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“Non-Functioning Panopticon”: Sexual Transgressions, Gender Norms and Forced Labourers in the National-Socialist Agrarian World

This paper analyzes the various links between numerous gender aspects of the agrarian world and peculiar forms of labour connected to National Socialism during its dictatorship, with a focus on the experience of German women, Scandinavian and Polish POWs in Baden Württemberg during the outbreak of the Second World War. In so doing, this paper demonstrates how an agrarian social space can allow transgressions in times of war when a local rural population mingles with exterior actors coming from urban spaces or extra-national captives coercively stationed in the hinterland. The Third Reich is an interesting example, as its mythology and national program boasted about its strong ties to a romanticized idea of the countryside. However, this official *Blut und Boden* ideology still allowed agency in the peripheries, where official powers could not hold a grasp on every aspect of everyday life and where sexual and racial ideologies were to be more frowned upon. This paper elaborates that the agrarian space can act as an ideological bulwark to official ideology when it does not fit the direct necessities of a rural population in times of war. The core of the paper shows how women from the southwest countryside of Germany were able to transgress national socialist gender patterns by socializing with POWs from Northern Europe and Poland. Additionally, it also emphasizes POWs' use of this extra-national forbidden blending in order to negotiate some of their labour conditions. This commodification of sexuality and forced labour long ignored by many historians contradicts the widely held view that the countryside constituted the tough national core of totalitarian and fascist regimes.

Using examples from Sonya Rose extending work on empire, race and sexuality and Dagmar Herzog, and Jill Stephenson on Nazi Germany sexual politics and POWs, this paper nuances the historiographical dichotomy between the city as the political core of resistance and the countryside as the bastion of official ideology.

Nonetheless, any historian deconstructing of the *Blut und Boden* myth pervading the literature on the Second World War should be aware that he or she may involuntarily romanticize other aspects of terror. Therefore, this paper also demonstrates how the possibility of transgression does not mean in itself that National Socialism should be relativized. Indeed,

dreaded aspects of forced labour in cities should not be compared to official laxity in the countryside. Moreover, racist Nazi ideology was not completely absent from the agrarian world as proven with examples of forced farm labour performed by KZ prisoners. Furthermore, any analysis of gender during wartime should not pass over patriarchal violence and connections between war and sexual violence. With the help of historical and feminist insights from historian Regina Mühlhäuser and political scientist Silke Schneider, this paper also raises the issue of sexual violence in order to draw a more accurate narrative and avoid the traps of generalization.

Keywords: gender history, forced labour, history of sexuality, POWs, global history