

# Introduction

BJÖRN KRONDORFER AND OVIDIU CREANGĂ

Masculinities are everywhere in history, but rarely does scholarship investigate critically the experiences of men as gendered beings in relation to the Holocaust. Beyond the more obvious observation that it is mostly men who were engaged as perpetrators in the killing fields, issues of masculinities—understood broadly to relate to male identity, identifications, roles, and relations—are consistently assumed rather than interrogated. Men were perpetrators, for sure, but they were also victims, survivors, bystanders, beneficiaries, accomplices, and enablers; they often negotiated multiple roles as fathers, spouses, community leaders, prisoners, soldiers, professionals, lovers, authority figures, resisters, chroniclers, or ideologues. This volume seeks to critically investigate men's variegated roles, behaviors, attitudes, conduct, and choices during the Holocaust. It will probe assumptions about masculinities and articulate the “male experience” as something obvious (the “everywhere” of masculinities) and yet invisible (the “nowhere” of masculinities).

The contributions to *The Holocaust and Masculinities: Critical Inquires into the Presence and Absence of Men* approach the history and legacy of the Holocaust through the varied experiences of men as gendered experiences. They aim to make visible experiences that pertain to the gendered character of male agency. Victimization, privilege, choice, accountability, authority, power, complicity, or culpability, when seen through the lens of gender, are some of the more obvious elements that help to explain and contextualize particular men's words, narratives, habits, deeds, behaviors,

and conduct under conditions of extremity. We thus seek to reveal and engage conceptual links between the fields of Holocaust studies and critical masculinity studies, and we hope that the case studies presented here can fruitfully be applied to other genocidal situations.

### Three Areas of Gender Investigations

In a 2017 forum, five historians of gender and the Holocaust discussed the current state of affairs of integrating the study of sexuality and gender into the history of Nazism and the Holocaust. Among the many important issues they raised, the panelists voiced their concerns that a gendered perspective on the Holocaust often implicitly refers to women and that masculinity still constitutes a “significant lacuna” in this field—and this despite an increased student interest on “including masculinity(ies) and men’s experiences as well as more fluid and intersectional notions of identity in examinations of gender” (Forum 2017, 85, 92).<sup>1</sup> The observed scarcity of a critical men’s studies inquiry regarding the history and legacy of the Holocaust might be all the more surprising when we consider briefly three areas of scholarship: first, research on women and the Holocaust; second, research on perpetrators of the Holocaust; and third, research on Jewish pre- and post-Holocaust masculinities.

First, regarding the scholarship on women and the Holocaust, after an embattled and difficult start in the mid-1980s and pioneered by scholars like Joan Ringelheim (on the Holocaust) and Claudia Koonz (on Nazism), it has grown exponentially over the last twenty-five years. It now includes the groundbreaking works by Dalia Ofer, Lenore Weitzman, Marion Kaplan, Atina Grossmann, Lilian Kremer, Zoë Waxman, Carol Rittner, Rochelle Saidel, Elisabeth Baer, Myrna Goldenberg, and Marlene Heinemann, to name but a few.<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that book or chapter titles often reference “gender and the Holocaust,” and despite the fact that gender historians understand, in principle, that gender necessitates the inclusion of the male gender, in almost all cases the focus in these works remains on women, with only a “perfunctory” and “limited” investigation of masculinity, as Maddy Carey argues in her recent book (2017, 5). As a result, the rich and productive research trajectory that prioritized women produced few studies of masculinity during the Holocaust.

This is understandable. Having to battle against an overwhelmingly male-dominated field and a scholarship that largely overlooked women’s

experiences, feminist historians needed to keep their focus on women, not men. Questions of men and masculinities were often dealt with under the rubric of power and privilege, which, of course, fittingly described Holocaust perpetrators as well as gender relations in Nazi Germany and beyond (as it also alerted the academic community to the disciplinary blindness regarding gender among male historians). As Jane Caplan points out, there is a “troubling relationship between power and masculinity, between absolute power and hypermasculinity” (2012, 86). Yet, the equation of Nazi masculinity and power cannot be projected onto all men (German or not). The study of the masculinities of Jews and other persecuted groups challenges the union of power/privilege with masculinity writ large. Furthermore, the linkage between masculinity and power that Caplan speaks about is in need of continued investigations within a broad geographical spectrum of social, institutional, and political practices. Recently, this research has been augmented with the theoretical insights of intersectionality and the analysis of asymmetrical power relations. Those tools allow scholars to understand gender relations within a web of overlapping and mutually reinforcing constituents (such as race, class, age, and disability); they also make visible other power relations, such as ordinary German women’s power over East European laborers (Usborne 2017), LGBT and “queer interactions,” or the (limited) range of agency of men in “subordinate or marginal” positions.<sup>3</sup> Such intersections are now essential to the study of Nazi masculinity and its assumed power.

Second, there is abundant scholarship on male perpetrators of the Holocaust, though the degree to which it proceeds with a critical and deliberate lens on masculinity studies varies widely. Klaus Theweleit’s *Male Fantasies* (1989) and George Mosse’s *The Image of Man* (1996) were path-breaking in their time, but they focused less on the Holocaust and more on the interwar period with respect to national and *völkisch* ideologies, male eros, male bonding, and male respectability. Stephen Haynes asked in his article, “Ordinary Masculinity: Gender Analysis and Holocaust Scholarship,” why the study of masculinity achieved so little “scholarly recognition in the interdiscipline of Holocaust studies” (2015, 167); he then proceeded with a select analysis of German male perpetrators. Lisa Pine (2017) traces the attributes of masculinity instilled by the Nazis in the *Wehrmacht* and the disciplinary mechanisms by which these behaviors were carefully enforced among combatants. The English translation of Thomas Kühne’s work on World War II comradeship of German soldiers (2017) sheds important light on the emotional power of male bonding

as an enabling factor in genocide. The linkage between masculinity and homosocial/homosexual bonding has also been applied to analyze Nazi paramilitary units such as the Stormtroopers (Wackerfuss 2015). These bonds may have constituted a kind of *Ersatzfamilie* (substitute family), as the title of Wackerfuss's book *Stormtrooper Families* implies. With the renewed focus on family history in Holocaust studies (both with regard to victims and perpetrators),<sup>4</sup> it is possible to reveal gender relations on the micro-level of everyday life, but this approach can also obfuscate issues of hegemonic masculinity, such as studies on fatherhood among the Nazi elites (Carney 2018).

The range of what it means to be a perpetrator has widened over time by looking beyond criminal culpability to various levels of complicity. The term “enablers,” for example, is being evoked with more frequency, bringing into view (male) occupations—such as clergymen—that traditionally do not fall into the category of active perpetrators (or neutral bystander, for that matter).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, feminist scholars have begun to pay attention to female perpetrators (Mailänder 2015; Lower 2013; Bock 2005; Harvey 2003; Schwarz 1997); and research is conducted on the impact of Nazism, fascism, and genocidal culpability on German men in the decades following the war and on changing conceptions of masculinity in postwar Germany (though the degree of integrating masculinity theory differs in these works; see, e.g., Linke 1999; Jerome 2001; Herzog 2005; Kellenbach 2013). In sum, research on perpetrator history continues to benefit from a sustained application of gender theory.

Third, when looking at scholarship on Jewish masculinities, we would assume that the topic of the Holocaust plays a significant role. Strikingly, though, it is absent or severely understudied in the relevant literature (e.g., Nur 2014; Schüler-Springorum 2014; Hakak 2012, 2016; Brod and Zevit 2010; Boyarin 1997; Peskowitz and Levitt 1997; Breines 1990). In these books, a similar pattern can be observed: Jewish masculinities are traced through the centuries, all the way up to the *maskilim*, Jewish Enlightenment, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Nordaus's turn-of-the-century *Muskeljudentum*, World War I, early Zionist ideals, and the pre-Holocaust antisemitic race and medical sciences targeting the Jewish body.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the years of the Holocaust are skipped. Studies take up again the thread of Jewish masculinities as they developed in fresh ways after 1945 in places like Israel, Europe, and America, or in film and popular culture. Jewish masculinities during the Holocaust, however, remain largely uninterrogated, and the term “Holocaust” is often missing in the

index of these works. Even the important volume *Jewish Masculinities: German Jews, Gender, and History* (Baader, Gillerman, and Lerner 2012) fails to tackle the Holocaust period. Instead, this volume, as it progresses chronologically, jumps from the “Jewish strongman” Sigmund Breitbart in the 1920s in Poland to its last chapter on German Jewish masculinities among postwar refugees.

Similarly, books on the Jewish body, which include reflections on the Jewish male body, by and large skip the Holocaust (e.g., Gilman 1991; Biale 1992). Biale’s book, which follows a chronological order, repeats the familiar pattern mentioned earlier: the second to last chapter addresses “Zionism as an Erotic Revolution” followed by the concluding chapter on American Jewish culture. The Holocaust period is absent. Jay Geller’s *The Other Jewish Question* (2011) also ends just before the Holocaust. Geller traces anti-Jewish tropes of European discourse on the Jews and, in response, the Jewish counterdiscourses in the period between Rahel Levin Varnhagen’s birth in 1771 and Walter Benjamin’s death in 1940, exploring how fictitious discourses on Jews entangled them in the impossibility of freeing themselves from such misrepresentation. Geller’s book concludes with Benjamin’s suicide, just at the moment when antisemitic ideology reached its pinnacle of genocidal destructiveness during the Holocaust. Maddy Carey’s *Jewish Masculinity in the Holocaust: Between Destruction and Construction* (2017) addresses this lacuna head on. Following an excellent theoretical survey on how masculinity theories can be applied to understanding the experiences of Jewish men in the Holocaust, Carey focuses her study on two periods: the collapse of civil life for Jews in Nazi occupied countries (deconstruction) and their subsequent ghettoization (enclosure).<sup>7</sup> Her careful research comes to the counterintuitive conclusion that Jewish men went through a devastating crisis of their masculine identity in the early years but recovered their masculine identities in the enclosure period—in the ghettos—despite the objectively harsher and deadlier environment.

Given these three areas, it is evident that more work needs to be done at the interstices of Holocaust studies and critical masculinity studies.<sup>8</sup> Such work must accomplish more than merely mentioning a man, or men, as the topic of study. To do so without investigating masculinity would reinforce a normative presence that, at times, actually renders men—and the power structures in which they are embedded—invisible. As coeditors of this volume, we received a number of contributions that fell into this category: men were the topic of research (e.g., letters written by German

soldiers from the front), but no attempt was made to think conceptually or theoretically of what the materials actually tell about masculinities. Would they shed light, for example, on the dynamics of male bonding, on patterns of male-male conduct, on narrative erasures, on instances of emasculation, on conflicting “masculine” expectations, or on power relations? When we asked those levels of analysis to be added, several authors withdrew their chapters.

Rather than treating maleness as a “powerful normalizer,” to paraphrase Doris Bergen (Forum 2017, 80), a critical approach tries to reveal—rather than “re-veil”—the many ways male agency operates and functions under extreme conditions.

### What to Expect from This Book

The articulations of masculinity explored in this volume are those of Jewish victims of National Socialism, Nazi soldiers, Catholic priests enlisted in the *Wehrmacht*, Jewish doctors in the ghettos, men from the *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz, and *Muselmänner* in the camps. Also included in the present study on masculinities are men in the postwar context: German Protestant theologians, Jewish refugees, representations and self-presentations of non-Jewish Austrian men, and Jewish masculinities in the United States. By necessity, this volume is more exemplary than comprehensive. It signals pathways that we deem helpful for continued research in this area.

The volume follows roughly a chronological trajectory, interweaving variegated experiences of men during and after the Holocaust, taking us from the narrow confines of the camps and ghettos (part 1, Genocide) to the wider perspectives of new postwar realities, where conceptions of masculinities were shaped by those years of genocidal madness (part 2, Aftermath). The geography of these gendered expressions and interactions includes death and labor camps, ghettos, and the killing fields, but also Allied internment centers for Jews emigrating from Germany, settlements (*kibbutzim*) in Palestine/Israel, and *Burschenschaften* in Austria. The constructs of male gender are gleaned from a variety of sources: textual documents (such as archival materials and memoirs), oral testimonies and interviews, and visual documentation.

The volume opens with Krondorfer’s chapter, in which he builds a case for why attention must be paid to the experiences of men as “gendered”

experiences with regard to the Holocaust, and how to proceed critically when gender norms render men *as men* invisible. After illustrating the accomplishments of earlier scholarship with the help of select case studies, his chapter introduces two mechanisms of analysis: the concepts of “non-absence” as a way to deconstruct forms of hegemonic masculinity of perpetrators, and of “double non-absence” as a way to approach the subordinate and marginal masculinities of Jewish men in the Holocaust.

Robert Sommer’s chapter on masculinity, sexuality, and death in the Nazi camps provides a gendered reading of the sexual encounters taking place between prisoners entrapped in a world of death and despair. Though the denial of the right to sexual activity was part of the individual’s destruction in the camps, available documentation also shows that prisoners resisted their dehumanization and emasculation in this way. They actually engaged in sex, even if mostly through “situational homosexual sex” and occasionally “situational heterosexuality.” Sexual activity in the camps was instrumentalized and economized, but on a rare occasion mutual love complemented sexual relations among prisoners. Sommer’s focus on the gendered experiences and implications of male sexuality includes the camp brothels.

Lisa Pine’s chapter on male Holocaust victims in Auschwitz tackles the ways in which male gender norms and expectations (as well as deviations from such norms) colored the behavior and emotions of Auschwitz prisoners, including those of the *Sonderkommando*. While some of the features she identifies as “male” are found also among women survivors, Pine argues that Jewish camp inmates faced challenges particular to their male identities to which they responded with a desire to remain strong (or at least project strength), to seek survival at all cost, and to suppress feelings of fear, sadness, and abandonment. Though their narratives comport to traditional gender norms by routinely stressing the work these men had to do in order to survive while downplaying companionship outside of familial ties, anguish over the fading of their masculinity observed in the deterioration of their body and mind is also present in their recollections.

Monika Rice analyzes self-writings by Jewish doctors in ghettos that reveal aspects of male gender identities. Drawing insights from the field of autobiography studies, she illustrates differences between men’s and women’s writings. Male doctors, for example, tended to emphasize an autonomous individual who strives to overcome difficulties, while female doctors were more concerned with forming relationships with their patients.

For all discernible differences, Rice is aware that written testimonies and memories are, like gender, fluid and, at times, can undercut established literary markers of gender identity.

Michael Becker and Dennis Bock's chapter on *Muselmänner* shows that gendering is part of the prisoners' internal camp society. Inmates in Nazi concentration camps—even as they themselves underwent a process of emasculation at the hands of their captors—established the parameters of their restrictive environment with the help of the most vulnerable: the *Muselmänner*. They came to represent all that the rest of the male prisoners resented for fear of becoming—physically and mentally too weak to wish to survive—and hence to maintain a trace of manliness. If the *Muselmann* was perceived as the most unmanly of men, the camp functionaries occupied the other end of the gender hierarchy within the camp: as privileged prisoners they embodied a subform of hegemonic masculinity among the prisoners. Becker and Bock argue that the role of *Muselmänner* contributed to the maintenance of the social and economic gender hierarchy within the camp.

Shifting to Nazi perpetrators, Edward Westermann delves into the little-studied relationship between masculinity, alcohol, and violence during the Holocaust. He shows how the Nazi glorification of martial masculinity was tied to alcohol consumption, and how alcohol played an important role not only in cementing intricate homosocial relations among perpetrators but also in lubricating the Nazis' genocidal machinery. Alcohol made those men feel invincible; it also caused actions that contravened Nazi ideology, such as having sex with or sexually assaulting non-Aryan women, particularly during operations in the East. Underneath the façade of camaraderie, alcohol (ab)use also indicates that these men needed alcohol to enhance their sense of a militarized masculine identity and to assist in their performance of an "ideal" Nazi soldier.

Lauren Faulkner Rossi addresses another form of German masculinity, namely, that of German Catholic seminarians in the *Wehrmacht* (German army). She argues that the priests' masculinity, in conjunction with their Catholic faith and German nationalism, explains their presence in the armed forces. Fear of being shamed and dishonored was likely a factor in the overwhelming acceptance of going to war. Other factors had to do with their strong conviction that, as soldiers, they could defeat the "satanic forces" of Bolshevism. Rossi argues that Catholic seminarians in uniform were not simply mouthpieces of Nazi propaganda; because they harvested the benefits of Nazi ideology, which invested Aryan men with



the creation of a new history, their sense of masculine identity became complicit in the hegemonic and criminal ideals of their time.

German Protestant theologians are the subjects of Benedikt Brunner's chapter, which opens part 2. He samples postwar autobiographies written by Protestant theologians that were published between 1959 and 1977. Far from being innocent recollections of the past, these autobiographies are shaped by the war and its aftermath while also mirroring fundamental changes that occurred in postwar Germany. Examining the language with which these theologians described the troubled relationships between church and state during the Nazi regime, Brunner observes a decidedly martial vocabulary that harks back to the militaristic attitude prevalent among Protestant churches and theologians in the 1930s. Traditional gender roles remained intact in their postwar autobiographies, with men positioned at the helm of history and women appearing in supportive roles.

How representations of masculinity intersect with national identity is the question that Carson Phillips pursues in his chapter on post-Holocaust Austrian masculinities. The nation's mythologized retelling of Austria as "the first victim of Nazism" (despite Austria's widespread welcome of the 1938 *Anschluss* with Germany) shaped some of the emerging post-1945 ideals of masculinity. Phillips focuses on five versions of masculinity and their loci of expression: the "cultured gentleman," the subcultural strand of male student fraternities (*Burschenschaften*), the new ideal of social inclusiveness represented by Austria's soccer players; and a novel masculinity emerging in the late 1980s and 1990s in the form of introspective memory workers. The latter were young men choosing to do their service years not in the military but to assist Holocaust survivors and become active Holocaust educators.

With Patrick Farges's contribution, the volume returns to Jewish masculinities in the form of German Jewish refugees in Canada and Palestine/Israel after 1933. With the rise of Nazism, waves of Jews were forced to migrate from Germany and its immediate neighbors, scattering around the world where they became known as *Yekkes* (German-speaking Jews). These refugee men had to negotiate new and challenging social and economic circumstances, which affected their perceptions of male identity and male gender norms. Farges shows how in two different national settings, Canada and Israel, the gender expectations of these German Jewish men were deeply upset, inhibiting the ways in which these middle-class, educated men (*Bildungsbürger*) performed their masculinity. In Canada, they felt marginalized, partly because they were unable to recreate a safe space

of “little Jewish Germanies”; in Israel, they encountered the new Zionist ideal of a disciplined, agile, and muscular masculinity, which many of the urban German-Jewish *Bildungsbürger* were unwilling or unable to accept.

Sarah Imhoff’s chapter on redemptive masculinity looks at how images of Jewish men were absorbed by the American public between the end of the Holocaust and the Six-Day War in 1967. What started with the perception of “a tragic Jewish masculinity” (the image of Jewish men emaciated by hunger, dressed in rags, and huddled together in an undifferentiated mass), flipped to its opposite twenty-two years later during the Six-Day War. Jewish men were now seen as strong, confident, armed, and ready to defend the land of Israel. Imhoff excavates the literary articulations that brought about this transformation. “Redemptive masculinity,” she argues, explains why the post-1967 image of strong Jewish men resonated so powerfully in America, because it reflected America’s own story of overcoming adversity through hard work, sacrifice, courage, and optimism.

The volume concludes with Thomas Kühne’s epilogue, in which he deepens the conceptual and theoretical framing that a critical masculinity studies approach offers to our understanding of the Holocaust. Emphasizing the notion of gender as a relational category of power, he affirms the importance of investigating the “unmarked” maleness within gender dynamics and recommends utilizing sociological and poststructural thinking about masculinity. He illustrates the advantages of such an inclusive approach with regard to German soldiers and perpetrators as well as Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Subsequently, he discusses the contested and changing nature of masculine norms and ideals.

Developing cogent frameworks for inserting critical masculinity approaches into the study of the Holocaust and its aftermath is crucial if we want to go deeper into the mechanisms of genocide (e.g., Pergher and Roseman 2013) and men’s resilience when faced with extreme conditions. The present volume moves us forward in this direction.

## Notes

1. The forum was held at the 2016 German Studies Association, and proceedings were subsequently published in *German History* (Forum 2017). The panelists were Anna Hájková, Elissa Mailänder, Doris Bergen, Atina Grossman, and Patrick Farges (the latter also represented in this volume).

2. Ringelheim (1990); Koonz (1987); Bridenthal, Grossmann, and Kaplan (1984); Heinemann (1986); Ofer and Weitzman (1998); Kremer (1999); Baer and Goldenberg (2003); Hedgepeth and Saidel (2010); Rittner and Roth (2012); Waxman (2017).

3. These points were raised by Mailänder and Farges (Forum 2017, 97, 92, 82).

4. For example, Gilbert (2017); for an article that registers gendered communication patterns in family archives, see Saraga (2014).

5. Doris Bergen, for example, frequently uses the term “enablers” to describe clergy, military chaplains, German Christians, and other religious groups connected to Nazism and the Holocaust. The “enablers,” she writes, “invoke and perform gender to navigate extreme circumstances, justify and cover up violence, and shift blame” (Forum 2017, 80). See also her 2018 public presentation, “Neighbors, Killers, Enablers, Witnesses: The Many Roles of Mennonites in the Holocaust” (<https://anabaptisthistorians.org/2018/03/17/mennonites-and-the-holocaust-neighbors-killers-enablers-witnesses>), accessed August 14, 2018. In her earlier work on the German Christian Movement (1996) and her textbook *War and Genocide* (2013), Bergen uses the term “enablers” rather sparingly. On the complicity of male clergy, see also Rossi’s and Brunner’s contributions to this volume.

6. On Jewish masculinity in Germany, see Zwicker (2011, esp. chapter 5) and Swartout (2003), who researched Jewish men in dueling fraternities, and Caplan’s work (2003) on Jews in the German military from Imperial Germany to the First World War.

7. Her study deliberately does not include the concentration camps.

8. When this volume was completed and under review by State University of New York Press, the journal *Central European History* came out with a special issue on masculinity and the Third Reich (Kühne 2018); it can be consulted as an additional resource on the themes addressed in our volume.

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