German Society at War, 1939–45

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Gesine Gerhard, *Nazi Hunger Politics: A History of Food in the Third Reich* (Rowman & Littlefield: London, 2015), 196 pp., £ 24.95, ISBN: 9781442227248.

Sven Keller, *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende: Gesellschaft und Gewalt 1944/45* (Oldenbourg Verlag: München, 2013), 505 pp., € 64.95, ISBN-13: 978–3486725704.

Maren Röger, *Kriegsbeziehungen: Intimität, Gewalt und Prostitution im besetzten Polen 1939 bis 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2015), 304 pp., € 24.99, ISBN: 978–3100022608.

Nicholas Stargardt, *The German War: A Nation under Arms, 1939–1945* (London: The Bodley Head, 2015), 736 pp., £ 19.99, ISBN: 978–1847920997.

Dietmar Süß, *Death from the Skies: How the British and Germans Survived Bombing in World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 736 pp., £ 30, ISBN: 9780199668519.

I

The actions, attitudes and experiences of German society between 1939 and 1945 played a crucial role in ensuring that the Second World War was not only 'the most immense and costly ever fought' but also a conflict which uniquely resembled the ideal type of a 'total war'.[1] The Nazi regime mobilised German society on an unprecedented scale: over 18 million men served in the Wehrmacht and Waffen SS, and compulsory *Volkssturm* duty, initiated as Allied forces approached Germany's borders in September 1944, embraced further millions of the young and middle-aged.[2] The German war effort, above all in occupied Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, claimed the lives of millions of Jewish and gentile civilians and

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[1] Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, eds., *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

[2] Ibid., 102; Ian Kershaw, *The End: Hitler's Germany, 1944–45* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), 107–8.

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served explicitly genocidal ends.[3] In this most 'total' of conflicts, the sheer scale of the Third Reich's ultimate defeat stands out, even in comparison with that of Imperial Japan, which surrendered to the Allies prior to an invasion of its Home Islands.[4] When the war in Europe ended on 8 May 1945 Allied forces had occupied almost all of Germany, with its state and economic structures lying in ruins.[5] Some 4.8 million German soldiers and 300,000 Waffen SS troops lost their lives during the Second World War, including 40 per cent of German men born in 1920.[6] According to recent estimates Allied bombing claimed approximately 350,000 to 380,000 victims and inflicted untold damage on the urban fabric of towns and cities across the Reich.[7] As Nicholas Stargardt notes, this was truly 'a German war like no other'.[8]

Explaining the 'self-destructive path' taken by German society during the Second World War represents a historiographical problem of considerable complexity, and one which has moved in recent years to the centre of Third Reich historiography.[9] Traditionally, an influential argument developed by historians such as Martin Broszat and Ian Kershaw stressed how an initial wave of enthusiasm at national victories gave way in German society to war weariness during 1941–2 and an irreversible slide into defeatism after the sixth army's destruction at Stalingrad in early 1943. Within this account the Nazi regime was increasingly reliant on coercion and terror to maintain its war effort during the years 1943–45, with German society progressively distancing itself from the influence of its ideology.[10] As Ian Kershaw argued in his magisterial biography of Hitler, *Nemesis*, following the battle of Stalingrad, 'the German people's love affair with Hitler was at an end. Only the bitter process of divorce remained.'[11] Recent research has, however, begun to revise this established interpretation, with

[3] For example, Jochen Böhler, *Auftakt zum Vernichtungskrieg: Die Wehrmacht in Polen 1939* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2006); Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford and David Stahel, eds., *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941: Total War, Genocide, and Radicalization* (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2012).

[4] Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 3.

[5] Ibid., 94.

[6] Rüdiger Overmans, *Deutsche Militärische Verluste im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999), 238–43, 279–83 and 300–1; Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives under the Nazis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), 17.

[7] Dietmar Süß, *Death from the Skies: How the British and Germans Survived Bombing in World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6; Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939–1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 470–7.

[8] Nicholas Stargardt, *The German War: A Nation under Arms, 1939–1945* (London: Bodley Head, 2015), 1.

[9] See, Ibid., 19; Kershaw, *The End*; Bessel, *Germany 1945*; Michael Geyer, 'Endkampf 1918 and 1945', in Alf Lüdtke and Bernd Weisbrod, eds., *No Man's Land of Violence: Extreme Wars in the Twentieth Century* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006), 35–67.

[10] See, Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis*, (London: Allen Lane, 2001), 556–7 and 702–3; Ian Kershaw, ed., *The 'Hitler Myth': Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 192; Martin Broszat, Klaus-Dietmar Henke and Hans Woller, eds., *Von Stalingrad zur Währungsreform: Zur Sozialgeschichte des Umbruchs in Deutschland*, (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1988).

[11] Kershaw, *Nemesis*, 557.

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Kershaw's own 2011 study, *The End*, depicting higher levels of societal support for the war and Nazi regime in 1944 than his earlier works.[12]

This article reviews several titles rethinking the mentalities, experiences and transformations of German society during the Second World War. Several authors focus directly on the established question of how Germans were able to continue fighting until the point of 'total defeat' in spring 1945.[13] In tackling this key problem, these titles, as well as the others under review, address a range of previously neglected questions, such as how Germans subjectively perceived their society and its war effort between 1939 and 1945 and the roles played by cultural and religious influences in shaping their attitudes.[14] The authors analyse what German society considered to be the legitimate functions of government, 'national community' and what Dietmar Süß terms its 'ideas of the "right" and "wrong" ways to respond to war situations'.[15] The titles provide innovative research on themes as diverse as sexual relationships between occupiers and occupied in wartime Poland and the cultural resources Germans drew upon to cope with the experience of mass bereavement during the years 1943–45.[16] The picture of German society which emerges from these studies is one stressing its adaptability and resilience in the face of total war, even as defeats mounted, but also one highlighting the range of cultural influences beyond Nazi ideology underpinning this tendency.

Conceptually, these titles can moreover be read as marking a significant historicising moment within the field, with earlier tendencies to write about Germans during the war as 'either victims or perpetrators' giving way to a much more nuanced portrayal of their attitudes and experiences.[17] Dietmar Süß resolutely refuses to engage in discussion of the morality of the Allied bombing of Germany, instead historicising arguments stressing German victimhood at the hands of the RAF, such those made by Jörg Friedrich's 2002 work *The Fire*.[18] Whereas contemporary memory cultures and public discussion in Germany itself continue to search for the 'right didactic lessons' to be derived from the Second World War, Nicholas Stargardt instead stresses the need 'to understand the past' on its own terms as his own book's point of departure.[19] It is this impulse, to explore Germans' wartime attitudes and experiences in all of their complexity and ambiguity, which accounts for the prominent roles played by 'ego documents' within several of the following studies – as a means of exploring,

[12] See, Kershaw, *The End*, 31–5 and 389; Stargardt, 'Beyond "Consent" or "Terror": Wartime Crises in Nazi Germany', *History Workshop Journal*, 72, 1 (2011), 190–204.

[13] Stargardt, *The German War*; Süß, *Death from the Skies*; Sven Keller, *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende: Gesellschaft und Gewalt 1944/45* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2013).

[14] See Stargardt, *The German War*; Süß, *Death from the Skies*.

[15] Süß, *Death from the Skies*, ix.

[16] Ibid., 239–99 and 407–54; Stargardt, *The German War*; Maren Röger, *Kriegsbeziehungen: Intimität, Gewalt und Prostitution im besetzten Polen 1939 bis 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2015).

[17] Stargardt, *The German War*, 3.

[18] Süß, *Death from the Skies*, 518–9, 546.

[19] Stargardt, *The German War*, 3.

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rather than excusing or condemning, their authors' responses and contributions to unfolding events.[20]

II

Much recent work on wartime Germany has focused on analysing the mass violence and destruction visited upon it during the conflict's final months: a period which saw the Wehrmacht suffer by far its heaviest losses during the entire war and previously unscathed urban areas devastated by Allied bombing.[21] Sven Keller's approach to analysing the wave of violence unleashed by the Nazi regime itself during the final months of 1944–5 is, however, distinctive. Rather than examining the contribution of state terror to sustaining the German war effort, he focuses instead on exploring the motivations behind its perpetration on the ground. His study, *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende*, poses the crucial question: 'why, when confronted with imminent and certain defeat, did perpetrators commit murder, and how was the Nazi regime able to inspire acts of violence to the very end?'[22]

In addressing this problem Keller's study provides us with a harrowing account of the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime and its supporters during the period Allied troops were fighting on German soil between September 1944 and May 1945, drawing on a rich range of source materials. These include post-war trial documents, whose content compensates for the increasingly thin paper trail left by the Nazi regime's collapsing bureaucracies in early 1945.[23] *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende* considers the many forms of violence perpetrated by the Nazi regime during the war's final months, ranging from the executions of 'defeatists' and former political opponents, to the last ruthless attacks on racial enemies, such as Polish forced labourers and Jewish camp survivors.[24]

Keller's study powerfully demonstrates that even amidst the Reich's collapse, Nazi violence continued to target 'racial outsiders' to a much greater extent than 'ordinary Germans'.[25] Local Nazi authorities and police forces overwhelmingly blamed instances of looting on 'forced labourers' from Poland and the Soviet Union – individuals they axiomatically associated with criminality. This viewpoint ensured that it was disproportionately forced labourers who bore the lethal consequences for instances of looting, despite the fact that German troops and civilians frequently resorted to it themselves.[26] Regional Gestapo officers and other Nazi agencies

[20] For this approach in a French context, see Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows: A New History of the French Resistance*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2015), 14–5.
[21] Overmanns, *Militärische Verluste*, Süß, *Death from the Skies*, 105–8; Kershaw, *The End*; Bessel, *Germany 1945*.
[22] Keller, *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende*, 7.
[23] Ibid., 21–52.
[24] Ibid., 274–323 and 406–17; see also the discussion of suicide as a form of violence, 203–9.
[25] Ibid., 426.
[26] Ibid., 275–7 and 297.

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executed large numbers of Soviet and Polish labourers in the face of Allied advances.[27] Keller cites several cases of German armed forces and police units murdering Jewish prisoners on death marches, again demonstrating the close interplay between the Nazi regime's racism and its perceptions of internal security threats.[28] His research moreover outlines the active roles played by 'ordinary Germans' – particularly Hitler Youths and *Volkssturm* men – in the perpetration of violence against foreign labourers and Jews in localities across the Reich.[29] Keller highlights a case in Soltau, a small town on the Luneburg Heath, in which a Hitler Youth helped search for an escaped 'eastern worker' 'out of curiosity', and assisted in his subsequent execution.[30] Collectively, these examples substantiate Keller's central argument, namely that: 'National Socialist violence in the final phase of the Second World War was violence for, through and according to the order of the "national community"'.[31]

One of the most powerful arguments developed by *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende* concerns the centrality of Germans' emotions in motivating such acts of violence against 'racial outsiders'. Keller highlights how many Germans took out their feelings of anger and fear at the unfolding destruction of their country on these unfortunate individuals, with the violence representing an attempt to maintain the racial hierarchy to which they had become so accustomed under Nazi rule.[32] He thereby demonstrates that the atrocities of late 1944 and early 1945 were driven by emotions and initiative on the ground as well as by orders from above. In a telling example, the morning following the firebombing of Dresden during the night of 16–17 February 1945, a local man detained three forced labourers whom he had found looting neighbouring properties. A small crowd, mainly consisting of women, soon gathered, who proceeded to stone the prisoners to death.[33] This incident, and the many others detailed within *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende*, underline the crucial roles played by Germans' own self-mobilisation within the state-directed violence of late 1944–5.[34]

This study also deepens our understanding of the violence Germans perpetrated against each other during this period. Crucial in this context is Keller's convincing depiction of the war's final phases in an area as an unstable 'transitional phase', with many Germans longing for the final end of the conflict and Nazi rule, others resorting to violence to assert their own senses of identity which were bound up with the National Socialist order.[35] This volatile atmosphere could easily lead to conflict, with Keller highlighting several examples of local Nazi Party officials ordering the execution of 'old opponents' such as former Communist and Socialist

[27] Ibid., 263, and 223–6.
[28] Ibid., 12–8, 139–40, 162 and 218–9.
[29] See, Kershaw, *The End*, 225–8; Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 54–8.
[30] Ibid., 158–61.
[31] Ibid., 20.
[32] Ibid., 429–30.
[33] Ibid., 289–90, 298 and 429–30.
[34] Ibid., 159–62 and 295–98.
[35] Ibid., 431–4.

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Party activists, and individual Nazi supporters and Wehrmacht members reacting furiously to public expressions of defeatism or alienation from the regime, such as failures to salute with the 'German Greeting' or the hoisting of white flags.[36] Individuals who had suffered bereavement or injury during the war could respond to these personal tragedies via a deep investment in German victory – and react violently to demonstrations of defeatism by those more fortunate than themselves.[37] In certain cases the violence perpetrated by the Nazi regime against 'ordinary Germans' in the war's final months could draw upon a certain level of societal support. Keller highlights several instances of civilians betraying Wehrmacht deserters to the state authorities and *Volkssturm* men willingly participating in the execution of 'defeatists'.[38] Featuring a formidable empirical base and analysis of localities across the collapsing Reich, *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende* is an important work, and one which significantly deepens our understanding of German society's varied and complex relationships to the mass violence instigated by the Nazi regime during the final months of its existence. Whilst Keller does not explore memory as a theme, his findings open up important questions concerning its manifestations in early West Germany. How did the Federal Republic's memory cultures in the long 1950s, with their emphasis on national victimhood, navigate local recollections of the lethal inter-German violence committed in early 1945, particularly when many of its perpetrators, such as *Volkssturm* men, could hardly be construed as members of a powerful and unrepresentative regime elite? *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende*'s findings could indeed be read as supporting recent literatures arguing that the early Federal Republic's memory culture represented not the perpetuation of a consensual 'national community' but rather the attempt to recreate 'a minimum degree of civic consensus' capable of papering over social conflicts such as the inter-German atrocities of early 1945.[39]

In contrast to Sven Keller's study, Nicholas Stargardt's recent book, *The German War*, focuses explicitly on the longue durée from September 1939 to May 1945.[40] Stargardt's employment of this wider chronological canvas is no accident and reflects his study's key aim: namely, to examine 'what Germans thought they were fighting for' and how this enabled them 'to continue their war to the bitter end'.[41] Central to this goal is consideration of how German society's understandings of the conflict – its 'oscillating hopes and fears' – shifted between 1939 and 1945, reflecting the influence of changing military developments at the fronts, mounting Allied bombing and knowledge of Nazi atrocities, above all the murder of European Jews.[42] In order to explore these complex and dynamic popular attitudes, Stargardt bases his study around a core collection of diaries and letters, whose contents afford rich insights into their authors' subjective understandings of the war and the psychological resources

[36] Ibid., 316–7 and 406–15.
[37] Ibid., 343–4.
[38] Ibid., 131–45 and 158–64.
[39] See Neil Gregor, *Haunted City: Nuremberg and the Nazi Past* (New Haven: Yale, 2008), 12–3, 376–8.
[40] Stargardt, *The German War*, 19.
[41] Ibid., 1.
[42] Ibid., 6 and 19.

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they drew upon to sustain their participation in it. Some of these diaries, such as those of the German-Jewish linguist Victor Klemperer and Protestant writer Jochen Klepper are well known, but the majority of these largely unpublished documents have received little or no scholarly attention.[43] These individuals afford a snapshot of wide sections of German society, featuring men and women with a range of class, confessional, regional and generational backgrounds.[44] (Although it is discernible that all of these *dramatis personae* are from localities within Germany's pre-1939 borders).[45] Stargardt complements these 'ego-documents' with source materials affording a more panoramic perspective, such as the morale reports of the Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*; SD).[46] In so doing, *The German War* provides us with a groundbreaking study that transforms our understandings of 'how the German people experienced and sustained this war', even to the point of 'total defeat' in spring 1945.[47]

Central to this revisionism is Stargardt's portrayal of much higher levels of German support for the national war effort during the years 1943–4 than has been suggested by previous studies. Whereas the sixth army's destruction at Stalingrad in early 1943 and the firebombing of Hamburg that July have traditionally been interpreted as prompting an irreversible slide into defeatism within German society, Stargardt highlights a wealth of evidence indicating ongoing hopes of victory, or at least alternatives to defeat, throughout 1943 and 1944.[48] Although Stargardt demonstrates that the late summer of 1943 undeniably represented an 'unprecedented' low-point in German morale, he also proves that this did not initiate a consistent slide into defeatism. Popular support for the war effort had consolidated again by the spring and summer of 1944, as expressed by the mass demonstrations of relief across the Reich that greeted news of Hitler's survival of the 20 July bomb plot.[49] *The German War* outlines how this ongoing societal investment in the conflict found expression in the voluntary mass mobilisation of women to serve as Red Cross auxiliaries, within the Reich Air Defence Association and even in the Wehrmacht itself. This helped ensure that the German Home Front, unlike its Italian equivalent, did not buckle under the weight of mounting Allied bombing between 1942 and 1945.[50] Neither did desertion trouble the Wehrmacht's core Austro-German contingents until 'the final weeks of the war'.[51] Stargardt portrays German morale as disintegrating only in early 1945, when Allied forces breached the Reich's last natural defences: the Rhine and Oder rivers.[52]

Pivotal within this account of wartime German morale is Stargardt's persuasive argument that enthusiasm for the Nazi regime was by no means the only – or

[43] Ibid., xxiv–viii and 19.
[44] Ibid., xxvii–viii.
[45] Ibid., xxvii.
[46] Ibid., 453. See also the complete list of SD citations on pages 700–1.
[47] Ibid., 1.
[48] Ibid., 8, 351, 417 and 453.
[49] Ibid., 378–81, 417–18, 452–3 and 480.
[50] Ibid., 394–5.
[51] Ibid., 215.
[52] Ibid., 482–5.

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the most influential – pillar of support for the national war effort. Whereas older studies understandably equated declining popular support of the regime with defeatist sentiment, *The German War* underlines the limitations of this binary approach.[53] The notion that the conflict was defensive in nature, and imposed on the Reich by external aggression, embraced far wider sections of society in 1939 than devoted Nazis, and would continue to do so after 1943.[54] It was paradoxically during 1943 and early 1944, when popular enthusiasm for the Führer cult and regime began to fade, that many Germans increasingly internalised the core Nazi belief that an international Jewish conspiracy committed to the Reich's destruction was orchestrating the Allied war effort.[55] In March 1944 even a former trade unionist and acquaintance of Victor Klemperer saw the influence of Jewish 'billionaires' as lying behind the recent Allied bombing of Hamburg.[56] Such examples substantiate *The German War*'s argument that it was the very ferocity with which the war 'came home' from 1943 onwards which rendered Germans increasingly 'receptive' to the Nazi regime's 'apocalyptic' world-view and the conspiratorial anti-Semitism at its heart.[57] Stargardt thereby demonstrates that widespread knowledge of the Holocaust in German society as of late 1941 ensured that many individuals perceived the war as one waged for national survival against an 'implacable enemy' – furnishing a powerful basis for fighting on despite the Nazi regime's declining popularity.[58] He nevertheless also highlights that the periodic expressions of fear concerning the prospect of 'Jewish retaliation' betrayed moments, however transitory, when German morale was wavering.[59]

Central to Stargardt's overall argument concerning morale is his portrayal of the wide range of cultural influences Germans drew upon to sustain themselves – and thereby the Reich's war effort – during the long years between September 1939 and May 1945. Religion, education and senses of familial duty are all themes which receive nuanced analysis in this context, with *The German War* affording them more significance than state imposed terror in motivating individuals to fight on until spring 1945.[60] For the Solingen high school teacher August Töpperwien, it was a devout Protestant faith that underpinned his support of the war until April 1945, despite his horror at the systematic murder of the Jews he encountered on the eastern front. Shaped profoundly by nationalist theologies portraying the Germans as God's chosen people, Töpperwien understood the collapse of November 1918 as a religious failure which must not be repeated in the present war.[61] Other educated soldiers sought inspiration in the works of Goethe and Hölderlin, as well as the visions of masculinity and combat popularised by Ernst Jünger's writings during the

[53] Ibid., 8 and 463.
[54] Ibid., 27–34, 461 and 564.
[55] Ibid., 375–80 and 417–8.
[56] Ibid., 417.
[57] Ibid., 7 and 463.
[58] Ibid., 417–8, 539–40 and 564.
[59] Ibid., 377–9 and 472.
[60] Ibid., 9 and 215. Note the contrast to Kershaw, *The End*, 390.
[61] Ibid., 4–5, 31–2, 258 and 458–9.

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interwar era.[62] Stargardt demonstrates how soldiers not only felt a powerful sense of intergenerational responsibility to avenge the defeat their fathers had suffered in 1918, but also a duty to save their own children from participation in the next instalment of what was understood, in Nietzschean terms, to be 'a terrible cycle of repeated wars'.[63] Wives and mothers appealed to soldiers at the front to hold out, with one instructing her husband in a letter of October 1944 to 'close your soft German heart with hardness to the outside'.[64] Here, Stargardt highlights a central paradox: while many couples' support of the war rested on the notion that it would lead to a blissful 'family idyll' following victory, in many cases the experience of prolonged separation strained and transformed their relationships.[65] Characterised by its analysis of a tremendous range of themes as well as the original insights derived from the use of 'ego documents', *The German War* is a wonderful book, which will serve as a key point of departure for future research in this field. Scholars seeking to contest Stargardt's revisionist account of wartime morale will indeed need to base their challenge on the terrain marked out by his work – that of the private emotions, hopes and fears chronicled in contemporary letters and diaries, especially during the years 1943–5.

Whereas love and sex represent recurring topics of analysis within *The German War*, they represent the central focus of Maren Röger's engaging study *Kriegsbeziehungen: Intimität, Gewalt und Prostitution im besetzten Polen 1939 bis 1945*.[66] Her original research concerns a subject long marginalised after 1945 by nationalist memory cultures on either side of the River Oder: namely the sexual relationships between German soldiers and Polish women, both gentile and Jewish, during the Second World War.[67] Röger focuses her analysis on the three most common forms of sexual encounter in occupied Poland, namely prostitution, rape and consensual relationships, while also highlighting the frequently ambiguous boundaries between these categories.[68] She provides a detailed analysis of the German authorities' attempts to regulate this sexual contact, such as the Wehrmacht's early establishment of an official system of brothels, staffed by Polish women frequently forced to work as prostitutes against their will.[69] *Kriegsbeziehungen* analyses the perspectives of both Polish women and German men, gleaned from innovative primary research embracing court files, the documentation of the Wehrmacht's medical corps, individual letters and diaries as well as oral history interviews.[70] The result is a superb work which provides us with a host of original insights into everyday life in German-occupied Poland.

[62] Ibid., 314–5, 413–4.
[63] Ibid., 17 and 69.
[64] Ibid., 465.
[65] Ibid., 19, 69, 293–5, 421–2.
[66] Röger, *Kriegsbeziehungen*.
[67] Ibid., 12–3, 216–7.
[68] Ibid., 12–5.
[69] Ibid., 29–42.
[70] Ibid., 22–6.

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One of *Kriegsbeziehungen*'s core arguments concerns the sheer scale of sexual contact between Germans and Poles during the war years. Röger highlights the large numbers of Wehrmacht members frequenting official and unofficial brothels, with these visits often functioning as a form of collective male bonding. In February and March 1943 approximately 600–800 German men visited a brothel in Lemberg (Lviv) every day.[71] She demonstrates that sexual contact between occupiers and occupied developed as early as September 1939 and underlines the limited effectiveness of the legislative boundaries with which the Nazi authorities subsequently intended to segregate Poles from Germans.[72] German men and Polish women came into contact with one another on the street, in the workplace, cafés and restaurants. The former often simply ignored signs banning Poles from frequenting such institutions and took their Polish girlfriends out for meals and coffee.[73] Several of these encounters developed into fully fledged relationships of considerable duration, with the German men in question often longing for female affection and companionship as much as sex itself.[74]

Revealingly, many German soldiers and officials flagrantly violated Nazi racial laws prohibiting sexual intercourse with Polish women outside the regulated environment of official brothels.[75] One policeman's girlfriend explicitly informed him that she was Polish – but this did nothing to deter him from having sex with her.[76] Yet more serious from the perspective of the Nazi authorities were several cases where soldiers raped Jewish women, in direct contradiction of the Nuremberg laws. The defences offered by the accused individuals in such cases – namely that the Jews were 'free game' – indicate not only the limits on the Nazi regime's control over its citizens' bodies, but also the sense of sexual entitlement created by the experience of serving as a conquering 'Aryan' in 'the east'.[77] The occupation authorities punished these German men and local women much more severely than the parties in cases where the woman in question was a gentile Pole, underlining the unique place occupied by Jews within the Nazi regime's racial hierarchy.[78] This point is further emphasised by the fact that many German men in consensual relationships with gentile Polish women sought to persuade the Nazi authorities to recognise these unions and permit marriage. To do so, they exploited the ambiguity of racial categorisations in occupied Poland, such as by claiming their girlfriend was an ethnic German, and strengthening this case by having her convert from Catholicism to Protestantism. Several of these applications were successful, with the women in question receiving classification as ethnic Germans.[79] *Kriegsbeziehungen* thereby supports recent historiographies

[71] Ibid., 53.
[72] Ibid., 30 and 83–95.
[73] Ibid., 84–95.
[74] Ibid., 119.
[75] Ibid 43, 59–74 and 108–27.
[76] Ibid., 142.
[77] Ibid., 193–4, 203, 221.
[78] Ibid., 226, 149–50.
[79] Ibid., 156–60.

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stressing the fluidity of national categorisations in occupied Poland and the roles played by cultural influences in shaping official decisions concerning individuals' racial identity.[80] The Nazi authorities' treatment of Germans found guilty of having sex with Polish women also lacked consistency. Certain individuals were punished harshly, others not at all, with ethnic Germans typically receiving less leniency than their compatriots from the 'old Reich'.[81] Viewed from Röger's chosen perspective of everyday life, Nazi racial policies in occupied Poland appear much more ambiguous than traditionally assumed – and Germans on the ground less scrupulous in their implementation.

Kriegsbeziehungen also makes important arguments concerning the interfaces between gender, sex and notions of national honour in wartime German (and Polish) society. She highlights in harrowing detail how German men's perpetration of sexual violence against Polish women often functioned as a means of humiliating the conquered enemy, as during the battle of Warsaw in summer 1944.[82] In autumn 1939 ethnic German men occasionally raped local Polish women against whom they bore grudges and as a symbolic demonstration of their newfound power in a locality.[83] Such understandings of women as keepers of national honour and racial purity also ensured that the Nazi authorities' treatment of German men engaged in sexual relationships with Polish women in 'the east' was far more lenient than that of their female compatriots in the 'Old Reich', who were found guilty of doing the same with Eastern European POWS or 'forced labourers'. Profoundly gendered understandings of national honour and 'racial defilement' decisively shaped the administration of the Nazi regime's legislation in this field.[84] *Kriegsbeziehungen* thereby provides us with an innovative portrayal of both the power and ambiguity of Nazi policies in occupied Poland, as well as a lucid account of a key form of everyday encounter between (largely male) Germans and (mostly female) Poles. Röger moreover clearly highlights opportunities for future research in this field. She notes that the post-war histories of the sexual encounters analysed by her study are almost entirely unexplored in either German or Polish contexts; particularly at the level of individual families, who were forced to either confront or suppress knowledge of them.[85] Above all, *Kriegsbeziehungen* movingly underlines the extent to which the Nazi regime was willing to exploit all available human and material resources in occupied Poland to sustain German morale – including even the bodies of local women.[86]

[80] Ibid., 161; Gerhard Wolf, *Ideologie und Herrschaftsrationalität. Nationalsozialistische Germanisierungspolitik in Polen* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2012); Birthe Kundrus, 'Regime der Differenz: Volkstumspolitische Inklusionen und Exklusionen im Warthegau und im Generalgouvernement 1939–1944', in, Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt, eds., *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am main: Fischer Verlag, 2009), 105–23.

[81] Röger, *Kriegsbeziehungen*, 144–50 and 205–6.

[82] Ibid., 195–7.

[83] Ibid., 185–7.

[84] Ibid., 151–2.

[85] Ibid., 217.

[86] Ibid., 54–8, 218–20.

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Whereas German society's wartime encounters with its Polish equivalent stand at the centre of Maren Röger's study, Dietmar Süß's book, *Death from the Skies*, is concerned with comparisons across the North Sea. This slightly updated and superbly translated edition of the 2011 German language original represents a major comparative work on the social and cultural histories of the air war and its impact on both British and German societies. As such, it serves as the perfect accompaniment to the military and economic focus of Richard Overy's recent study, *The Bombing War*.[87] Süß's analysis ranges from the visions of future aerial bombardment popularised in both countries prior to 1939, to their societies' contested and changing memories of the air war after 1945. His central questions concern what impact bombing had on morale in wartime Britain and Germany, how their citizens coped with the threat it posed and which cultural and social resources they used to do so.[88] *Death from the Skies* draws upon a rich range of source materials to tackle these questions, gathered via extensive research in a host of British and German archives. It is a masterful study, and one with important implications for our understanding of how German society related to one of its most formative experiences during the Second World War. As Süß notes, the very process of comparison highlights 'even more clearly than hitherto' the peculiarity of wartime German society – namely its foundation on racial hierarchy and violence.[89] Contrary to romantic memories of the 'people's war', Anti-Semitic sentiments were present on the British Home Front, but, in stark contrast to Germany, the state authorities strove to combat and suppress them.[90]

Death from the Skies provides us with a persuasive account of the German Home Front's resilience under Allied bombardment and the important roles played by material factors in this context. Süß details how the Nazi state aimed to compensate individuals whose property had been damaged by Allied bombing in a 'generous' manner. Even when the Reich War Damage Office was forced to postpone these payments for the conflict's duration from 1942/43 onwards, this ensured that claimants' hopes of compensation were 'bound up with future victory'.[91] The Nazi regime's rehousing of bombed out 'national comrades' in confiscated Jewish properties augmented this material support of popular morale.[92] Süß details the efficiency with which state and party organisations met the challenges posed by heavy Allied bombing as of 1942, with the National Socialist Welfare (*Nationalsozialistische* Volkswohlfahrt; NSV) proving highly effective at feeding citizens after air raids.[93] The mobilisation of women and Hitler Youths further strengthened cities' air defences, and local authorities forced dedicated groups of 'forced labourers' to perform the most dangerous tasks during clean-up operations, such as disarming unexploded bombs.[94]

[87] Süß, *Death from the Skies*, vi; Overy, *The Bombing War*.
[88] Süß, *Death from the Skies*, ix.
[89] Ibid., ix.
[90] Ibid., 315–21.
[91] Ibid., 163–8.
[92] Ibid., 184–5.
[93] Ibid., 212.
[94] Ibid., 220–1.

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Süß thereby highlights a crucial paradox – the increasing devastation visited upon the Reich from the air during the years 1942–5 forced Germans into a greater dependency on state and party organisations. Whereas Allied strategists hoped bombing would provoke absenteeism and unrest in urban areas, many workers in the war's final months were in fact increasingly bound to their firms by the welfare services they provided, such as meals at on-site canteens. Like *The German War*, *Death from the Skies* is a work emphasising the resilience, not fragility, of wartime German society, with Süß outlining the adaptability of both British and German home fronts in the face of aerial bombardment.[95]

In addition to exploring the material underpinnings of popular morale, Süß displays a wonderful feel for the roles played by cultural influences in shaping Germans' attitudes towards the air war. Central here is his treatment of religion. *Death from the Skies* outlines the wide spectrum of theological opinion articulated concerning the air war by German Catholics and Protestants, and how these different religious understandings of Allied bombing – such as the Catholic Neo-Scholastic portrayal of it as a divinely imposed penance – furnished the devout with alternative reasons to hold out than the arguments provided by the Nazi regime.[96] Süß demonstrates how, until the very end of the war, clergymen of both confessions played crucial pastoral roles on the German Home Front, above all as comforters of the bereaved and conductors of funerals – services which were increasingly in demand as of 1943.[97] However, he also draws our attention to instances where aerial bombing strained the Churches' established theological teachings – with Catholic Bishops, for example, having to confront the impracticality of priests providing individual absolution of sins to believers amidst the chaos of air raids.[98] In so doing, Süß highlights not only the considerable influence exerted by religious belief and tradition in shaping Germans' experiences and understandings of the air war, but also the frequently ambiguous impact exerted by aerial bombardment on church life at the local level.[99]

Alongside *Death from the Skies*' account of German society's resilience under Allied bombing is a vivid portrayal of the various tensions existing within its ranks. Süß highlights how in the small Catholic town of Stadtlohn in March 1945, locals objected to the Nazi Party's attempts to transform the funeral for the victims of a recent air raid into a 'quasi-religious' Nazi ritual, and did so by praying audibly during the service.[100] Süß provides an intriguing discussion of air shelter communities and the tensions which could easily flare up within their tight confines. He cites the SD as noting in early 1944 that many individuals were expressing frustration with the priority afforded mothers and children in the allocation of shelter space, and a woman from Bremen in March 1945 who lamented that it was necessary to use elbows in her

[95] Ibid., 123–32, 198–201, 395 and 545.
[96] Ibid., 253–60, 258–59, 544–5.
[97] Ibid., 451–2.
[98] Ibid., 260–3.
[99] Ibid., 267–70.
[100] Ibid., 426.

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local shelter because polite, modest behaviours 'get you nowhere'.[101] *Death from the Skies* nevertheless reminds us that, however real these tensions within the 'national community' may have been, they paled in comparison with the fundamental dividing line separating Germans from 'racial outsiders' such as 'forced labourers', who were not even permitted access to air raid shelters.[102] Similarly to *The German War*, *Death from the Skies* is a work which emphasises the need to account for the everyday tensions belying the propagandist image of a harmonious 'national community'– but also highlights their real limits as either a critique of the Nazi regime, or more profoundly, the national war effort itself, whose legitimacy persisted into 1945.[103]

Like Süß' study, Gesine Gerhard's *Nazi Hunger Politics* emphasises the tremendous importance placed by the regime on sustaining the material living standards of the German population during the Second World War. Building on the findings of earlier scholarship, she skilfully demonstrates the crucial roles played by the Nazi regime's 'hunger plans' in feeding the German Home Front as of 1941, notably by extracting food stuffs from the occupied eastern territories at the expense of millions of Soviet lives.[104] Gerhard underlines the crucial role this murderous policy played in sustaining German morale, noting that, compared to the First World War, 'the ration system worked better, it provided nuanced and generally satisfactory rations for German consumers and, most importantly, it did not pit German consumer groups against each other'.[105] She outlines how it was only with the loss of the occupied Soviet territories during the Red Army's advances of 1944 that German food supplies began to break down – with the Wehrmacht reduced to receiving civilian rations that August. Between February and April 1945 official rations reduced daily calorific intakes to less than half the level they had occupied at the war's outset.[106] Gerhard's study moreover provides valuable new findings concerning the attitudes of Herbert Backe, the influential Nazi official responsible for administering the regime's food policies during the Second World War. Using his previously unstudied private letters, Gerhard demonstrates that it was in January 1945 that Backe admitted defeat in his attempts to feed German society, in a chronology of wartime morale similar to that outlined by the *German War*.[107] Like many individuals discussed in Stargardt's book, Backe's sense of commitment to the national war effort was also grounded in familial concerns. As he wrote to his wife, Ursula, in November 1944: 'it was you alone who strengthened me in my struggles, who supported me when I despaired.'[108]

It would nevertheless have been desirable had Gerhard expanded this fascinating social and cultural aspect of her book. The ideologies behind and administration of

[101] Ibid., 327–30.
[102] Ibid., 309–10.
[103] Ibid., 545.
[104] Gesine Gerhard, *Nazi Hunger Politics: A History of Food in the Third Reich* (Rowman & Littlefield: London, 2015), 85–101.
[105] Ibid., 63.
[106] Ibid., 61 and 122.
[107] Ibid., 61.
[108] Ibid., 123.

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the Nazi regime's food policies have been extensively examined by scholars since the 1990s, with particular focus devoted to their interfaces with the Holocaust and mass starvation of Soviet civilians as of 1941.[109] We know rather less about Germans' own attitudes towards food during the war years and its connection to questions of morale and family relationships. As one of *The German War*'s central protagonists, Helmut Paulus, gratefully informed his mother from the eastern front in November 1941, following the arrival of a food package from home, he had 'no other interests than food now and then the mail'.[110] As late as August 1944 Hitler refused to countenance Goebbels' suggestion that the production of sweets and beer be halted in favour of using the necessary ingredients for less luxurious products, stating that they were necessary for the maintenance of morale.[111] As Röger's study moreover underlines, the superior food rations available to German soldiers and officials in occupied Poland opened up a host of possibilities to solicit consensual or commercial sex from underfed local women.[112] *Nazi Hunger Politics* is a highly accessible and lucidly written study, and one which does great service by drawing together the findings of a large historiography concerning the regime's food policies throughout its years in power. It underlines with great clarity the extent to which the Nazi regime's desire to fill Germans' stomachs – and maintain their morale – led to the systematic mass starvation of millions of other Europeans during the Second World War – especially in the occupied Soviet and Polish territories. As in Süß and Röger's analysis, this study demonstrates how the Nazi regime's desire to shield German society from the privations and dangers of war underpinned its direction of murderous and exploitative policies towards those it classed as racially inferior or dangerous.[113]

III

Collectively, the titles reviewed highlight the considerable resilience of German society's morale and organisational structures during the war years. Rather than the consistent societal slide into defeatism during the years 1943–5 outlined by older literature, these works draw our attention to the strength of popular mobilisation and support for the war effort during 1943 and 1944, as well as the ability of German morale to overcome moments of crisis.[114] Stargardt in particular emphasises that, however important at particular junctures, state repression cannot function as the primary explanation for the German Home Front's resilience in the later war years. It was only in early 1945 that the Nazi regime unleashed its most severe wave of terror on German soil, and, even then, as confirmed by Keller, its attacks were primarily

[109] See Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weissrussland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburg Edition, 2000); Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London: Penguin, 2006), 513–51.
[110] Stargardt, *The German War*, 219.
[111] Kershaw, *The End*, 76.
[112] Röger, *Kriegsbeziehungen*, 64–5, 108–9, 221.
[113] See Süß, *Death from the Skies*, 15.
[114] Stargardt, *German War*, 473–7.

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directed against 'racial outsiders' and could draw upon support from sections of German opinion.[115]

A central paradox nevertheless highlighted by these works is that this resilient societal support of the war effort should not be conflated with uniform or even consistent enthusiasm for the Nazi regime or its approved forms of national solidarity. Maren Röger portrays the frequency with which many German soldiers and officials violated the sexual boundaries of 'national community' in occupied Poland, while Nicholas Stargardt and Dietmar Süß underline the regional limits on patriotic solidarity revealed by tensions between locals and evacuees within the Reich itself.[116] As their works argue, it was Germans' investment of a wide range of religious, cultural and emotional meanings in the war which ensured that commitment to Nazism was no prerequisite for support of its fundamental legitimacy. This tendency played a crucial role in stabilising popular morale during the years 1943–44, as the regime's popularity – and increasingly even Hitler's – waned. Highlighting this 'complex and contradictory set of circumstances' which led German society to 'total defeat' in May 1945 is a tremendous achievement of the works reviewed here, and one which future research will be unable to ignore.

These compelling insights should moreover serve as inspiration for future research into neglected aspects of wartime Germany's social and cultural history. For example, works on German Protestantism during the Nazi era have neglected the years 1939–1945, despite the confession's prominent roles in nationalist mobilisation during the First World War.[117] Bereavement and mourning also require further research as central features of wartime experience. To cite but one example, Dietmar Süß notes that 'not a great deal is known' about the conflicts arising late in the war following air raids between the Nazi Party's desire to honour victims in communal burials and families' desires for more private funeral rites.[118] Monica Black's superb work on Berlin explores wartime bereavement practices in the Reich capital; future research should seek to compare her findings with other regions featuring differing confessional and political traditions.[119] The voluminous transcripts of bugged conversations between German POWS in Anglo-American captivity discovered by Sönke Neitzel also promise to be a rich resource for future scholars exploring soldiers' attitudes to 'fighting, killing and dying' and much besides.[120]

[115] Ibid., 7–8 and 517; Keller, *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende*, 159–62 and 263.

[116] Röger, *Kriegsbeziehungen*; Stargardt, *The German War*, 397; Süß, *Death from the Skies*, 274–5.

[117] Manfred Gailus, 'Keine gute Performance: Die Deutschen Protestanten im "Dritten Reich"', in Manfred Gailus and Armin Nolzen, eds., *Zerstrittene "Volksgemeinschaft": Glaube, Konfession und Religion im Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), 113.

[118] Süß, *Death from the Skies*, 452.

[119] Monica Black, *Death in Berlin: From Weimar to Divided Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 91–143.

[120] Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer, *Soldaten – On Fighting, Killing and Dying: The Secret Second World War Transcripts of German POWs* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2012). The ongoing potential of these sources is underscored by Mark Roseman in his review, *The American Historical Review,* 119, 1 (2014), 266.

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Finally, the works reviewed prompt us to rethink the transitions from war to peace in Germany and Austria. If we accept that Germans' emotional investment in the national war effort lasted until 1945, then the traditional narrative of a gradual societal retreat from Nazism as of early 1943, pointing towards democracy in the future Federal Republic, must be revised, with greater emphasis placed on discontinuities and transformations in the aftermaths of defeat.[121] As Stargardt's work suggests, popular belief in the war's 'Jewish' nature if anything intensified during 1943 and 1944, and was readily expressed in conversations with American interviewers as late as summer 1945.[122] It remains the task of future research to establish when and how this anti-Semitic theory lost its explanatory power within the societies of the Third Reich's successor states; and in this context as in others, it is greatly to be desired that Austria be incorporated into a comparative analytical framework with East and West Germany.[123] The subjective and intimate legacies of war in the German states and Austria after 1945 also remain extensively understudied. As Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann notes, 'ego documents' such as diaries contain great potential – as demonstrated by *The German War* – to facilitate exploration of the transformations of societal mentalities over the years following 1945 and could greatly enrich our understandings of crucial themes, such as the conflict's legacies within family relationships, the 'emotional traces' left by wartime violence and the development of diverse memory cultures either side of the emerging Cold War divide.[124] The social and cultural legacies of the war within the German states and Austria after 1945 hold much promise for future historians.[125]

[121] For this established chronology, see Broszat, Henke and Woller, eds., *Von Stalingrad zur Währungsreform*.

[122] Stargardt, *German War*, 416–7, 564.

[123] For the argument that a conscious wartime 'flight into ignorance' concerning the Holocaust continued after 1945, see Peter Longerich, *"Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!": Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung, 1933–1945* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 2006), 328; see also, Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 112, 258–9.

[124] Stefan Ludwig-Hoffmann, 'Germans into Allies: Writing a Diary in 1945', in Stefan Ludwig-Hoffmann, Sandrine Kott, Peter Romjin and Oliver Wieviorka, eds., *Seeking Peace in the Wake of War: Europe 1943–1947* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 66–8; Dorothee Wierling, 'Generations as Narrative Communities: Some Private Sources of Public Memory in Postwar Germany', in Frank Biess and Robert G. Moeller, eds., *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe* (New York: Berghahn, 2010), 114; Röger, *Kriegsbeziehungen*, 216–7.

[125] Outstanding existing studies include Svenja Goltermann, *The War in their Minds: German Soldiers and their Violent Pasts in West Germany* (Michigan: Michigan University Press, 2017); Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

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