

“LANDSCAPE AFTER THE BATTLE”
OR THE SOVIET HUNS IN EUROPE IN 1945

Although there can be no doubt that Germans doomed Germans to this fate at their own request (to paraphrase Zofia Nałkowska’s famous statement “People doomed people to this fate”), the scale of Soviet crimes against the defenseless citizens of the Third Reich and German prisoners of war arouses horror today, a reflex of empathy, and unequivocal condemnation of the Soviet perpetrators. However, this empathy—it seems—may be rather dulled by the very atrocities of declining Nazism, or by the misplaced empathy of the German Catholic Church, which in the second phase of the war, showed too much sympathy for its “sons” who were ruthlessly murdering innocent people and robbing other nations. The unfortunately very unpleasant evidence for the Church’s attitude is provided by the pastoral letter of August 19, 1943 of the German bishops. It was read in Fulda, at the tomb of Saint Boniface, patron saint of Germany (the document actually suggests that he was a patron saint of the Third Reich):

Our heart belongs to our people, whom God gave us, as their shepherds. We pray for our people and we work for them, we struggle with them and we suffer with them. First of all, our thoughts, wishes, prayers, and worries are with our warriors who sacrifice their lives, suffer for and protect their

homeland against unlimited happiness in heroic battle. The war is waged not only on the bloody fronts, but also in the homeland. It is admirable how much suffering men and women, young and old, must bear to save their homeland. Let Christ, who promised the crown of life for fidelity until death, pay all those who participate in this great and difficult work of saving, often sacrificing the last drop of strength. We direct the words of cordial compassion and the assurance of sincere remembrance in prayer for our brothers and sisters who have lost their property and often their dear ones in air raids. ... At the moment, we are particularly concerned about these thousands, if not millions, who had to leave their homeland and look for a temporary home in distant lands, on someone else's property.¹

The end of the war brought extreme experiences for millions of Germans, soldiers, and civilians. In addition to mass rapes, murders, and robberies, they experienced the agonal phase of Nazism, which murdered its electorate who, a few years earlier, so eagerly applauded the Fuhrer, his speeches, the SA (*Sturmabteilung*, also known as Storm Troopers or Brownshirts) parades, and all the "blitzkriegs." Germans also had to face the realities of a total war, which did not care about victims, the law, or the suffering of the civilian population. It was a war that Germany itself had popularized, making it a kind of showcase for its military strategy and politics. The Soviets who fought against them had the same "features" and were even very innovative in this area. They murdered ruthlessly. They destroyed what they could not take and burned German villages, towns and cities, plundering them completely.

Due to Soviet pressure, there was a great humanitarian catastrophe in Świnoujście (then Swenemunde). On March 9, 1945, the commander of the Soviet air force, Marshal Sergei Khudyakov, asked the US Air Force command for support, involving the bombing of a large group of German ships expected to arrive in the port of Świnoujście. The raid took place a few days later. On March 12, the American fleet of 661 US B17 and B24 bombers, which were protected by some 200 P-11 "Mustang" fighters, dropped 3,218 bombs, totalling 1,609 tons, within 52 minutes. Although of the 422 carpet raids carried out by Americans in Europe during World War II this occupied "only" 66th place in terms of amount of bombs dropped, its effects were extremely tragic for the city. At least a quarter of

¹ The pastoral letter of the German bishops of August 19, 1943, announced in Fulda, at the tomb of Saint Boniface, Archive of New Files, Government Delegation, ref. 202/III-14, ref. 34. For the entire document see: K. Jasiewicz, *Bóg i Jego polska owczarnia w dokumentach 1939–1945*, Warsaw 2009, pp. 320–323.

the city was in ruins. The military objectives were only minimally achieved. Seven ships were sunk and six were damaged. One ferry was sunk and the other was damaged. Because the day was cloudy, the Americans, who were unable to track down their military targets, decided to drop most of the bombs on the city's green areas (parks and cemeteries), not knowing that they contained thousands of escapees from East Prussia and soldiers from broken military units. This decision caused gigantic losses—estimated at 23,000–28,000 victims (the fact that reconnaissance aircraft equipped with sirens appeared over the city just before the raid, warning civilians of the approaching bombardment, is a mitigating factor for the Americans). The city looked ghastly after the raid. As Carola Stern writes:

Bombs were thrown into the middle of the soldiers and refugees hiding there [Health Resort Park – the author's note]. Old trees turned into charred stumps from which human remains hung. There were detached limbs, human heads and hundreds of dead soldiers and civilians everywhere. ... The dead lay all night, naked or covered with newspapers, on the ground. How true were the words 'All is vanity'.²

A pastor who came then to the city writes:

But the most terrible of all hard experiences was still ahead of me. Men and women hung at intervals on linden trees and oaks in our main street, which runs from the station to the beach. Large inscriptions were attached to their backs: "Soldier X deserted" or "Woman Y plundered," and people stood and watched. That was my return and I experienced the truth myself that returning home can be very difficult.³

In his outstanding novel, *Tin Drum*, Günter Grass, a great German writer, Nobel prizewinner (1999) and native of Gdańsk, described marginally, yet quite faithfully, this climate of senseless destruction, savagery, robberies, cruelty, and exceptionally hideous rapes of German women. In 1945, the then 18-year-old saw the city—which in its history had experienced many fires, demolitions, and other disasters from various invaders—in the following way:

The Russians sat outside the houses in the feeble February sun, sorting wristwatches from pocket watches, polishing silver spoons with sand, trying

² As quoted in J. Pluciński, *Świnoujskie przelomy 1939–1959*, Świnoujście 2010, pp. 30–31; the book contains detailed information on the air raid and losses. The victims were buried in collective graves on Golm Hill in the suburbs of Świnoujście or, more precisely, in today's German village of Kamininke.

³ Ibidem, p. 34.

bras on as earmuffs, practicing bicycle tricks on an obstacle course they'd erected with oil paintings, grandfather clocks, bathtubs, radio sets, and hat stands, peddling through them in figure eights, helixes, and spirals, carefully avoiding the baby carriages, chandeliers, and the like that were being thrown out of windows, and were applauded for their skill.⁴

There were also more intimate scenes, often taking place in basements, gates, abandoned apartments, courtyards, or in alleys. As Grass writes:

Things grew almost calm and cozy in our cellar. La Greff lay with increasing composure beneath the three men taking turns, and when one of them had had enough, my talented drummer handed Oscar over to a sweaty, slightly slant-eyed fellow I assume was a Kalmuck. Holding me with his left hand, he buttoned his trousers with his right, and took no offence when his predecessor, my drummer, did the reverse The women, meanwhile, proved to be remarkably quick learners: Maria was picking up her first few words of Russian, her knees no longer trembled, she even laughed and would have played her harmonica, had it been at hand.⁵

Grass most beautifully defined the behavior of the Soviet soldiers in the following phrase: "... all the Russians on the street trying out bicycles, sewing machines, and women ...".⁶

The Soviet rapes have not been condemned by international public opinion, nor have they been condemned by the Soviet Union and modern Russia. Currently, veterans of the Great Patriotic War—as the Soviets and post-Soviets enigmatically call World War II, which, in their opinion, lasted from June 22, 1941 to May 9, 1945,⁷—enjoy undeserved respect. Probably all Russian scientific and teaching institutions, employing thousands of "scholars" specializing in these "issues," conduct "research" on this period.

⁴ G. Grass, *The Tin Drum*, Breon Mitchell (transl.), Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston and New York: 2009, p. 381.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 374.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 380.

⁷ For more on this phenomenon as an element of Soviet/Russian historical policy see: K. Jasiewicz, "Polityka historyczna ZSRS i Rosji w latach 1956-2005 jako element permanentnej destabilizacji Zachodu. Szkic do portretu współczesnej polityki rosyjskiej," *Studia Polityczne* 2007, No. 20, pp. 227–251. It is worth noting that the fact that the Russians do not consider the period from 1939 to 1941 to be an absolutely obvious component of World War II conceals Soviet aggressions against Poland, Finland, Romania (the annexation of Bukovina and Bessarabia), the Baltic states, and the deportations and crimes of 1940–1941, including the Katyn Massacre. Consequently, events such as a crime against peace (after all, there was no war and there was "peace"), war crimes (there was no war) and genocide (also not caused by the war) are not mentioned. After all, the Soviets attributed the Katyn massacre to the Germans. According to Soviet propaganda, it took place in 1941, after the German attack on the Soviet Union.

Western civilization is also silent: political correctness and the desire to do big business with Russia overshadows the underlying moral and ethical principles of united Europe.

It is worth noting that the phenomena of rapes and marauding are very old and are associated with all known wars. They differ only in scale. When entering the eastern part of the Second Polish Republic, sub-units of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army also committed rape, but there were very few incidents of this kind and they were generally severely punished. Both Soviet⁸ and Polish⁹ sources describe these events. In my opinion, there were very few of them in eastern Poland in September 1939 and during subsequent Soviet conquests (until June 1941). I remember reading about a dozen or so incidents of this type (which does not mean there were no more because, due to the delicate nature of these events, many abused women keep this fact, for various reasons, secret, even from relatives).

Women were, and still are, also sexually exploited by more "humane" methods. The Allied troops who occupied the Third Reich used economic incentives (sex for food and everyday goods). Similar cases have been recorded during various recent humanitarian missions, during which many soldiers and civilian employees have sexually exploited young women and even children while distributing food.

Some 5.7 million soldiers from seven fronts (three Belarusian and four Ukrainian) took part in the great Soviet offensive operation, which commenced in January 1945 in the area between the Baltic and the Danube. At the end of January, these troops reached the Oder River, having previously occupied the territory between the lower Vistula and the Oder, including Gdańsk and Kołobrzeg.¹⁰ The Red Army entered ethnic German lands, which were densely populated with civilians and with thousands of fugitives from

⁸ The Russian State Military Archive in Moscow, fond 35 084, passim (concerns the activities of the Soviet army in the territory of so-called Western Ukraine, i.e., the southeastern borderlands) and *ibid.*, fond 35 086, passim (concerns the activities of the Soviet army in the territory of so-called Western Belarus, i.e., the northeastern borderlands). The Soviet documents also describe the activities of military courts. See also: K. Jasiewicz, *Zagłada polskich Kresów. Ziemiaństwo polskie na Kresach Północno-Wschodnich Rzeczypospolitej pod okupacją sowiecką 1939–1941. Studium z dziejów zagłady dawnego narodu politycznego*, Warsaw 1997.

⁹ See numerous accounts in the Eastern Archive in Warsaw, in which this thread is missing.

¹⁰ Information available in any encyclopedia.

the part of the German empire that had already been occupied by the Soviets. These were lands stripped of men in their prime, who had fallen in the earlier years of the war or been captured. For Germans, and German women in particular, it was the time of the Apocalypse.

The crimes and atrocities committed by the citizens of the Third Reich were perfectly remembered by the soldiers. This memory was very fresh and extremely intense at the same time. Probably the emotions behind some retaliatory acts, especially on SS men and camp guards, would be legible to us, despite our condemnation of the perpetrators. However, the civilized world differs from the barbarian world primarily by the claim that each and every criminal must have the right to a fair trial before an independent court. The barbarian world claims that no one has the right to judge the winners, and that the winners are allowed to do anything.

Rape is the most repulsive crime; in wartime it was often punished with death. Rape and marauding are natural consequences of wars and the movement of large numbers of soldiers. However, the rapes committed by the Red Army men and the fact that these rapes went completely unpunished is unprecedented in modern history. Nobody knows exactly how many German women were raped. Two million—the number cited in scientific publications—is probably the minimum number and it is hard to say how much it is underestimated. However, when extrapolated using statistical methods, this number gives a striking conclusion. If we assume that two million German women were raped—and most were subjected to gang rapes—and some had several traumatic experiences, such as those mentioned, for example, in *Dziennik Śląski* [*Silesian Diary*] by Helene Pluschke,¹¹ it means that each and every Red Army soldier, out of those 5.7 million who attacked Germany, was a rapist at least once (I assume in this calculation that gang rape is rape committed by at least three individuals).¹²

I do not count those raped women who hid the fact and the tens of thousands of women raped on the way. The Red Army soldiers—as various Soviet documents show—raped the residents of areas “liberated” from German occupation, first Belarusians

¹¹ H. Plusche, “Dziennik śląski,” *Karta* 2009, No. 57, passim.

¹² K. Jasiewicz, “Refleksje nad „Dziennikiem śląskim” Helene Plusche,” *Karta* 2009, No. 58, passim.

and Ukrainians, and the pace increased with the advance of the mass of the army further west and south. In addition to the many thousands of German women who did not manage to escape from East Prussia and the Sudetes, thousands of Slovak, Czech, Polish, and Austrian women were raped. Even female prisoners from “liberated” concentration camps were raped. Many thousands of Hungarian women were violated during the “liberation” of Budapest in 1945.¹³

We should also mention two other phenomena accompanying Soviet rapes. In non-German (or “allied”) areas, if a woman was not murdered after a rape or if the rape was not fatal to her (it happened that many perpetrators participated in a rape, in some cases there were several dozen, maybe even up to a hundred rapists), she often had her eyes plucked out. In general, unnecessary witnesses were liquidated, including the victim’s family, even if the latter did not obstruct this horrid practice.¹⁴ It may be presumed that the Soviet authorities attempted to keep up the semblance of the rule of law in their own or “allied” territories, hence the perpetrators—not wanting to be recognized—committed another cruelty, mutilating the victim.

Another problem is the offspring, which were an unwanted aftermath of Soviet rape. It is known that thousands of such children were born and it cannot be ruled out that Soviet special services somehow tried to use them, for example, by turning them into means of influence. It was not for nothing that they tried to conceal the existence of post-Soviet children in Germany, falsifying the birth certificates of these children (increasing or decreasing their age so that nothing compromising could be deduced from the date of birth).¹⁵

Demoralized by the war, the suffering they experienced themselves, and the reality of the war they had witnessed, the masses of soldiers were hungry for sex and vodka to relieve their combat stress. They also craved revenge. A shocking report on this subject was put in my hands by a witness, a Pole from a landowning family who was forced to join the Soviet army. He followed the combat trail with a sanitary battalion. “They had only one ailment—gang rape. They raped all German women without exception, often

¹³ Ibidem and J. Baberowski, *Stalin: Terror absolutny*, Warsaw 2014, p. 470.

¹⁴ An anonymous account from the Suwałki area; the person was guaranteed anonymity.

¹⁵ See K. Jasiewicz, “Zmodernizowana janczaria?,” *W Sieci Historii* 2018, February, No. 2, pp. 54–56.

mutilating or killing them. It is better not to describe what happened after a Soviet unit entered a German village or town. You cannot even imagine this savagery and bestiality”.¹⁶

The problem is similarly described by the Soviet soldier Leonid Rabczew, quoted by Jörg Baberowski:

Women, mothers and daughters, lay on the street, on the left and on the right, and a group of men stood in front of each of them with their pants down. A woman, covered in blood, unconscious, was lying on the street and the children who were running to help her were shot. Cackles, encouraging cries, laughter, screams and groans. The commanders and superiors stood in the street, one laughed, the other gave advice. Actually, he made sure that all soldiers, without exception, could have their pleasure. No, there was no collective responsibility or revenge on the [...] it was ruthless group sex, often deadly for the victims.¹⁷

Baberowski explains these horrors by the fact that Soviet soldiers had been living in a world of anti-values for many years, that there was contempt for death in their mentality, and that they had become used to ruthlessness and rape, which were ubiquitous in the life of the Soviet Union.¹⁸

It is rather difficult to accept Baberowski's view. Undoubtedly, frontline soldiers stared at death long enough to get used to it. The war also triggered in them a great power of destruction against their opponents, including defenceless women, children, and elderly civilians. Judging by their consent to this style of “struggle,” rapes could also have had a purely political subtext. They forced or encouraged the residents of conquered territories to escape and thus cleansed the territory of a human element, turning it into a no man's land. It was easier to negotiate the future of an uninhabited “no man's land.” Or the subtext could have been very practical. The soldiers needed “entertainment” and it was probably difficult to control their baser instincts under the conditions of war, even if drastic methods were used. However, this does not at all absolve them. The conclusion is that the Soviet system generated this ethos, and not any other, in

¹⁶ The account of Tadeusz Czarkowski-Golejewski, the son of the *ordynat* in Wysuczka, in the Tarnopol province, in: “The Archival List of Losses among Polish Landowners, 1939–1956” (Krzysztof Jasiewicz's own collection). Also see the part of this account that includes the passage quoted: T. Czarkowski-Golejewski, *Moja Wysuczka*, in: *Europa nie-prowincjonalna. Przemiany na ziemiach wschodnich dawnej Rzeczypospolitej (Białoruś, Litwa, Łotwa, Ukraina, wschodnie pogranicze III Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) w latach 1772–1999*, K. Jasiewicz (ed.), Warsaw-London 1999, pp. 339 et seq.]

¹⁷ J. Baberowski, *Stalin. Terror absolutny...*, p. 470.

¹⁸ J. Baberowski, *Stalin*, passim.

its army. Moreover, the example came from above. The commanders also eagerly made use of the benefits of lawlessness.

The book by Stanisław M. Jankowski provides an even sadder testimony to Soviet war crime. It is full of evidence, including numerous descriptions of Soviet rapes:¹⁹

I saw with my own eyes how drunken Russians chased nuns around the church, and they shouted so that someone would help them. But who could help them then? Nobody could do anything. The Russians raped them one by another in front of the church. [This is a description of events in Carlsruhe, today's Rokitno] ... A dozen or so drunken Russians shouted and waved their rifles. They ran into the monastery and began to pull women out of the basement [secular ones who had sheltered there]. They did not look at their age or what they looked like. Others immediately threw themselves on those that were pushed out of the building and ripped off their clothes. They pushed terrified women onto the ground and raped them in the snow near the wall of the building. They took some of them onto carts or into other houses. Half-naked women tried unsuccessfully to break free of these riffraff and begged for help. Younger girls called their mothers who approached the soldiers and asked them to take them and release their daughters. There were cries, shouts, and wild roars from the Russians. The Russians paid no attention to anything, they ran amok. A real Gomorrah began, sending chills down the spine. Those who did not violate, laughed, smoked cigarettes, and drank hooch from their canisters.²⁰

Another picture is associated with Elblag. A German resident describes the organized, gang sexual activity of the Soviets. Women were picked up, selected, and sent to a building occupied by Soviet commanders:

I was 39 years old then. One of the headquarters' rooms was intended for rapes. Younger women were taken first; I was only taken in the morning and three Russian soldiers raped me. These rapes were repeated twice a day, each time many soldiers raped, until the seventh day. This day was the worst for me... I could neither walk nor lie. Later there were three more days similar to the first six. Then, according to Russian soldiers, we were no longer fit for anything and they chased us out of this cave. These atrocities took place in the presence of other women, and often even their own children. During these terrible days, we did not get anything to eat, only alcohol and cigarettes.²¹

This account must be slightly corrected at this point. The author calls all uniformed men "soldiers." Meanwhile, the rapists were

¹⁹ S.M. Jankowski, *Dawaj czasy! Czyli wyzwolenie po sowiecku*, Poznań 2017.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 184.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 205.

probably “officers” from headquarters and even NKVD or SMERSH officers, who wanted to find women for themselves in such places under the pretext of business matters—which caused disagreements between these formations.

Difficult relations also prevailed in the Polish territories (both the old and the “recovered” ones). Soviet soldiers and officers behaved the same everywhere. There were rapes, robberies, and other crimes. There were even Soviet battles with a kind of Polish Citizens’ Militia and Polish soldiers who tried to defend the abused civilians. The Polish communist authorities formed so-called “operational groups,” whose official task was to protect property, particularly industrial facilities, against common looting, but at the same time they provided protection against uncontrolled robbery by Soviet troops, who took everything that came into their hands and transported it to the farthest parts of the Soviet Union.²²

In the common opinion of the liberated Poles, “liberation” was enslavement and the behavior of the “liberators” was extremely reprehensible, not to say thuggish. Lieutenant Colonel Jerzy Ziętek, who was the deputy of the voivode of Silesia, General Aleksander Zawadzki (they were both Sovietized Polish communists), mentioned the enthusiasm with which the Red Army was greeted in Silesia, before quickly coming to a conclusion that reflected the actual state of affairs: “A Soviet soldier has now become a symbol of evil among the Polish people who were waiting for him.”²³

As long as a politically correct Europe does not require Russia to condemn the above-described phenomena publicly, we can suspect that their troops might behave in the same manner if they ever come again. In the name of the values of the civilized world, we have an obligation to talk about these events and condemn these crimes. After all, maintaining good relations with Russia based on good business leads nowhere.

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²² For the times of the early communist Poland see: I. Kostrowicka, Z. Landau, J. Tomaszewski, *Historia gospodarcza Polski w XIX i XX wieku*, Warszawa 1984, pp. 452 et seq.

²³ S.M. Jankowski, *Dawaj czasy!...*, p. 318.