addition to being enemy nationals, Germans could also be subjects of desire and affection.

⁴³ Morgenthau's Plan, proposed in the summer of 1944, would impose heavy punishments on Germany for starting the war and reduce it to an agrarian society. See Henry Morgenthau, *Germany is Our Problem* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945) for more details.

⁴⁴ The gender ratio was especially unbalanced for Germans in the 20 to 25 age group. For specific statistics, see Dirk Bethmann and Michael Kvasnicka, "War, Marriage Markets, and the Sex Ratio at Birth," *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 116, no. 3 (2014): 859-877.

When American troops first began to fight on German soil near the end of the war, U.S. commanders thought it was necessary to prevent contact between GIs and local Germans for the sake of maintaining wartime resolve.⁴⁵ A nonfraternization policy was instituted in September 1944, when Supreme Headquarter Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower issued a “Policy on Relations Between Allied Occupying Forces and Inhabitants of Germany.”⁴⁶ Citing German attitudes after their defeat in World War I, the policy statement insisted that many Germans would only accept temporary defeat while discreetly plotting a path for the resurgence of German power.⁴⁷ It noted the deep Nazi indoctrination and the extensive damages of the war, which undoubtedly intensified German hatred toward the Allies. It also anticipated that “there is likely to be deliberate, studied, and continuous efforts by the Germans to influence the sympathies and thoughts of occupying forces”—so-called word-of-mouth propaganda—through fraternization.⁴⁸ German children, women, and old men in particular were seen as powerful agents of such messages. Consequently, SHAEF urged its soldiers to adhere to the “avoidance of mingling with Germans upon terms of friendliness, familiarity or intimacy, whether individually or in groups, in official or unofficial dealings.”⁴⁹ The ban applied to all personnel, including the Army, Navy, and Air Forces, and even civilians working for SHAEF.⁵⁰ The idea of German collective guilt was thus translated into policy that affected everyday interactions.

⁴⁵ “Policy on Relations Between Allied Occupying Forces and Inhabitants of Germany,” September 12, 1944, RG 331, (NM8)56, Box 14, File 91.4 “1944: Germany,” National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) II.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

According to press reports from the same month, however, nonfraternization broke down in practice almost immediately after it was put into effect. On September 17, 1944, just five days after Eisenhower issued the policy, the *New York Times* published a photo of German civilians



Figure 1: German Civilians and American GIs. *New York Times*.

gathering around American soldiers in a village near Aachen (see Figure 1).⁵¹ The article accompanying the photo noted that there had been plenty of “front-line pictures the past few days showing doughboys treating smiling German families to army rations.”⁵² Similarly, a *Newsweek* correspondent who followed the First Army into Germany reported that while most Germans were unsure how to interact with American soldiers, some tried to smile and engage in conversation.⁵³ The correspondent described his own interactions with a German woman, who came out of a smashed grocery store to give him a “shy smile as though she expected to be struck but hoped not to be.”⁵⁴ “We like you, I like you,” the woman later told him.⁵⁵ According to *Time*, when American troops first rolled into the German town of Roetgen, a German woman even approached the soldiers with “a skirtful of green apples.”⁵⁶ “Against orders, the G.I.s passed out chocolate.”⁵⁷ These examples certainly caught SHAEF’s attention, as Eisenhower received a message from Washington, D.C. indicating that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had seen the photos and

⁵¹ “Villages Burned to Rout Snipers,” *New York Times*, September 17, 1944.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Al Newman, “‘In Germany’: Some Folks Smile, Most Are Unsure—It’s Like Cold Water in Your Face,” *Newsweek*, September 25, 1944.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ “Germany: Heavings,” *Time*, September 25, 1944.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

considered them to be “objectionable by a number of our people.”⁵⁸ He was instructed to censor future publication of such photos and to discourage fraternization through additional means.⁵⁹

The soldiers’ behavior prompted policymakers to be more specific and severe in implementing the fraternization ban. Within a month of its first iteration, the policy had been expanded to include measures such as segregated seating at church and segregated quarters, meaning that troops could not be billeted in civilian homes.⁶⁰ Concerns about gendered interpersonal relationships were even given their own section, as the updated statement strictly prohibited marriage with Germans.⁶¹ The consequences for violating any of the measures could range from a \$65 fine to court martial.⁶² In early October 1944, the War Department suggested encouraging Americans at home to write letters to GIs reminding them that the Germans were “guilty of perpetrating the war” and therefore should not be trusted.⁶³ Such sustained efforts at maintaining nonfraternization continued into the next year. By the beginning of 1945, SHAEF, the War Department, and commanders of the various army groups in Germany had combined their efforts to circulate 325,000 copies of a pamphlet for soldiers explaining the policy as well as numerous copies of a 50-page pocket guide to Germany.⁶⁴ In addition to providing general information, the latter warned soldiers that “however friendly and repentant, however sick of the

⁵⁸ “W-34308, From AGWAR General Marshall, to SHAEF FWD to General Eisenhower (Personal),” September 21, 1944, RG 331, (NM8)56, Box 14, File 91.4 “Germany,” NARA II.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ “Appendix ‘A’ to Letter, September 12, 1944, ‘Policy on Relations Between Allied Occupying Forces and Inhabitants of Germany,” RG 331, (NM8)56, Box 14, File 91.4 “1944: Germany,” NARA II.

⁶¹ Still, marriage did not feature as prominently as a headache for policymakers until the end of the war.

⁶² Percy Knauth, “Fraternization: The Word Takes On a Brand-New Meaning in Germany,” *Life*, July 2, 1945.

⁶³ “WZ 39847, From AFWAR from Hildring Signed Marshall, to SHAEF FWD to Eisenhower for Holmes,” October 1, 1944, RG 331, (NM8)56, Box 14, File 91.4 “Germany,” NARA II.

⁶⁴ “BX-22615, From HQ Sixth Army Group Signed Devers, to SHAEF Main Attn G-1,” January 10, 1945, RG 331, (NM8)56, Box 136, File 91.1 “1945: Germany,” NARA II.

Nazi party, the Germans have sinned against the laws of humanity and cannot come back into the civilized fold by merely sticking out their hands and saying—‘I’m sorry.’”⁶⁵

Eisenhower and other commanders were particularly worried about heterosexual contact. Official reports on the local population casted German women in a suspicious light. According to one from October 1944, “there is evidence that many German girls have, to an even greater extent than in other countries, lost all moral hold and can be described as ‘sex-mad.’”⁶⁶ Not only were they ready to offer their bodies to Allied soldiers in exchange for material benefits. But having been indoctrinated by the Nazi regime to respect military might, these women were also particularly susceptible to falling for the “lure of a uniform,” especially that of a “conquering hero.”⁶⁷ The report even warned that “sometimes, in the most dangerous cases, adhesion to the underground is likely to be coupled with this form of sexual forwardness towards Allied soldiers.”⁶⁸ In other words, German women could be treacherous agents of the Nazi regime, influencing the unsuspecting American GI to disregard his mission of occupying and defeating Germany, or otherwise interfering with the Allied forces. For this reason, Eisenhower’s nonfraternization policy called for Women’s Services, including female GIs and volunteers affiliated with the Red Cross and similar organizations, to be added to the occupying forces “in relatively large numbers” in order to guard against the lure of German women.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *A Pocket Guide to Germany* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), 1944, 4.

⁶⁶ Lieutenant Colonel H. V. Dicks, “German Political Attitudes: An Analysis and Forecast of Likely Reactions Confronting the Allies in Occupied Germany,” October 1944, RG 331, (NM8)56, Box 14, File 91.1 “1944: Germany,” NARA II.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ “Policy on Relations Between Allied Occupying Forces and Inhabitants of Germany,” September 12, 1944, RG 331, (NM8)56, Box 14, File 91.4 “1944: Germany,” NARA II.

In spite of the military leadership's fears and repeated warnings, relations between soldiers and German women became the most widespread violations of the nonfraternization policy.⁷⁰ Disguising himself as an enlisted soldier, *Stars and Stripes* editor Arthur Goodfriend reported in October 1944 that American GIs often assumed patriarchal duties among German civilians, providing food for families that lacked husbands and fathers and deliberately seeking out German women as companions.⁷¹ Secret inspections of the soldiers' personal letters and diaries, which were carried out by authorities to gauge the level of fraternization, also revealed that GIs had plenty of contact with local women and often flagrantly disregarded the ban.⁷² For example, one soldier noted that there was a poster in the mess hall showing "a pair of bare legs standing over a dead American soldier, and a gun is in her hand."⁷³ It asked whether fraternizing with German women was worth dying for. "Personally, I think yes," the soldier responded.⁷⁴ Another observed that the women were "very good looking and very friendly, and for a pack of cigs, candy bar, you can get anything in the books."⁷⁵ A similar account by a weapons sergeant stationed in Munich described the *fräuleins*, a somewhat derogatory term for unmarried German women, as "all so very, very willing."⁷⁶ By the time World War II was over in the European theater, he remarked that most GIs were already "shacked up" with local girls.⁷⁷ One even named her "his little Nazi."⁷⁸

⁷⁰ Arthur Goodfriend, "Fraternization Between Germans and American Officers and Men," Special and Information Services Report, October 7, 1944, RG 331, File 250.1, NARA II.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² "Fraternization with the Enemy," January 4, 1945, RG 331, (NM8)165, Box 25, File "Occupation Policy: Nonfraternization," NARA II.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ "Excerpts from Morale Report on Non-Fraternization," December 26, 1944, RG 331, (NM8)165, Box 25, File "Occupation Policy: Nonfraternization," NARA II.

⁷⁶ Janice Holt Giles (ed.), *The G.I. Journal of Sergeant Giles* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 370.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

In Germany, fraternization quickly gained a gendered connotation. On the most basic level, this took place because American GIs encountered more German women than men among the civilian population, and most were attracted to the opposite sex. To apply Scott's theoretical framework, gender also shaped the soldiers' views of Germany. American wartime propaganda had painted Nazi Germany as relentless, hypermasculine, and ultra-militarized, an image befitting the enemy.⁷⁹ The aggregate effect of all the heterosexual relationships that formed during the months immediately before and after Germany's surrender, however, was the development of a phenomenon that historian Petra Goedde called cultural feminization.⁸⁰ As Goedde put it, "[c]ultural feminization became a powerful catalyst in America's postwar rapprochement with Germany...[and] fostered in American GIs a shift from one traditionally male gender role—conqueror—to another—protector and provider."⁸¹ The numerical predominance of women and their intimate associations with GIs led occupied Germany to be understood in part as a feminine society. In general, the change in perception was a positive development for women. As one reporter observed in July 1945, "This evening in Wiesbaden a bicycle came out of the dusk, pedaled by a couple of bare legs which were topped by a body and a face that nobody in his right mind would throw rocks at."⁸² German women were thus treated as subjects of desire rather than disgust. Many also received material benefits from their GIs during a time when food and other resources were scarce. By expressing and taking advantage of traditional femininity, German women gained a peculiar kind of influence over soldiers, softening their resolve to advance the American military government's agenda of collective guilt.

⁷⁹ Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945-1949*, 6.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Percy Knauth, "Fraternization: The Word Takes On a Brand-New Meaning in Germany," *Life*, July 2, 1945.

The gendered shift in American cultural understanding of Germany was perhaps best captured by Billy Wilder's Hollywood film *A Foreign Affair*, which starred actress Marlene Dietrich as the sly and seductive Erika von Schlütow (see Figure 2).⁸³ In the film, Erika was the popular and hypersexualized singer at a Berlin cabaret and former mistress of a high-ranking Nazi official, most likely Hermann Göring or Joseph Goebbels. After the war ended, Erika relied on the American Captain John Pringle for survival, as he protected her from purges of former Nazis and gave her food rations and goods that he bought from the black market, all in exchange for her company. That is, until the protagonist Phoebe Frost, a puritanical



Figure 2: Marlene Dietrich as Erika von Schlütow. *A Foreign Affair*.

American Congresswoman played by Jean Arthur, arrived in Berlin to inspect troop morale. She was appalled by the widespread fraternization and sexual relations she witnessed on the ground and grew determined to change the status quo. She took an immediate dislike to Erika upon meeting her and was both disgusted by Erika's Nazi past and frustrated that Erika seemed to have a patron within the American military. In a dramatic turn of events, John, who was pretending to be the only soldier Phoebe could trust in Berlin but was really shielding Erika from the Congresswoman's investigation, began to attract Phoebe's romantic attention.

The inspiration for the film's production came from Wilder's brief time serving as an advisor to the Information Control Division of the United States Forces, European Theater

⁸³ *A Foreign Affair*, directed by Billy Wilder (Paramount Pictures, 1948).

(USFET) in 1945. Wilder was asked to assess the German film industry for the purpose of denazification and reeducation. After spending two weeks in Berlin, he wrote the following in a memorandum addressed to the military government:

Now *if* there was an entertainment film...and with a love story—only with a very special love story, cleverly devised to help us sell a few ideological items—such a film would provide us with a superior piece of propaganda: they would stand in long lines to buy and once they bought it, it would stick. Unfortunately, no such film exists yet. It must be made. I want to make it.⁸⁴

A Foreign Affair was thus conceived of as propaganda that would convey American objectives in Germany. Its ending cautioned GIs and Germans alike, as John and Phoebe were reconciled as a natural couple and Erika was finally arrested for her Nazi affiliation.⁸⁵ But the film did more than just that. Wilder was among the first directors to include real footage of Berlin's destruction after the war. As Erika told Phoebe in the film, "This is a beastly thing to do but you must understand what happened to us here. We all become animals with exactly one instinct left: self-preservation."⁸⁶ Wilder's Erika represented German women who exercised a type of agency tied to their femininity—a sinister kind, perhaps, but still agency—in order to survive, even flourish, during American occupation.⁸⁷

Nevertheless, the cultural feminization of German society also came with repercussions for German women, whose relationships with American men were unequal because of the traditional gender roles they reverted to. In this sense, Goedde's work leaves little room for a scholarly analysis of the different expressions of femininity, especially regarding how they positioned and

⁸⁴ Billy Wilder, "The Wilder Memorandum," reprinted in *The Americanization of Germany, 1945-1949*, ed. Ralph Willett (New York: Routledge, 1992), 40-44.

⁸⁵ It is unclear, nevertheless, if Erika ended up facing punishment for her past. Equally uncertain was the outcome of the relationship between John and Phoebe.

⁸⁶ *A Foreign Affair*, directed by Billy Wilder (Paramount Pictures, 1948).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

often disempowered women.⁸⁸ For example, many German women did not give consent to engage in sexual relations with American soldiers. While rape occurred more frequently and was more widely known among Soviet-German encounters, American GIs were not completely innocent.⁸⁹ In fact, German women filed 64% of all rape complaints made against American soldiers in the European theater, compared with 16% of French women and 13% of British women.⁹⁰ Individual GIs thus exploited sexual difference for revenge or self-gratification.⁹¹ Furthermore, the American military largely ignored rape accusations, only stepping in when there were concerns about the spread of venereal diseases and the health of its soldiers.⁹² In one particular instance, authorities even accused German rape victims of sabotage. According to a report written by a colonel in the Ninth Army, “it appears that the Germans are making use of such [rape] allegations in order to deliberately discredit the American soldier and cause difficulties within the command.”⁹³ Suspicion and blame never quite left the minds of the occupiers.

Prostitution was another area in which German women exhibited traditionally feminine behavior but were disparaged because of it.⁹⁴ For example, all German women who allegedly engaged in prostitution were subjected to mandatory examinations for venereal diseases by the

⁸⁸ See Maria Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins: The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002) for a work that captures the experiences of women in Germany. Note that she writes about a slightly later period and focuses primarily on West Germany.

⁸⁹ See the anonymously published diary *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City*, trans. Philip Boehm (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005) for the widespread raping of German women by Soviet soldiers during the Battle of Berlin and its immediate aftermath.

⁹⁰ Joseph Starr, “Fraternization with the Germans in World War II,” Office of the Chief Historian European Command, 1947.

⁹¹ When she and others were being raped, the author of the anonymous diary *A Woman in Berlin* noted that Soviet soldiers justified their actions by recalling rapes perpetuated by Nazi soldiers against Soviet women. A similar line of reasoning could be used to explain American rapes.

⁹² “Health of the Command Report for the Month of May 1945,” June 15, 1945, RG 331, (NM8)165, Box 25, File “Occupation Policy: Nonfraternization,” NARA II.

⁹³ O.F. Kotick, “Memo G-1,” March 26, 1945. RG 331, (NM8)165, Box 25, File “Occupation Policy: Nonfraternization,” NARA II.

⁹⁴ The line between prostitution and fraternization was often quite blurry.

United States military government, which did not treat its soldiers in the same way.⁹⁵ They were blamed for soliciting men and contributing to the spread of such diseases instead of the American GIs who eagerly pursued sexual relations.⁹⁶ The *Stars and Stripes* even created the cartoon character Veronica Dankeschön, whose initials stood for venereal diseases, to warn soldiers about the dangers of fraternization.⁹⁷ Interestingly, she was portrayed not only as a seductress ready to infect American soldiers but also as a dangerous underground agent unwilling to relinquish her Nazi ideologies.

After Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945, nonfraternization was substantially relaxed. The policy itself was abolished in October of that year.⁹⁸ Since relationships between American GIs and German women were the most common violations of the ban, these women undoubtedly contributed to its repeal. By embracing the role of the sexually appealing female dependent, they helped craft more traditionally gendered images of Germany that fell in between the two extremes of a hypermasculine and a grotesquely feminine Nazi regime. In the process, they made room for U.S.-German relations to adopt a more conciliatory tone on the ground. Still, within this larger framework of cultural feminization, women also bore the brunt of gender inequality. Ironically, by reverting back to traditional gender roles, they only increased American suspicions of their latent Nazi sympathies and subversive powers vis-à-vis American men. The contradictory forces would continue to be at play as casual fraternization transformed into more serious relationships.

⁹⁵ Astrid Hastak, “‘I Was Never One of Those Fräuleins’: The Impact of Cultural Image on German War Brides in America” (PhD diss., Purdue University, 2005), 132.

⁹⁶ “Health of the Command Report for the Month of May 1945,” June 15, 1945, RG 331, (NM8)165, Box 25, File “Occupation Policy: Nonfraternization,” NARA II.

⁹⁷ Reprinted in *Newsweek*, June 16, 1947.

⁹⁸ Petra Goedde, “From Villains to Victims: Fraternization and the Feminization of Germany, 1945-1947,” 16. For the military government’s announcement abolishing nonfraternization, see “Non-Fraternization,” September 29, 1945, RG 260, Box 87, File 261.1, NARA II.

Chapter 3. The Making of the German War Bride

Nonfraternization survived as an official policy for only about a year. Especially after the American military settled in Germany for postwar occupation, it was no longer feasible for U.S. commanders to prevent any association at all between soldiers and civilians. The policy's contested and short-lived existence was also due in part to the organic transformation of casual encounters between GIs and German women into social contacts and eventually into marriage. But upon the repeal of nonfraternization in October 1945, the marriage ban stayed in effect. The fight for marriage became a defining experience for the German war bride, whose making and collective identity centered around a paradox. On the one hand, marriage conferred upon these German women the right to choose their spouses, better treatment by their occupiers, and, in contrast to the idea that all German shared the burdens of a common Nazi past, America's acknowledgement of their suitability as wives, mothers, and immigrants. On the other hand, by pursuing marriage, German women relegated themselves to the most normative of all traditional gender roles and depended on American GIs for their future. They became tributes in the process of diplomatic rapprochement, sacrificing their independence to amend relations between the United States and Germany.

German women were not the only ones to become war brides. Given the wide geographical reach of World War II, American GIs met and married foreign women from around the world. The term "war bride" itself actually comes from a legal definition of immigrants that was introduced by the War Brides Act of 1945 and related pieces of legislation. Since the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, the number of immigrants allowed to enter the United States every year had been strictly limited based on a national origins quota system.⁹⁹ Because they were the spouses

⁹⁹ Immigrants from a particular nation were allotted slots equivalent to two percent of the total population of that nationality living in the United States at the time of the 1890 national census. The act excluded all immigrants from

of military servicemen, however, war brides were given the right to nonquota immigration, meaning that they were allowed to immigrate outside of the quota system. This privilege was introduced during the first session of the Seventy-Ninth Congress in December 1945, when both the House and the Senate passed the War Brides Act “to expedite the admission to the United States of alien spouses and alien minor children of citizen members of the United States armed forces.”¹⁰⁰ Less than a year later, Congress extended the benefit of non-quota immigration to the fiancées and fiancés of American GIs with the passage of another bill in June 1946.¹⁰¹

Although both acts were gender neutral in language, Congress had specific groups of beneficiaries in mind. “I think this is the least we can do for the men who fought our wars overseas, who have married aliens, and who now wish to have their wives join them in this country,” Senator Richard Russell of Georgia said on the floor as the Senate first debated the War Brides Act.¹⁰² In other words, even though the bill mentioned both spouses and children, policymakers were mainly thinking of GI men and foreign women. The numbers reflected this gendered understanding. By 1950, almost 115,000 foreign women had entered the United States through the War Brides Act, compared with only 4,669 foreign children and 333 foreign husbands.¹⁰³ More importantly, foreign women received immigration benefits only because they were affiliated with American servicemen, whom Congress intended to reward. The dependency of one gender on the other was thus established from the very beginning.

Since the legislation was geographically agnostic on paper, German women shared the war bride identity with women of other nationalities, at least during the immigration process. But it

Asia, and its restrictive measures would not be completely repealed until 1965. See “The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act),” United States of America Department of State Office of the Historian.

¹⁰⁰ “Public Law 271,” University of Washington Bothell Library.

¹⁰¹ “Public Law 471,” University of Washington Bothell Library.

¹⁰² *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 79th Congress, First Session*, 12342.

¹⁰³ “Annual Report of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, United States Department of Justice, Washington, D.C., for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1950.”

would be most productive historically and analytically to think of German war brides as their own group instead of within the larger war bride category, especially given their distinct identity formation process in postwar Germany. The War Brides Act may have passed in December 1945, but German women were unable to take advantage of expedited nonquota immigration until the end of the next year. To become war brides, they first had to gain the American military government's approval for marriage.

In the eyes of American commanders, marriage served as a symbol of equal association between the occupier and the occupied.¹⁰⁴ They were against GI-German marriages because they wished to make clear that as nationals of a defeated country, German women did not deserve the same rights and privileges as those of GI wives.¹⁰⁵ According to official policy, "aside from the just consequences which the Germans may have to suffer for their tolerance of the crimes and evils of Nazism, we must maintain, in a military occupation, a line of demarcation between our own forces and our enemies."¹⁰⁶ Consequently, it noted that "[w]e cannot at this time permit inter-marriage, and the consequent association on equal terms, without weakening that demarcation."¹⁰⁷ In addition to American soldiers, the military government also banned marriage between Germans and "civilians serving with, employed by, or accompanying the Army in this theater."¹⁰⁸ The broad categories of people who fell within the scope of the ban reflected the American resolve to maintain wartime boundaries and to continue to punish the German people for the Nazi regime's atrocities.

GI-German couples contested the marriage ban at first by exploiting ambiguities in its coverage and other loopholes. While the policy seemed straightforward on paper, its application

¹⁰⁴ "Letter on Marriage – Bill E. Biar," October 24, 1946, (NM8)173, Box 6, File "Non-Fraternization," NARA II.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ "Marriage to German," April 25, 1946, RG 331, (NM8)173, Box 7, File "Orientation for Occupational and Nonfraternization Policies," NARA II.

was unclear, especially for Americans who were not serving in strictly military positions at the time of marriage. For example, the *Stars and Stripes* noted in July 1946 that two former GIs who became employees of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) were able to wed German women in local civil ceremonies.¹⁰⁹ Herman Kaplan, a driver for UNRRA, married Isa Beyermann of Bad Sachsa on March 29; James Powell, a dispatcher for UNRRA, married Irene Ergenzinger of Nuremberg on March 30.¹¹⁰ Even for regular GIs, the policy was so poorly enforced that many simply ignored it. *Newsweek* reported in February 1946 that a GI-German couple exchanged vows at a local church.¹¹¹ They only sought official recognition of the marriage from the U.S. military to acquire immigration benefits for the bride, since the GI was nearing the end of his deployment and wanted to bring his wife back to America.¹¹²

As a result, American commanders were compelled to clarify the marriage policy as time went on and specific cases emerged. They were clearly unhappy about the violations. After the article about the two UNRRA employees was published, the military government decided that despite the organization's international character, the marriage ban applied to all American zone workers, thus expanding its original scope.¹¹³ In a letter addressed to UNRRA, the Adjutant General asked Kaplan and Powell to be removed from Germany entirely.¹¹⁴ Commanders also did not recognize marriages that were conducted at local churches and ceremonies.¹¹⁵ In one case, the military government faced an even more perplexing problem when a German woman seeking

¹⁰⁹ Robert R. Rogers, "2 Ex-GIs Wed German Girls in 'Loop-Hole' Ceremonies," *Stars and Stripes*, July 6, 1946.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ "A Nice German Girl," *Newsweek*, February 4, 1946.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Robert R. Rogers, "2 Ex-GIs Wed German Girls in 'Loop-Hole' Ceremonies," *Stars and Stripes*, July 6, 1946.

¹¹⁴ George F. Herbert, "Letter to Director General of the UNRRA Central Headquarters for Germany," July 25, 1946, RG 331, (NM8)173, Box 7, File "Orientation for Occupational and Nonfraternization Policies," NARA II.

¹¹⁵ "A Nice German Girl," *Newsweek*, February 4, 1946.

marriage turned out to be a Jew who had been sent to concentration camp by the Nazis.¹¹⁶ But because she regained her German citizenship after Nazi Germany's defeat, U.S. commanders were firm in maintaining that "[n]o distinction is made between different classifications of Germans and it is not the intention of this headquarters to make any such distinctions."¹¹⁷ In other words, even German Jews were forbidden to marry Americans.

Individual agency exercised by GIs and German women played an important role in the repeal of the marriage ban altogether, which was no small task given the military government's hardline attitude. Prompted by its ambiguity and widespread application, many GIs wrote letters to their commanders demanding a change in official policy. In August 1946, for example, one soldier wrote the following to General Joseph McNarney, commander of the American zone of occupation after Eisenhower:

I note with misgiving your reiteration of a policy of not permitting a soldier to marry a German woman. The reason given by you, according to press reports, was that a soldier needed to be protected against the wiles of unscrupulous fräulein who had ulterior purposes to gain in seeking marriage with American soldiers. By what logic do you reason that German women resort to more guile and deceit than women of other nationalities? And what an insult to our American soldiers who are represented as incapable of resistance and need paternal shepherding to prevent their falling into a trap! Such indefensible policy should, in the name of Americanism and democracy be shoved overboard without delay.¹¹⁸

Some declared that the military did not have the authority to regulate marriage, which was an act ordained by God, while others appealed to love and the freedom to choose whom they wanted to marry.¹¹⁹ A veteran even suggested that the marriage ban was jeopardizing effective American

¹¹⁶ "Letter Addressed to Commanding General, US Air Forces in Europe, APO 633," September 9, 1946, (NM8)173, Box 7, NARA II.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Dean Russell Olt, "Letter to General Joseph McNarney," August 19, 1946, (NM8)173, Box 6, File "Non-Fraternization," NARA II.

¹¹⁹ (NM8)173, Box 6, File "Non-Fraternization," NARA II.

occupation.¹²⁰ Apparently, the Soviet Union had used the American marriage ban to instill a sense of inferiority in Germans and incite animosity among them toward their American occupiers.¹²¹

While most letters protesting the marriage ban were written by American GIs, German women did not remain entirely silent. In one case concerning the marriage between Corporal Alfred S. Wheaton of New York and Dorit Spiegelberg, the war bride—with encouragement from her fiancé—contacted New York Congressman Edwin Arthur Hall to ask for his help.¹²² She wrote in a letter:

My fiancé and I, me [sic] met us in May 1946 and got the feeling that we belong [to] each other from the first moment. Our love has been unchored [sic] at the bottom of our heart, and we both are animate of the wish to be together as soon as possible...As we attended at Bremen, the catholic church regularly, we promised the Lord always to be true and honest and prayed very much that He may help us to get marry [sic] as soon as possible in order to give our little baby we expect, the honest name of Wheaton.¹²³

Upon learning about her case, the New York Congressman appealed directly to McNarney on behalf of his constituent and his German fiancée, explaining that the circumstances were especially pressing since Spiegelberg was pregnant. The bride's desire to "preserve family honor" was highlighted to call the American commander's attention to the normative gender role that she hoped to play.¹²⁴

In several letters pleading for marriage, GIs and women alike affirmed the bride's character and her lack of Nazi sympathies in order to differentiate between good and bad Germans. The latter should be held accountable for Nazi crimes, but the former deserved a second chance. This division was first used as a screening test to weed out any former registered Nazis when the

¹²⁰ M. C. Harley, "Letter to General McNarney," September 12, 1946, (NM8)173, Box 6, File "Non-Fraternization," NARA II.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Dorit Spiegelberg, "Letter to Honorable Edwin Hall," November 21, 1946, (NM8)173, Box 6, File "Non-Fraternization," NARA II.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Edwin Arthur Hall, "Letter to Commanding General," December 5, 1946, (NM8)173, Box 6, File "Non-Fraternization," NARA II.

American military government decided to hire German civilians to assist with postwar reconstruction efforts.¹²⁵ Many GI-German couples thought that the distinction could be extended to the realm of marriage, in effect claiming that the Germans who wished to marry Americans were not like the others. For example, in addition to appealing to family honor, the pregnant Dorit Spiegelberg made it clear that no one in her extended family was a member of the Nazi Party.¹²⁶ Similarly, a German woman by the name of Charlotte Duepper wrote directly to the military government and claimed to be a political prisoner in the Nazi regime, adding that she even made a speech against the war in 1943.¹²⁷ She asserted in the letter: “I think that is [the] very difference between German and German victims of Nazism, isn’t it?”¹²⁸

Nevertheless, the division was often not so clear. Many women who became German war brides once had ties to the Nazi regime in one way or another. Elfriede Johnsen, who eventually married an American GI and relocated to Montana, told an interviewer in 2002 that her father had been drafted into the German military and was captured as a prisoner of war in Austria.¹²⁹ Her own feelings toward the Nazis could be described as ambiguous at best. Gertrude*, another German war bride who settled in Iowa, said in an oral history interview that her father was a member of the Nazi Party and fought in the war.¹³⁰ Her uncle even died at an Allied prisoner-of-war camp.¹³¹ Jackie Johns, whose story was described in the introduction, also came from a family who favored the Nazis.¹³² She was more fortunate than Gertrude in escaping interrogations after the war,

¹²⁵ Gerald Johns and Irmgard “Jackie” Stieger-Johns, interview.

¹²⁶ Dorit Spiegelberg, “Letter to Honorable Edwin Hall.”

¹²⁷ Charlotte Duepper, “Letter to General Lieutenant J.M. Bevans,” RG 331, (NM8)173, Box 7, File “Orientation for Occupational and Nonfraternization Policies,” NARA II.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Elfriede Johnsen, interview by Seena Kohl, July 16, 2002, Montana War Brides Oral History Project OH 2038, Montana Historical Society, transcript.

¹³⁰ *Her last name was redacted because she did not wish to be identified. Gertrude, interview by Rachel Casteel, December 1994, “War Brides of World War II: Iowa Experiences” (thesis, the University of Iowa, 1995), transcript.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Gerald Johns and Irmgard “Jackie” Stieger-Johns, interview.

however, because her parents never officially joined the Nazi Party.¹³³ She explained that her father was a stingy man who “did not want to pay the [Party] dues.”¹³⁴ The women’s reason for trying to steer clear of Nazism and emphasizing their aspiration to become wives and mothers was in fact to distance themselves from American images of the suspicious seductress that were formed during the fraternization era. They were not Erika von Schlütow, former mistress of a high-ranking Nazi official. Nor were they Veronica Dankeschön, the latent Nazi who carried venereal diseases. Instead, they wanted to be seen as the most heteronormative of all gendered representations.

Regardless of their Nazi affiliations, the women’s common desire for marriage brought different individuals together to form an imagined community of German war brides. Sharing the identity meant that they all claimed to be good enough to become American wives, mothers, and immigrants. They may not be the *trümmerfrauen* rebuilding Germany with their own hands, but they were not fooling around with American GIs either. Their contribution to diplomatic rapprochement was a particularly normative image of German women seeking to marry Americans and form intercultural families. By appealing to traditional gender roles and cementing the provider-dependent relationship, they were changing American perceptions of Germany yet again. For if and when the American military government decided to recognize this identity, it could no longer perceive all Germans as one monolithic group of people who deserved to be punished for a shared Nazi past. After all, some of these Germans were now joining American families.

There were romantic and practical motivations behind the women’s decisions to marry. As historian Susan Zeiger puts it, “Marriage was a complex and even paradoxical expression of women’s autonomy and desire.”¹³⁵ Love was undoubtedly an important cause. But aside from

¹³³ Gertrude, interview.

¹³⁴ Gerald Johns and Irmgard “Jackie” Stieger-Johns, interview.

¹³⁵ Susan Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances: Foreign War Brides and American Soldiers in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press), 72.

love, there was a conspicuous gender imbalance in Germany. The war's devastation in Europe resulted in a surplus of German women of marriageable age relative to German men, an issue that persisted well into the years of American occupation.¹³⁶ A 1949 survey of 3,500 Germans in the British Zone and 400 Germans in the western sectors of Berlin illustrated that roughly half of the survey participants supported the marriage of German women to foreigners because of the uneven gender ratio.¹³⁷ But many qualified their answer, such as by adding that German women should only "marry British, American, Nordic races, Aryans, European nations and white races."¹³⁸ Furthermore, German women should consider "no coloured races, no Eastern races, no Slavs, no Russians, no Poles."¹³⁹ The survey also noted that "to many Germans America is a land of inexhaustible wealth and unlimited possibilities" and that "the main attractions are material."¹⁴⁰ Through marriage, then, many German women were seeking a better future for themselves.

At the same time, the paradox existed because marriage affirmed American manhood and nationhood at the expense of female agency. Once married, most German war brides followed their GIs back to America and became vulnerable foreigners whose wellbeing depended largely on their American husbands and the American government. Viewed from a different angle, they were tributes sent by a defeated country. Again, Zeiger writes that the "exchange of women across boundaries of tribe or nation is an ancient human practice, carried out to resolve boundary disputes, build political alliances, or denote the close of warfare between groups."¹⁴¹ German war brides certainly fell under the last description, as their unequal and dependent relationships with American GIs only served as a reminder that Germany had to pay a price for losing the war.

¹³⁶ "Special Report No. 287: Germany's Surplus Women," May 10, 1949, Public Opinion Research Office Political Division, RG 260, (A1)250, Box 146, NARA II.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Susan Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances: Foreign War Brides and American Soldiers in the Twentieth Century*, 3.

On December 11, 1946, the U.S. military government finally lifted the GI-German marriage ban, under the condition that the bridegroom must be completing his deployment and returning home soon.¹⁴² McNarney explained the decision by framing the freedom and right to marry Germans as a reward for American soldiers who had served their country well, adding that soldiers should forget the wartime doctrine of “hate the German” and help the locals rebuild their country instead.¹⁴³ It was a moment of victory for many couples, whose efforts at contesting the policy had paid off. The policy change also demonstrated that American attitudes toward Germans during the occupation had softened remarkably since commanders first instructed their soldiers to remember Nazi atrocities and prohibited them from fraternizing with Germans in 1944. Now, they were permitting marriages between Americans and former enemy nationals. German war brides became both symbols of intercultural romance and agents who created the amicable conditions for U.S.-German rapprochement on the ground. They embraced an expression of femininity that seemed least deviant to Americans and pushed for an image of themselves as good mothers and wives and thus worthy immigrants. By doing so, they reflected a Germany dependent on American support and goodwill.

As German women followed their GI husbands to a new country, many challenges laid ahead. After all, the German war bride was also a transnational identity. They may have won over American soldiers and commanders by changing their perceptions in occupied Germany. But on the other side of the Atlantic, they faced the scrutiny of the American public.

¹⁴² “U.S. Army Lifts Restrictions on GI-German Marriages,” *Associated Press*, December 12, 1946.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

Chapter 4. From War Brides to Individuals: Contesting Cultural Representations in America

When German war brides arrived in America as the country's newest group of immigrants, many encountered cultural stereotypes that the American public had already constructed about them. For Americans who had never traveled to Germany or even interacted with Germans, much of their understanding of German war brides was informed by the media, which featured these women with mixed reviews. From fiction to news reports, American popular culture often depicted the character of German war brides as unflattering, if not outright sinister, because of their lingering Nazi associations. In other words, German war brides had reached a society that remained quite suspicious of them. They were thus compelled to navigate new environments and contest negative cultural images as they formed their own families in America. Through the settlement process, however, many German war brides took advantage of the heteronormative gender roles they assumed to interact with Americans on a personal level, ultimately shattering the myth of the collectivity and emerging as individuals with their own paths to tread.

German war brides may have tried to differentiate themselves as good Germans during the fight for marriage, but American cultural representations did not absolve them of the Nazi past. In 1947, Quentin Reynolds published "War Bride" in the magazine *Collier's*, a story featuring the fictional German war bride Anna Gerhart.¹⁴⁴ At first, Anna was portrayed as a demure, wide-eyed German girl, the daughter of a Lutheran minister in Cologne who was "bitterly anti-Nazi," and a 21-years-old bride about to marry a former American GI in New York.¹⁴⁵ Anyone who interacted with Anna during her journey across the Atlantic was touched by her sweet and shy smile. Many were also moved by her tragic background. Anna's father had been persecuted by the Nazi regime for preaching against its fascist ideology, and her mother committed suicide when her father was

¹⁴⁴ Quentin Reynolds, "War Bride," *Collier's*, September 13, 1947.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

sent to a concentration camp. But still she kept faith. A reporter onboard the ship with Anna remarked: “Poor kid, she’s really had it. I don’t like Krauts but this kid is different.”¹⁴⁶ Once she reached New York, her fiancé Ernest and his parents gave her a royal welcome. Unknowingly, Anna had married into a prominent Jewish American family, who not only treated her without prejudice but also put her in a suite in the Waldorf and spoiled her with expensive gifts. They were ready to embrace Anna, an immigrant from a former enemy nation that had slaughtered many members of their own kin, as the newest addition to the family.

But Anna was nothing close to whom she appeared to be. She was soon revealed to be 34 years old, and back in Germany she had socialized with only the highest-ranking Nazi officials. Her real name was not Anna Gerhart either, but the “dark, sleek, sophisticated” Anna Dietrich.¹⁴⁷ She was highly skilled in the art of makeup and manipulating men and knew exactly what she wanted for her future. When she arrived in New York, Anna gave Ernest’s mother a pair of golden earrings that she had received as a present from one of her Nazi lovers, who found it in Auschwitz “hidden on the body of one of the undesirables, one of a group which had come from Budapest.”¹⁴⁸ Ernest’s mother was originally from Hungary, and her sister—who once owned a beautiful pair of golden earrings—had been sent to Auschwitz.

Reynolds’s piece reflected American anxieties about the sympathies of German women who journeyed to their country as immigrant wives, especially given that 1947, the year it was published, marked the arrival of the first substantial wave of German war brides in the United States. As a work of fiction, it exaggerated certain aspects about these women. But media outlets also reported on the Nazi leanings of German war brides in real life, which reinforced the negative

¹⁴⁶ Quentin Reynolds, “War Bride,” *Collier’s*, September 13, 1947.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

cultural images. For example, just three months after Reynolds wrote “War Bride,” an article in the *Associated Press* reported that a former GI divorced his German wife of only three months when he found out that she remained pro-Nazi.¹⁴⁹ It cited the divorce petition, in which the veteran Joseph J. Mates explained that “[m]y wife would start raving about the fact that America was no good, that the people of Germany were a lot better off under Hitler and that America had robbed Germany of everything she had.”¹⁵⁰ According to Mates, his wife would use his money to buy boxes of food, clothing, and other goods to be sent home to Germany.¹⁵¹ In this case, the German war bride took advantage of her position as an immigrant wife not only to better her own life, but also to benefit her native country at the expense of her adopted one.

Nevertheless, the American public soon realized that with the mass immigration of German war brides, who settled into communities across the country, it became much more difficult to impose a single opinion on all of them. Between 1945 and 1950, more than 14,000 German women arrived in the United States under the War Brides Act.¹⁵² Despite having a later start than Allied war brides, as the American military government in Germany did not lift the marriage ban until late 1946, German women became the second-largest group of war brides to arrive in the United States by the start of the next decade.¹⁵³ Only British women outnumbered them. There were some concerns about their backgrounds and affiliations during the immigration process, but most German war brides entered the country without much opposition.¹⁵⁴ In fact, among the Axis war

¹⁴⁹ “Veteran Calls German War Bride Pro-Nazi,” *Associated Press*, December 26, 1947.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² “Annual Report of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, United States Department of Justice, Washington, D.C., for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1950.”

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ A prominent exception to the trend is the story of Ellen Knauff, a German Jewish war bride of Czechoslovakian nationality by her first marriage to a Czech citizen. She was detained on Ellis Island, an inspection station for new arrivals off the coast of New York, from 1948 until 1951 and was almost deported twice during those three years. She was accused of being a Communist spy for the Czechoslovakian government. Given that her case is more relevant to the Cold War and the Red Scare in domestic politics, it will not be discussed in detail in this essay. But

brides, German women were the largest cohort of former enemy nationals to marry into American families. They were also perceived as the most racially white.¹⁵⁵ Racial and cultural affinity helped white Americans accept German war brides more easily than women of other nationalities, though the notion of German collective guilt for Nazi brutality was not completely erased.¹⁵⁶ It would take the individual agency of German war brides and personal contact between these women and local Americans to dispel monolithic representations of Germans once and for all.

Oral history interviews conducted with German war brides several decades after their initial arrival in the United States showed that many women managed to build intercultural families in vastly different subcultures within America, from rural communities in Iowa to big cities such as New York.¹⁵⁷ Regardless of where German war brides settled, the first step often involved facing prejudice about their identity from extended family members and neighbors. Gertrude recalled unpleasant words that her brother-in-law had said upon learning about the marriage.¹⁵⁸ He told Gertrude's husband that "I had to kill them and now you're going to marry one?"¹⁵⁹ "He didn't say it quite that nice," she added.¹⁶⁰ Jackie Johns mentioned her husband's family friend who

for more information, see Ellen Knauff, *The Ellen Knauff Story* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1952). Similarly, when Congress first passed the Internal Security Act in 1950, a few German war brides were also detained on Ellis Island for their participation in Hitler Youth activities. They were soon released, however, when the Attorney General issued a policy allowing immigrants who held nominal membership in totalitarian organizations to enter the country.

¹⁵⁵ In fact, an interesting comparison can be made between German and Japanese war brides. The U.S. military had a large presence in both Germany and Japan for postwar occupation, which facilitated contact between American GIs and local women. Additionally, both countries went through a process of cultural feminization and diplomatic rapprochement with the United States (see Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy*). Yet while more than 14,000 German war brides immigrated to America during the first five years after the war, only 758 Japanese women were able to do the same. Race made a big difference, as Japanese war brides had to wait until a 1947 amendment relaxed racial restrictions in order to immigrate.

¹⁵⁶ Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945-1949*, 68.

¹⁵⁷ Transcripts of oral history interviews gathered for this essay came primarily from rural settings in Montana, Iowa, and Pennsylvania. The six women who shared their experiences in these interviews are by no means representative of the 14,000-plus German war brides who arrived in America during this time period, but their stories demonstrate a wide range of experiences and emphasize the importance of acknowledging war brides as individuals.

¹⁵⁸ Gertrude, interview.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

would not accept her at first.¹⁶¹ But now that German women were American wives, they had the opportunity to become individuals in front of their new families and communities. Elfriede Johnsen, who followed her husband to a small town in Montana, recalled that the locals “were just awed by seeing probably the first war bride they’d ever had in that town.”¹⁶² Meeting a German war bride in person helped Americans understand that beyond their portrayals in the media, German women had different personalities, upbringings, and experiences during the war, much like themselves. Time also made a difference. After Jackie Johns established herself as a competent wife and a productive employee in Wrightsville, the family friend realized that the marriage “is going to hold” and apologized for her unfriendly behavior.¹⁶³ The positive reputation that Jackie earned for herself thus eased tensions within the local community.

During the settlement process, German women also encountered cultural and material shocks in different ways, further illustrating that there was no archetypal German war bride that fit a particular cultural representation. Women who grew up in large German cities but whose husbands hailed from rural communities in America, for example, had to face a stark urban-rural divide. Eva Peiffer was from Dresden, which she described as “full of city life.”¹⁶⁴ Even though her husband had told her that he lived on a farm in Iowa, she was not prepared for an environment without basic utilities. “I did not know that they had no electricity at the time in 1948. Howard’s parents had water until we moved to work his uncle’s farm—no water, no toilet, everything outside!”¹⁶⁵ Similarly, a war bride from Cologne recounted that her first home in America was a small tobacco farm in North Carolina, where the neighbors were nice but ordinary conveniences

¹⁶¹ Gerald Johns and Irmgard “Jackie” Stieger-Johns, interview.

¹⁶² Elfriede Johnsen, interview

¹⁶³ Gerald Johns and Irmgard “Jackie” Stieger-Johns, interview.

¹⁶⁴ Eva Peiffer, interview by Rachel Casteel, November 1994, “War Brides of World War II: Iowa Experiences” (thesis, the University of Iowa, 1995), transcript.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

were lacking.¹⁶⁶ “After the newness wore off, I questioned the wisdom of my being in this strange environment...It was the backwardness of many of the residents...About half the home still had outdoor toilets (including ours), and no one had a telephone.”¹⁶⁷ Elfriede Johnsen mentioned that her GI husband could only afford a small trailer house with no water or sewer in Iowa. “I didn’t mind because I was in love,” she explained, but the living situation was still difficult.¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, German women from small towns and who moved to similar settings in America tended to experience easier transitions. Jackie Johns grew up in Schonberg-in-Taunus, a small village outside of Frankfurt, and assimilated seamlessly into Wrightsville. There, she found that many townspeople spoke German, especially among the older generations, and even her mother was “accepted in Wrightsville with open arms” when she came to visit.¹⁶⁹

Once German war brides settled into American communities, some were able to leverage their acceptance and reputation to garner support for recovery efforts in postwar Germany, which increased the cultural affinity between the two nations. In one example, Rosemary Dunn, the German war bride of a Harvard Law School student, organized an emergency shipment of streptomycin to save sick children in her hometown Heidelberg.¹⁷⁰ Rosemary had received a letter from her mother informing her that several children in the city had succumbed to a certain disease that could only be treated by streptomycin.¹⁷¹ Because she was a respectable wife in good standing with her husband’s community, she was able to secure support from other Americans for her cause.¹⁷² In another example, a Bavarian war bride named Isolde Thorn who lived with her

¹⁶⁶ Helen R. Lee, *Bittersweet Decision: The War Brides Forty Years Later* (Lockport: RoseLee Publications, 1985), 233.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Elfriede Johnsen, interview.

¹⁶⁹ Gerald Johns and Irmgard “Jackie” Stieger-Johns, interview.

¹⁷⁰ “War Bride Speeds Serum by Plane to Sick German Child,” *Daily Boston Globe*, April 8, 1948.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

husband in Pasadena, California on a “meager \$105-a-month GI educational allowance” was known for sending “regular food packages to her destitute family in Germany” despite her own limitations.¹⁷³ When she was caught shoplifting \$1.50 worth of food from a local grocery store because of the family’s financial difficulties, the judge unconditionally suspended her jail sentence.¹⁷⁴ The sympathy of the local community for a distressed German war bride whom they now knew on a personal basis extended to her family back in Germany as well.

But not all stories of German war brides in America were about positive individual agency. In particular, failed GI-German marriages, especially tales of neglect, domestic violence, and death, reminded Americans that German women were quite vulnerable in their position as foreign dependents, which made them seem more human than their flat cultural representations. Instead of villains, they became victims. In 1949, newspapers reported that Donald Smith, an army private from Kankakee, Illinois, had married a German woman in occupied Berlin but lost interest in her within a month of the couple’s arrival in America.¹⁷⁵ He even asked authorities “how he could have his wife deported” because he was “tired of her.”¹⁷⁶ The German war bride, Viola Smith, was deprived of food and driven out of the house. She eventually filed a suit against her husband, who was then jailed for neglect.¹⁷⁷ That same year, the press also brought to light a case of domestic violence in Hyattsville, Maryland, where former GI Clyde E. Gibbs was sentenced to one year in the Maryland House of Correction for beating his wife Margaret Gibbs. When she reported domestic violence to the police in Hyattsville, she said “her husband had kicked and beaten her that day and on previous occasions had threatened her life.”¹⁷⁸ The plight of German

¹⁷³ “Sentence Suspended: Mercy Tempers Justice for German War Bride,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 1949.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ “Tries to Shed His War Bride; GI is Jailed,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 5, 1949.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ “Beat German War Bride, He Gets Year,” *The Washington Post*, July 15, 1949.

war brides was even more tragic in cases in which there was no return. In July 1949, a 24-year-old German war bride named Eva Renkes leaped to her death in downtown Pittsburgh. She was separated from her husband, and “[f]riends said she was despondent over the failure of her marriage and had threatened to kill herself.”¹⁷⁹ In the same city a year later, Alexander Hyzak shot his German wife Maria Hyzak “in the face” during a heated argument and then proceeded to kill himself while their 13-months-old son slept in the crib.¹⁸⁰ ““It’s a tragic end to a wartime romance,”” the police detective on the case commented.¹⁸¹ In all of these examples, heteronormative gender roles contributed to the unfortunate outcomes, as German war brides were relegated to relatively powerless positions.

By marrying American GIs and immigrating to the United States, individual women from Germany assumed a common identity as German war brides. American popular culture further promoted particular images that contributed to the understanding of German war brides as a collective, often with unfavorable connotations. But once in America, the experiences of German war brides differed according to their place of settlement, level of assimilation, personality, family dynamic, socioeconomic status, and other factors. Within the gender roles that they assumed as wives of American servicemen, some women exercised agency to counter negative cultural representations by establishing personal contact and putting down roots in local communities. In more tragic cases, others reminded Americans of the range of human experience that was possible, particularly for dependent and disempowered foreign wives. After all, these women were individuals before becoming German war brides. Here in America, their stories diverged again.

¹⁷⁹ “German War Bride Leaps to Her Death,” *Associated Press*, July 14, 1949.

¹⁸⁰ “Ex-Soldier Kills German Bride, Self,” *Associated Press*, October 22, 1950.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

In 1958, Hollywood film *Fräulein* told the love story between an ill-fated German woman and a handsome American GI.¹⁸² The plot began in the thick of World War II, with the Angermann family giving temporary shelter to an American prisoner of war named Foster MacLain. Erika Angermann, the daughter, was in love with a Nazi officer at the time and did not treat Foster with much sympathy. It was her father Julius Angermann who cared for the American until it was safe again for him to leave. After Germany was defeated, Erika's life took a turn for the worse. First her father died, forcing her to live with a cousin, who was ruthlessly killed when he tried to defend her from a lustful Russian soldier. Erika then fled to the American zone, where she was unwittingly sold into prostitution. Fortunately, Erika was saved in time by Foster, who remained grateful for her family's protection during the war and wanted to repay their kindness. With Foster's aid, Erika located her wartime lover, the Nazi officer, only to discover that he had become a crippled and resentful man and no longer wanted to marry her. During the search process, however, Erika and Foster began to develop feelings for each other. The movie ended on a happy note, with Foster marrying Erika and bringing her back home to New Jersey to start a new chapter in their lives.¹⁸³

Fräulein demonstrated that more than a decade after the start of the American occupation of Germany, the German war bride theme remained salient in American cinema. Representations of German woman and the German people at large, however, had undergone dramatic shifts throughout the years. In fact, the construction, reconstruction, and deconstruction of monolithic cultural images of Germany corresponded with different phases of U.S.-German relations in the immediate postwar period. In particular, the reintroduction of traditional expressions of femininity into American discourse about Germany helped create the conditions for rapprochement. German

¹⁸² *Fräulein*, directed by Henry Koster (20th Century Fox, 1958).

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

war brides, whose existence spoke to the revival of the most heteronormative of all gender roles, literally and figuratively married into American families as the United States and Germany amended their relationship after the war. The formation of this gender identity took place through a combination of personal encounters, policy changes, and transnational movements. It allowed Germany to move past its collective guilt for the Nazi regime and helped German women gain acceptance as American wives, though often at a steep individual cost.

American propaganda during the war portrayed the German people as hypermasculine and militarized, effectively establishing these qualities as part of the German national character. Especially for American soldiers who fought on the frontlines and took part in liberating concentration camps, such cultural images of Germany were confirmed by their personal experiences. While women were largely absent from American wartime discourse, the few examples that did emerge immediately after Germany's surrender were grotesquely feminine. Germany as a whole became abnormally gendered in American eyes. As a result, the German people were collectively held responsible for the Nazi regime's deviant behavior.

At first, American GIs were prohibited from fraternizing with civilians as the U.S. military occupied Germany. Commanders concretely applied the notion of German collective guilt when they instituted a nonfraternization policy to ensure that soldiers did not weaken their resolve in war and occupation. Despite the military government's best efforts, however, the fraternization ban quickly broke down in practice. In particular, heterosexual contact between GIs and German women flourished. The former saw the latter as subjects of desire rather than disgust, while the latter often reaped material benefits from GI companionship. A dependent-provider relationship began to take shape, although American cultural representations of German women during the fraternization era continued to highlight their questionable motivations and ties to the recent Nazi

past.¹⁸⁴ Many women also suffered the consequences of sexual objectification, including rape, prostitution, and venereal diseases. Still, the reemergence of women brought about a cultural feminization of Germany that made it possible to discuss Germans in familiar and traditional gender terms again, which made reconciliation seem more likely. By the time the nonfraternization policy was repealed in late 1945, the American military government had recognized that it was futile to convince soldiers to treat the German people as a monolithic enemy.

When nonfraternization was lifted, however, the ban on GI-German marriage stayed in place. American commanders may have acquiesced to casual relations on the ground, but they were not prepared to allow former enemy nationals from Germany to enjoy the benefits of becoming GI wives, which included nonquota immigration under the War Brides Act of 1945. The making of the German war bride thus incorporated two components: marriage and immigration. Only a subset of fraternizing German women became war brides by fighting for policy change on the ground and immigrating to the United States with their husbands. In the process, they embraced the use of gendered discourse and took advantage of a particular expression of femininity to strengthen the dependent-provider relationship. They made it clear that they were not disease-ridden seductresses who held onto Nazism. Instead, they sought the heteronormative roles of wife and mother to dispel anxieties about their ideological leanings and convince American policymakers of their good character. At the same time, by refashioning themselves into the foreign dependents of American servicemen, German war brides effectively became tributes who sacrificed their independence for a better, albeit unequal, relationship between the United States and Germany.¹⁸⁵ Their status was made all the more apparent when the American military

¹⁸⁴ See Erika von Schlütow in *A Foreign Affair*.

¹⁸⁵ Susan Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances: Foreign War Brides and American Soldiers in the Twentieth Century*, 2.

government canceled the marriage ban in December 1946 and explained its decision in terms of rewarding American GIs, not their wives.¹⁸⁶

On the other side of the Atlantic, the American public remained wary about German women who were once deemed Nazi perpetrators and sympathizers but who were now allowed to marry into American families. As German war brides immigrated to the United States in large numbers starting in 1947, the American media became fixated on their collective identity as foreign wives affiliated with the Nazi regime. But time and quantity soon made a difference. By 1950, 14,931 German women had immigrated to the United States as war brides.¹⁸⁷ Every one of these women came with a unique life story, making it difficult for Americans to view all of them through a monolithic lens. On the one hand, leveraging their positions as wives and mothers in American families, many German war brides contested cultural representations by emphasizing their individual experiences and developing positive relationships with the local communities in which they settled. On the other hand, tragic examples of German war brides wronged by their GI husbands reminded Americans that, German or not, they were also individual women whose vulnerabilities were exacerbated by their status as foreign tributes. The cumulative effect was an increased sense of culture affinity for Germany, which now produced wives instead of Nazis.

And so, when the fictional character Erika Angermann appeared in the film *Fräulein* in 1958, she cemented the heteronormative gender role that German war brides had contributed to American discourse about Germany. Here was a German woman who interacted with an American GI, but she was not the seductive and incorrigible former Nazi mistress as represented by Erika von Schlütow in *A Foreign Affair*, which was released exactly ten years earlier. Nor did she harbor

¹⁸⁶ “U.S. Army Lifts Restrictions on GI-German Marriages,” *Associated Press*, December 12, 1946.

¹⁸⁷ “Annual Report of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, United States Department of Justice, Washington, D.C., for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1950.”

any malicious intentions as the double-faced Anna Dietrich did in Quentin Reynolds's "War Bride." As a movie review in the *New York Times* put it, Erika Angermann was "an appealing, if somewhat docile, heroine."¹⁸⁸ Even though all three characters started as Nazi sweethearts, this Erika was ultimately saved by her American soldier and transformed into a virtuous American wife. By extension, whereas Germany during the war was described in grotesquely gendered terms and Germany during the fraternization era was cast as suspiciously feminine, Germany in the 1950s had become properly dependent. The making of the German war bride as a distinct gender identity thus created the conditions for reconciliation between two erstwhile enemies. Correspondingly, no other group embodied U.S.-German rapprochement as fittingly as German war brides.

Beneath the narrative of shifting perceptions and thawing diplomatic relations, however, were the real-life experiences of individual German women who became war brides and faced the consequences of cultural feminization, often in their own family lives. As the U.S.-German relationship continues to be strong today, their participation in its remaking after World War II should not be forgotten.

Word Count: 11,899

¹⁸⁸ A. H. Weiler, "The Screen: 'Fraulein'; Dana Wynter Stars in Film on Germany," *New York Times*, June 9, 1958.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

My interest in studying German war brides of World War II as historical subjects began with reading a collection of secondary literature in Professor Mary Lui's seminar on Asian American women's and gender history. Books such as Naoko Shibusawa's *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* and Ji-Yeon Yuh's *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America* first introduced me to the concept of war brides. These were foreign women who, despite their diverse backgrounds and experiences, became lumped together as distinct national groups because of their marriages to American military personnel stationed abroad during and after the war. Legislation also recognized them as such by granting them the privilege of nonquota immigration to the United States. I was fascinated by the multiple angles that historians could use to study war brides. They were at once members of a particular nation, intercultural liaisons to the American military during and after war, wives, immigrants, and above all, women. As national categories, they were as much of a social, political, and legal construct as other imagined communities in history. Yet they were perceived by the outside world as sharing one monolithic identity, especially after Congress passed the War Brides Act of 1945 with which they became permanently associated. Analyzing the formation of this identity, Shibusawa argues in her work that American foreign policy toward Japan during postwar occupation was influenced by the perception of Japanese people as dependents of the United States, an image best embodied by the Japanese war bride. Gender played an important role in the transformation of America's former enemy in the Pacific into a weak, willing, and subordinate—to borrow the title of the book—"geisha ally."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Shibusawa's focus is on postwar Japan, leading me to wonder about the fates of other defeated nations in World War II, particularly Nazi Germany. In my search for scholarship on postwar Germany and German war brides, I came across Petra Goedde's book *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945–1949*. It soon became the work that shaped the development of my senior essay, which emulated what I found convincing about Goedde's analysis but diverged from her argument in significant ways. Similar to Shibusawa, Goedde addresses the question of how two erstwhile enemies were able to rebuild their diplomatic relations so quickly and powerfully after World War II. She advocates for analyzing the changes in foreign relations through a sociocultural lens, although she does not disregard the importance of political and economic factors, especially in the context of the Cold War. She makes the case that the development of personal relationships between American GIs and Germans, particularly German women, shaped power dynamics between America and Germany. In a process she calls cultural feminization, which took place through fraternization, Goedde argues that the United States became a benevolent, all-encompassing occupying power and Germany an emaciated, feminized client state.¹⁹⁰ This transformation, Goedde argues, took place before the U.S.-Soviet rivalry during the Cold War was solidified.

Goedde's work presents an interesting sociocultural and gender-based framework to interpret the formative years of postwar U.S.-German relations, but she does not account for the range of gender expressions that cultural feminization entailed. In fact, Goedde discusses German women as one monolithic group in terms of their interactions with the U.S. military's fraternization and marriage policies, assuming that her reader understands these examples within a fixed gender construct. To think of a different approach, I looked to Joan Scott's *Gender and the Politics of*

¹⁹⁰ Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945-1949*, 202.

History as well as her essay “Rewriting History” in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* as theoretical guides. Scott writes that gender is a fluid concept pertaining to society’s understanding of the difference between the sexes.¹⁹¹ As gender has been constructed and reconstructed throughout history, she argues that historians should study the use of gender in political discourse, especially in the context of war, which has traditionally been an unequal, male-dominated playing field.¹⁹² In my essay, I tried to comprehend the role of gender in American discourse about Germany and how it may have changed during the immediate postwar years. To find a point of reference for the early occupation period, I first looked at the portrayal of gender in American propaganda during World War II. Then I used military documents from NARA, news articles, and film and fiction—many of which are the same primary sources that Goedde used—to trace the evolution of American perceptions of Germany in gendered terms from the end of the war until the start of the next decade. I found that gender, especially femininity, took on several meanings. The phenomenon of cultural feminization encompassed many expressions of femininity, some of which actually jeopardized Germany’s position vis-à-vis the United States.¹⁹³ The specific expression that Goedde had in mind—that of a dependent-provider relationship—was best captured by only a subset of German women who fraternized with American GIs: the German war brides.

Unlike Goedde, I decided to center my argument around the formation of the German war bride identity as the most important condition for U.S.-German diplomatic rapprochement. It was a narrower interpretation of cultural feminization, but a more convincing one given that German

¹⁹¹ Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 2.

¹⁹² Joan Scott, “Rewriting History,” 30.

¹⁹³ For example, fraternization produced the image of the German seductress who carried venereal diseases and espoused Nazi ideologies. This representation of German femininity was hardly productive in terms of amending U.S.-German relations.

war brides sought to play the most heteronormative gender roles of all German women who associated with American GIs. I was interested in learning about the portrayals of German war brides in American popular culture while also giving them a chance to speak for themselves. In other words, I wanted to couple gender analysis with the real experiences of women on the ground. Other historians have relied on oral histories to shed light on women's perspectives, attempting to break down their monolithic front, demonstrate their complex identities, and attribute some amount of agency to their actions.¹⁹⁴ I tried to do the same. In my research, I was able to gather the transcripts of oral history interviews with six German war brides: Irmgard "Jackie" Stieger-Johns from Pennsylvania, Elfriede Johnsen from Montana, and Eva Peiffer, Wilhelmina Kuennen, Vera Shelton, and Gertrude* from Iowa.¹⁹⁵ I also found letters and statements written by German women seeking to marry American GIs at NARA. Last but not least, I was able to locate voices of German war brides in contemporary news articles that were written about them. These sources offered me a window into what German war brides thought about their lived experiences as I was tracking larger shifts in the use of gender in American discourse. My only regret is not being able to find and interview living German war brides myself.

Finally, by limiting this essay to war brides as a subset of German women, I was able to discuss their transnational journey, specifically the implications of their immigration and settlement process in the United States. Goedde's narrative ends in occupied Germany, but I hoped to demonstrate that gender analysis remained pertinent as the German war brides came to America. On the one hand, the heteronormative positions they assumed as the foreign dependents of American servicemen limited them in significant ways. To borrow a term from historian Susan

¹⁹⁴ Outside of the German context, historian Ji-Yeon Yuh writes about her interviews with 16 Korean war brides in her book *Beyond the Shadow of Camp Town* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

¹⁹⁵ *Her last name was redacted because she did not wish to be identified.

Zeiger, whose work examines war brides from various nationalities and wars that America fought abroad, they became tributes in the process of national revenge and social healing.¹⁹⁶ On the other hand, their collective identity as Germans and German war brides was shattered upon their arrival in the United States. Through personal interactions with Americans in local communities, they reemerged as individuals. If I were to think of a future research project, I would like to conduct an in-depth analysis of the experiences of German war brides in America and compare them across different factors. Additionally, race is a conspicuous element that is missing from this essay, and it would be interesting to think about U.S.-German rapprochement through the specific lens of personal relationships between African American GIs and German women. For now though, I am satisfied with the product of my present endeavors.

This essay would not have been possible without patience guidance from my advisor Professor Jennifer Allen, inspiration from Professor Mary Lui, and advice from Professor Joanne Meyerowitz and Professor Carolyn Dean. To all of them I give my greatest thanks. I would also like to acknowledge the help of numerous archivists and librarians throughout my research process. Finally, I owe much gratitude to my fellow students in the Allen advisory group, whose comments and companionship have been invaluable.

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