

GENDERING THE HOLOCAUST

A case study of Irma Grese: Constructing the ‘evil’ and the ‘ordinary’ through digital oral testimonies and written trial testimonies of the Holocaust survivors

Esettanulmány Irma Grese-ről: a „gonosz” és a „hétköznapi” artikulálódása a Holokauszt túlélők digitális szóbeli visszaemlékezései és írásbeli tanúvallomásai elemzése tükrében.

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Abstract

In the paper, I discuss the case study of Irma Grese, labelled as the ‘beauty beast’ who was one of the cruelest and most infamous Nazi female perpetrator working in Auschwitz-Birkenau as a camp guard in the Holocaust history. I look into how Grese’s figure is constituted through analyzing the trial testimonies of the Holocaust survivors from 1945 and the oral testimonies of the survivors, recorded between 1994 and 1999, available at the VHA collection of Shoah. In the article, I demonstrate that with the use of the combination of the different testimonies, it can be mapped how not only the ‘evilness’, but also the ‘ordinariness’ of Grese is constructed. As a result, I provide new insights on the general images of Nazi female perpetrators in both the public and the perpetrator scholarship in terms of two main aspects. One of them is the fact that ‘recorded cases of female killers had been suppressed, overlooked and under-researched’ and the female perpetrators in Third Reich ‘were not marginal sociopaths’ (Lower 2013: 4). Instead, I agree that the violent acts of female perpetrators were part of serving the Nazi party, thus, fulfilling the Nazi racist ideology (Lower 2013: 4). The other part of my contribution with the analysis is analyzing the ‘ordinariness’ of Grese. Despite her popular sexualized images in the public and even the scholarship, I aim to contribute to ‘the new research directions that map out female perpetrators as ‘ordinary’ women which might be the first step towards getting a more individualized picture’ about Grese (Pető 2009: 149).

Keywords: gender, female perpetrators, Holocaust, remembering and testimonies

Female perpetrators in the literature – Contextualizing women

First and foremost, I situate the character of Irma Grese as a Nazi female guard in the perpetrator literature. On the one hand, I introduce the major directions which are discussed in the perpetrator scholarship. On the other hand, I focus how specifically women become perpetrators and accordingly, how Grese was described by the survivors and the scholarship of the Holocaust. That way I also discuss the theoretical and methodological concerns that arise regarding Nazi female perpetrators in both the scholarship and the survivors' memoirs. Consequently, I am able to investigate how the normative discourses on Grese as the most emblematic female figure of 'evil' in the history of the Holocaust can be shaped and questioned by combining the trial and the oral testimonies of the Holocaust survivors.

As a matter of fact, 'the perpetrator literature started in the second part of 1990s and it primarily focused on men who were portrayed either as psychopaths or banal bureaucrats and lately, the new direction of the literature has been placed on investigating how someone becomes a perpetrator at the level of 'ordinary people' (Pető 2013: 14-15). Therefore, the scholarship recognized that the simplified typology of perpetrators should be abolished and instead of that, there is a need to concentrate on the various sub-types of perpetrators. By doing so, a more complex understanding can be ensured on carrying out research on perpetrators, however, the social and psychological situation of perpetrators have been analyzed in a gender-neutral way (Pető 2013: 12). Mann distinguishes different kinds of perpetrators, including ideological killers and disturbed killers and additionally, in relation to the new focus on 'ordinary people' (see Browning 1992). He also differentiates five views on ordinary perpetrators, such as bigoted killers, fearful or compliant killers, bureaucratic killers and careerists (Mann 2000: 332-333). Nevertheless, due to the gender power differences and active participation in the Holocaust, the judgement and perception of female perpetrators is multiple complicated. As Pető notes, 'there are two ways to resolve this politically difficult research situation: first, female perpetrators as 'ordinary perpetrators' and second, the gender of the perpetrator is female (Pető 2013: 14-15). Hence, this approach offers an opportunity to analyze gender at two levels: investigating where women were among the perpetrators and it can be also shown how gender worked in the far-right movements and the war crime trials' (Pető 2013: 14-15). In line with these approaches, in the below discussion, I map Nazi female camp guards as specific perpetrators and among the perpetrators, Grese's imaginary construction as one of the most well-known sadist woman perpetrator in the popular culture and the perpetrator literature.

Irma Grese, nicknamed as 'the beautiful beast of Belsen' in both the popular culture in Grese's age and the contemporary culture and as 'the Blonde Angel' and 'the Hyena of Auschwitz' by the prisoners, was the youngest female criminal who had been convicted for war crimes under the British law in the 20th century. As a young and attractively described decent woman, she is widely seen as a sexualized and 'extraordinarily cruel and evil' (Weckel 2005: 561) in both the public, the popular culture and the Holocaust survivors' memories which overall create a canonized remembrance of Grese.

During the Belsen trial in 1945 where Grese was sentenced to death, the magazines and newspapers reporting on the trial paid particular attention to the pretty and decent physical appearance and 'evilness' of Grese, compared to other female camp guards who were generally described as plain or average.

Indeed, 'the newspapers of the victor countries had seized the value of their circulation of her ringlets and pretty blue eyes' and 'for weeks in scores of screaming headlines Irma Grese had

been the ‘blonde beastess’ (Playfair; Sington 1957: 181). The New York Times particularly notes, ‘how the 21-year old blonde ... managed to maintain the defiant contemptuous look that marred her undeniable good look’, referring to her as ‘blonde’ and ‘smartly dressed’ (The New York Times, 17-10-1945). The Daily Mirror goes further and exaggerates Grese’s figure, saying, she is an ‘attractive blonde who looks like a Hollywood film-star is one of the forty-eight accused in the Belsen camp atrocity trial’ (The Daily Mirror, 31-07-1945). Likewise, in the memories of numerous Holocaust survivors, Grese’s cruelty is also constructed through sexualizing her beauty and femininity. In Olga Lengyel’s memoirs, Grese is portrayed as ‘a woman of such beauty ... a blue-eyes fair-haired ‘angel’ being conscious of the power of her beauty’ who ‘spent hours before her mirror and practiced the most seductive gestures’, while ‘her immoderate use of perfume was perhaps the most supreme refinement of her cruelty’ (Lengyel 1989: 50; 98-99). She adds that Grese had alleged affairs with the SS men and homosexual affairs with the inmates in Auschwitz, as another sexualized constitutive element of her sadism. Another Holocaust survivor, Gisella Perl also describes Grese who was ‘the most depraved, cruel, imaginative sexual pervert I ever came across’ and had ‘orgiastic spasms’ upon seeing the physical agony of prisoners being operated on’ (Perl 1992: 61-2.).

Notwithstanding, despite Grese’s widespread popular images, little is known about her pre-war life and involvement in the killing machine of the Nazi regime which is methodologically problematic as primarily sources are not available about Grese. At any rate, we can be informed about Grese’s biography from her statement in the Bergen Belsen trial where she was convicted based on individual evidence of the survivors as the trial charged those Nazi criminals against whom there was individual evidence (Playfair; Sington 1957: 156). Grese introduced herself in the following way: ‘I was born on 7th October, 1923. In 1938 I left the elementary school and worked for six months on agricultural jobs at a farm, after which I worked in a shop in Luchen for six months. When I was 15 I went to a hospital in Hohenluchen, where I stayed for two years. I tried to become a nurse but the Labour Exchange would not allow that and sent me to work in a dairy in Fürstenberg. In July, 1942, I again tried to become a nurse, but the Labour Exchange sent me to Ravensbrück Concentration Camp, although I protested against it ... I told my father about the concentration camp and he gave me a beating and told me never to come home again’ (Testimony 12: Statement of Irma Grese).

From this short expert, it can be seen that Grese as a factory worker was an ‘ordinary woman’ in a sense that she as an average person used the opportunity to be part of the Nazi genocide machinery (see Browning 1992). It also seems to be obvious that it is vital to go beyond the typical representation and images of Grese and to also see that Greese voluntarily decided to choose and join the Nazi party, as ‘these women were more than comely Nazis obeying orders’ (Morris 2011: 69). Besides, it is necessary to keep in mind that Grese was only one of the female perpetrators in the state-led systematic violence of Nazi Germany. Lower points out the basic difference between gender roles in researching perpetrators. She notes that ‘in the immediate aftermath of the war, the ordinary German woman was depicted popularly as the heroine who had to clean up the mess of Germany’s shameful past’ (Lower 2013: 10). In contrast, the images of ‘the worst female camp guards, such as Grese were fueled by extreme female sadism and post-war Nazi-style pornography’ (Lower 2013: 10).

Apart from the general lack of engendering perpetrator research so as to also investigate the mechanisms behind why and how women become perpetrators which I have mentioned before, the case of the Nazi female camp guards seems to be even more complicated. There is also a limited number of researches about ‘women as offenders in concentration camps’ (Dauber 2014: 179). As Lower highlights, ‘certain female types have emerged in the popular literature, and they are polar extremes: one depicts German women as victims, as ‘baby-machines’ in Hitler’s misogynist, racial state, and the other depicts them as demonic, often sexually deviant camp guards’ (The New York Times, Ordinary Women: Wendy Lower Talks About ‘Hitler’s Furies’ 2013. http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/14/ordinary-women-wendy-lower-talks-about-hitlers-furies/?_r=0). She also adds that, ‘both of these distortions are based on the assumption that German women remained in confined spaces, either at home in Germany or within the closed universe of the camp system’ (The New York Times, Ordinary Women: Wendy Lower Talks About ‘Hitler’s Furies’ 2013. http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/14/ordinary-women-wendy-lower-talks-about-hitlers-furies/?_r=0). Also, the ‘feminist’ Historikerstreit between Bock and Koonz that resulted in an oversimplifying discourse about seeing German women as either victims (Bock 1983) or active agents and perpetrators (Koonz 1986). Thus, I claim that Grese and overall, the Nazi female guards serving in the SS became invisible as a result of this discourse. The reason for that is the fact ‘the mere presence of women workers in these camps was a contradiction to the Nazi doctrine that stated that a woman’s place was in the home’ (Morris 2011: 68). The other possibility for women to properly fulfill their gender roles was what Grese left behind, to work as a farm worker in the agriculture. Furthermore, by dealing with these women without context – as they do not fit any of the traditional discourses on gender and the Holocaust –, Nazi female perpetrators tend to be enriched with more severe and extreme perception of their ‘evilness’ and cruelty which is exactly due to their unexpected and inappropriate gender roles. Women’s cruelty is perceived as abnormal and surprising, while men’s cruelty is discussed without reference to their gender, ‘as though the connection between atrocity and maleness is self-evident’ (Heschel 2004: 305). As a consequence, ‘Grese became the subject of a narrative that simultaneously sexualized her feminine beauty and exposed her brutality’ (Collins 2015: 115). In the paper, I go beyond these canonized descriptions of Grese due to the fact that the consistent ‘dehumanizing’ effect of Grese runs the risk of denying their agency and role and decontextualizing her and Nazi female perpetrators in the Nazi killing-machine system. This recognition leads to the next stage of the scholarship while situating Grese, namely to the ‘evilness’ and ‘ordinariness’ which are basically the two key concepts I explore in the paper. As Browning stresses that the soldiers of Reserve Police Battalion 101 – who were involved in executing thousands of Jews in Poland – should be seen as ‘ordinary men’, woman guards are never seen as ‘ordinary women’ in the public and the scholarship which is also worrying in the perpetrator literature. Instead, the traditional concept of ‘the banality of evil’ (Felman 2001: 202-03) works while reading these women, which tends to overlook the exact role of female perpetrators in the state-organized system of violence in the Third Reich. This results in decontextualizing and portraying these women as more ‘evil’. Indeed, Grese and Nazi female perpetrators become ‘sexually deprived monsters’ (Morris 2011: 69). Moreover, as Brown highlights, Grese is frequently depicted as being ‘responsible for the most savage killing sphere by any women in the twentieth century’ (Brown 1996: xviii). I aim to challenge all of these decontextualizing and normalizing discourses about Grese in the paper and

demonstrate the ways how permeability can be drawn between the ‘evilness’ and ‘ordinariness’ of Grese at the same time.

Empirical material – survivors’ trial and oral testimonies

The material of the paper comprises of the trial testimonies of the witnesses from the Bergen Belsen trial and the oral testimonies of the survivors, located on the website of the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive (VHA). All survivors of both the trial and the oral testimonies are female due to the fact that Irma Grese was responsible for leading the women’s blocks in Auschwitz and she violated those people, women and young girls.

The Jewish women’s trial testimonies that detail Grese’s ‘activities’ in Auschwitz in the Bergen Belsen trial in 1945 were at the age between 20 and 40 at that time. Besides, I also selected the available oral testimonies about Greese, also narrated by Jewish female survivors, between the ages of 66 and 79 between 1994 and 1999 from the VHA collection of Shoah. The available oral testimonies show middle/upper-class Jewish women. They derive from traditional and mainly religious Jewish families, mostly from Central-Eastern European countries, likewise to those who were involved in the Belsen trial (e.g., Hungary, Czech Slovakia and Poland).

By using both sources, the oral testimonies – in which, as far as I recognized, emotions can be observed better – and the written trial testimonies which, as Pető states, historians did not consider relevant ‘because emotions do not leave any traces in legal historical sources’ (Pető 2013: 6), I intend to create new research approaches in the paper. That way the combination of the ‘sources’ about Grese allows to me to make the line between ‘factual history’ and the ‘remembered past’ by the Holocaust survivors permeable.

Methodology

I apply discourse analysis while interpreting both the trial testimonies from 1945 and the oral testimonies of the survivors which were recorded between 1994 and 1999. During the analysis I employ the concept of the cultural politics of emotions, including the organization of hate and fear so as to analyze the emotional construction of remembering Irma Grese by the survivors in the trial and oral testimonies (Ahmed 2004: 191). As Ahmed argues, ‘emotions do things; they generate and create meaning in the world and as material rhetoric, have affective power’ (Ahmed 2004: 4-5), my aim is to investigate what the survivors’ emotions do through remembering Grese. Namely, how the survivors name her and how their emotions generate social affects. I demonstrate that the circulation of hate and fear towards Grese through pain creates the memories of the survivors about Grese and that way Grese becomes as ‘the cause of both hate and fear’ – ‘the hated’ and the ‘feared’ at the same time (Ahmed 2004: 7; 64). Indeed, while remembering Grese, ‘the survivors’ memories trigger a feeling’ (Ahmed 2004: 65). In this case, ‘the memory are the object of their feeling in two senses: the feeling is shaped by contact with the memory, and invokes an orientation towards Grese who is remembered’ through hate and fear (Ahmed 2004: 65).

By using the concept of emotions, I investigate how the ‘evil’ and the ‘ordinary’ in Grese’s representation is constructed through the emotional constitution of the survivors’ afterlife memories. I analyze this in a multidirectional way of remembering due to the cross-cultural and multigenerational interplay and production of memories in relation to other stories and other histories (Rothberg 2009: 29).

I also prove that even if the trial testimonies as collective, canonized memories reveal the ‘material truth’ only, part of the ‘factual history’ as it has happen, the oral testimonies provide us a great opportunity to see how the ‘psychological truth’ is formulated (Petó 2015: 227). This is especially relevant as two of the VHA interviewees attended the Belsen trial. Thus, they have a particular remembering of Grese – at the intersection of both the ‘material’ and the ‘psychological truth’. The rest of the interviewees remembers Grese from the camp. This fact could show the ‘emotional communities’ that have been constituted by the legal framework among the witnesses (Rosenwein 2002: 842). By also investigating the oral testimonies, I claim that the emotional bounding between the survivors giving oral testimony is also articulated. On the other hand, the oral testimonies also introduce another narrative about Grese that is connected to the ‘evil’, at the same time, it contextualizes the ‘evilness’ of Grese through also seeing her ‘ordinary’ which establishes a more nuanced picture about Grese.

Analysis of the testimonies

I consider both the trial and the oral testimonies that work ‘by aligning subjects with collectives by attributing Grese as the ‘source’ of the feelings of the survivors’ while the survivors as ‘we’, ‘a group of subjects’ identify themselves as injured by Grese (Ahmed 2004: 1-2).

In the analysis, I demonstrate that there are three main frames of remembering Grese in the legal and oral testimonies. These are non-remembering Grese’ name, but vividly remembering Grese’s figure; ‘being an eyewitness’ and clearly remembering Grese, and naming Grese with particular attributes and qualifiers. In my analysis, I demonstrate that all these three frames of remembering Grese through the circulation of hate and fear towards Grese constitute the emotional construction of remembering Grese together. By analyzing how hate and fear as an intertwined emotional connection of the survivors, I use Ahmed’s concepts of ‘emotions’. Based on it, I assert that among all survivors’ giving trial and oral testimony, ‘emotions are intentional in the sense that they are ‘about’ something: they involve a direction or orientation towards Grese (Ahmed 2004: 7).

As a result, I also map how emotions are indicated in the legal testimonies and the oral testimonies as relational and intentional ‘feelings’ towards and against Grese that also create ‘collective feelings’ among the trial witnesses and the survivors providing oral testimonies (Ahmed 2004: 27).

As far as the non-remembrance the name of Irma Grese, but vividly remembering Grese’s figure is concerned, while in the trial testimonies, the survivors remember Grese through recalling her brutal acts committed on the inmates, in the oral testimonies, the survivors start remembering her while recalling her attractive appearance. Many of the trial witnesses did not even know the name of Grese, only that time when they identified her according to a photography of Grese. They argue that ‘I am now told that her name is Irma Grese’ and ‘I have now been told that her full name is Irma Grese’ (Testimony 10: Katherine Neiger and Testimony 6: Edith Trieger). However, they remember Grese through recalling her violated acts with the feelings of ‘pain’ and ‘suffering’. Hence, ‘the body of Grese is transformed into ‘the hated’ through a discourse of pain’ which is distributed across Grese, ‘to come to embody the threat of violence’ (Ahmed 2004: 43). Therefore, pain in return shows ‘how feelings of injury get converted into hatred for Grese, who become read as causing ‘their injury’ (Ahmed 2004: 194). Indeed, ‘the body of the victim is read as testimony, as a means

by which the truth of the brutal actions committed by Grese against the prisoners is established in the law (Ahmed 2004: 58). This is especially vital in the case of the trial testimonies that are supposed to be ‘authentic’. What is more, part of the emotional bonding and community among the survivors in the trial, I also link the following recognition. As Ahmed says, ‘claims to pain and suffering on behalf the survivors themselves and other inmates are repeated in forms of speech and writing’, in which the survivors are affected by not only ‘their’ pain, caused by Grese, but also others’ pain: ‘to bear witness, to recognize their pain’ (Ahmed 2004: 21). Many witnesses confirm and repeat the narratives of pain. Stein remembers Grese when ‘the woman was in hospital for three weeks suffering from the effects of the beating’ of Grese just like Diament who says ‘many of the people Grese injured were likely to die from such injuries’ (Testimony 9: Ilona Stein and Testimony 7: Gertrud Diament). Another survivor adds that ‘those beaten were so injured and weak that they had to be carried by the strongest of the prisoners all the way to the work site and then back to the camp’ (Testimony 11: Luba Triszinska). Interestingly, the gap of ‘non-remembering’ Grese’s name is realized by the survivors of the oral testimonies through continually recalling her appearance (e.g., Grese’s blond hair, ‘big blue eyes’ and Grese’s decent and pretty appearance etc.).

It is also worth mentioning that as the prisoners particularly remember Grese’s name in contrast with other female and male camp guards. This illustrates that as Grese practiced her power by violating the female inmates in an indirect way on a daily basis – as the trial witnesses confirm – ‘power relations and violence are almost inseparable’ (Mailander 2015: 3). Indeed, ‘different forms of violence in the camp ... also depend on the people who live and work there, their position in the camp, and their place in the hierarchy of guards (Mailander 2015: 3). In relation to these complex considerations and construction of power relations, Grese – starting in a beginner position in 1941 – achieved to ‘be promoted to the higher position of camp guard’ in 1943 as she became a senior SS supervisor of female prisoners (Morris 2011: 64). Furthermore, compared to male SS guards and officers – occupying the highest positions – in the camps, female guards, such as Grese has a special position: ‘they were civil employees within a paramilitary organization’ as ‘they were not formally members of the SS’ (Mailander 2015: 3-4). However, as Grese’s career advancement shows, these women were not simply subsumed to their male SS counter-partners and female guards. As Grese was responsible for supervising women’s barracks, they could also ‘practice’ direct power on the inmates, likewise male guards. One of the VHA interviewees while talking about a particular event when she was beaten by a female guard who was with a dog. She says that she does not know the name of that woman, repeating, ‘I do not remember names’ and she also adds that the only person she remembers is Irma Grese (Testimony 3: Hedda Gomba). As afterwards the interviewer asked Gomba whether she remembers anyone else from Auschwitz, Gomba says: ‘No, I remember only her. Because she was an attractively beautiful beast’ (Testimony 3: Hedda Gomba). There is another survivor, who similarly could not recall names of the women and girls whom she was with during the interview, however, she exactly remembered Grese’s figure. As she starts describing Grese’s physic, she starts remembering her. ‘There was also, you probably heard about her... what is her name... such a beautiful girl, a German, who she loved to go around and shoot people, you know, the girls all over’ (Testimony 1: Cecilia Einhorn). However, afterwards she manages to say that Irma Grese was that guard’s name, as the survivor were also involved in the Belsen trial to testify against Grese. She argues, ‘I really do not remember any other names from the trial, it was

such a long time. Nevertheless, she clearly remembers Irma Grese, implying hate and fear with her words while remembering Grese: she ‘stayed with us for such a long time (Testimony 1: Cecilia Einhorn).

The second pattern is ‘being an eyewitness’ of Grese’s atrocities committed against the prisoners (Laub 1992) and that way remembering specifically Grese in the testimonies which are also present in different ways in the trial and oral testimonies.

In the trial testimonies, through remembering the terrible and sadist actions committed by Grese, there is a continuous emphasis of telling the truth. This fact is associated with the ‘material truth’ of ‘being an eyewitness’, to prove authenticity. The survivors indicate that ‘I have seen everything I describe’, ‘I saw everything myself that Grese did to this victim’ and ‘I saw all this occur from the distance of about 50 meters’. (Testimony 9: Ilona Stein and Testimony 6: Edith Trieger). During proving ‘witnessing’ Grese’s acts, the survivors giving the legal testimony about Grese use such phrases that definitely show their hate towards Grese, in which it is followed ‘how the language of hate affects those who are designated as Grese of hate’ (Ahmed 2004: 15). Diament recalls that Grese’s ‘favorite habit was to beat women and girls until they fell to the ground’ (Testimony 7: Gertrud Diament). The trial witnesses also confirm that Grese ‘made sport with the internees making them fall down and get up for hours or crawl at an increasing speed’ (Phillips 1949: 19). These examples illustrate that the circulation of hate in the trial testimonies is especially crucial from the perspective of ‘authenticity’. That way ‘seeing the other as being hateful, the subject is filled up with hate, which becomes a sign of the truth of the reading’ (Ahmed 2004: 52). On the other hand, they also show that the embodiment of emotions in the legal testimonies can be explored. Nonetheless, in the oral testimonies, the survivors obviously approach the issue of ‘authenticity’ from another angle, with the use of the following and continually reoccurring phrases. They emphasize ‘I remember only her’ (Grese) and ‘I remember, very clearly, Irma Grese’ (Testimony 3: Hedda Gomba and Testimony 5: Norma Falk). While stressing that how much they remember Grese, they also add such words and phrases that similarly to the trial testimonies also indicate and recall the ‘evilness’ of Grese (e.g., remembering her due to the fact that she has done particular violated acts etc.). As a result, ‘the emotion of hate aligns particular other who comes to stand for and stand in for, a group of others’ and ‘the hate encounters align, not only the I with the we, but you with them (Ahmed 2004: 53). This implies a ‘collectivity’ between the survivors that can be observed in the oral testimonies as an emphasis. Similarly, as I have also showed how ‘feeling’ the survivors’ pain themselves and other’s pain as well also imply such emotional ‘collectiveness’ among the survivors (see above). In the oral testimonies, ‘fear might be concerned with the preservation not simply of me (survivor), but also with us (with the fellow survivors) or what is or life as we know it or even life itself (Ahmed 2004: 64). The used particular phrases, words and expressions of ‘feeling’ hate and fear towards Grese in the oral testimonies illustrate how ‘fear makes the subjects of Grese contest to her power as the possibility of dissent is linked to pain and torture (Ahmed 2004: 71).

As a survivor admits in her oral testimony, ‘we were afraid of her’, adding that ‘no thank God! I did not have a direct contact with her’ (Testimony 1: Cecilia Einhorn). She also recalls how Grese ‘killed our people... for her, take something and go around wherever she saw a girl, maybe two, and she was just going around and killing... killing women.... killing young women!’ (Testimony 1: Cecilia Einhorn).

Regarding the third main pattern of the trial and the oral testimonies, naming and ‘labelling’ Grese with particular attributes and qualifiers, ‘the hated’ and ‘the feared’ woman exemplifies that ‘fear involves reading such openings as dangerous; the openness of the body to the world involves a sense of danger (Ahmed 2004: 69). The survivors name Grese as an ‘attractively beautiful beast’; ‘the worst of the woman SS’; ‘a terrible person’; ‘awful’ and ‘the worst, one of the worst people in Belsen’ (Testimony 3: Hedda Gomba; Testimony 8: Gitla Dunkleemann; Testimony 2: Edith Biró; Testimony 1: Cecilia Einhorn, and Testimony 5: Norma Falk).

Last but not least, aside from discussing the main patterns that are constituted in the trial and the oral testimonies, in the oral testimonies, there is indeed a narrative about Grese’s ‘ordinariness’ which, I argue, consists of two components. Firstly, it is articulated due to Grese’s pleasant appearance that transgresses the survivors’ expectations about a young and pretty lady about how to be so ‘evil’. Falk claims ‘if you see her on the street, she would be a perfectly normal person. It is so hard to understand how she got into this position’ (Testimony 5: Norma Falk). She further states that ‘(while) sitting in the court, I could not believe that she had done all this. She looked saloon’ (Testimony 5: Norma Falk). Likewise, Einhorn mentions that she does not understand that Grese as ‘such a beautiful young woman, very young, how she behaved horrible, how she killed our people’ (Testimony 1: Cecilia Einhorn). Secondly, the issue is also due to such unexpected events when Grese gave some girls extra food that also confronts the ideas and the general conception about her ‘evilness’. One of the survivors who gives interview confirms: ‘there was a Jewish woman whom she loved very much’ and ‘she (the inmate) received raw eggs, sometimes a whole onion’ (from Grese) (Testimony 3: Hedda Gomba). Even though this depiction is part of the alleged homosexuality of Grese, it is told as only an additional information and gossip and not as a constitute element of remembering Grese. Another survivor also reveals that ‘she (Grese) somehow liked me and occasionally gave me some extra piece of salami or piece of cheese’ that also stands in contrast with Grese’s ‘extraordinary evilness’, by putting Grese’s figure in a more complex context (Testimony 4: Nina Kaleczka).

Conclusion and outlook

With my analysis, first of all, I have aimed to contribute to the present perpetrator scholarship in order to place Irma Grese as a Nazi female camp guard into a more comprehensive context. I consider this especially crucial as in the scholarship, the issue of violence focuses on male as perpetrators and women as victims as the main discourse of the scholarship is primarily based on the ‘male norm’ (Collins 2015: 108). On the other side, engendering the scholarship dealing with particularly Nazi female camp guards can be also problematic for numerous reasons. I have proved that the normative discourses about these women tend to decontextualize them due to the fact that they do not fit into the dominant discourses of female perpetrators in the Nazi Germany (e.g., being either victims or perpetrators). On top of all, despite the fact that Grese became one of the most – if not the most – infamous sexualized and ‘extraordinary evil’ in the public and the scholarship, this also further and controversially strengthens the invisibility of Nazi female guards. Also, it confronts with the widespread assumption that male commit atrocities. What is more, the specific plight and role of female perpetrators can also imply that despite the dissymmetrical power relations between male and female guards, women become active actors in perpetrating crimes. Indeed, ‘by using physical violence, the women guards exercised power over the

prisoners, and over their colleagues ... that was the proof of what they were ‘capable of’ (Mailander 2015: 18).

Through providing new and critical insights on the scholarship, I have also endeavored to bring new perspectives with the combination of the trial and oral testimonies to challenge the dominance of men as perpetrators and the demonized and sadist images of Irma Grese in both the popular culture and the scholarship. One of my conclusions of the analysis of the testimonies is the fact that the same emotional reaction (e.g., hate and fear) against Irma Grese establishes a particular frame of remembrance of all survivors. Secondly, opposed to the sexualizing aspects of Grese in the public and in most of the memorial literature, the oral testimonies provide another and nuanced narrative about her, in which Grese’s decent beauty and prettiness is part of her ‘ordinariness’ and not her sexuality, also supported with recalling some exceptional events by the survivors when she behaved as a ‘normal’ and even kind person that challenge the trial testimonies of the survivors about Grese’s evilness as well. On the other side, that way oral testimonies challenge not only the modes of remembering Grese, but also the ‘canonized’ politics of memories and the trial testimonies about her which has not been researched in the scholarship so far.

Despite the above-mentioned new perspectives which I have drawn in the article, I would also like to highlight the possible limitation of using the trial and oral testimonies. The limitation is rooted in their different characteristics: the trial testimony is a legal source, while the oral testimony is more personal and less formal. On the other hand, the large period of time that passed between the date of the Belsen trial, in 1945 and the time when the VHA collection recorded the oral testimonies between 1994 and 1999 can be also regarded as a sign of the limitation. Regarding the individualistic feature of the trial, I state that this also reinforces and banalizes Grese’s cruelty and ‘evilness’ to some extent due to the fact that that way we tend to overlook her role at the organizational level. Additionally, I have also illustrated that is why Grese is considered as ‘extraordinary evil’ – even compared to other female and even male camp guards. This is also traceable in the gender roles and norms of Grese as her ‘evilness’ confronts the expectations about typical gender roles, behavior and look, in other words, her ‘ordinariness’. I claim that this results in seeing Grese more deviant in the public and the literature. This is also realized in the survivors’ trial and the oral testimonies through recalling Grese’s particular cruel and deviant violence over the female prisoners. However, as the oral testimonies introduce a nuanced narrative about Grese based on her ‘ordinariness’, it assists to analyze the specific role and agency of Grese as a female guard in a more complex context.

All in all, due to the limited number of researches conducted on analyzing female perpetrators which is rooted in encountering the fact that a big amount of women were actively involved as active perpetrators in the Nazi regime’s genocide, my article about Grese can shape and challenge these voids in the scholarship. That way I hope this can also help the reader and scholars that to ‘historicize female camp guards’ violence by anchoring it in a cultural and social context’ (Mailander 2015: 21). Due to the deeply rooted prejudices in gender relations in history – seeing women as generally supportive actors or helpless victims –, these cruel and sadist women guards completely disturb the traditional expectations about gender roles, violence and power. The latest stage of the perpetrator literature problematizing perpetrators as ‘ordinary people’/‘ordinary men’ should definitely investigate the gendered relations in a more comprehensive way so as to avoid the traps of judging, simplifying and overlooking the role and the agency of the Nazi female perpetrators. There is indeed an urgent

need to conduct more research on the topic to contribute not only to the historiography of the Holocaust, but to help in understanding the gendered construction of the Holocaust and any genocide.

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List of testimonies:

Oral testimonies

Testimony 1: USC Shoah Foundation VHA. Cecilia Einhorn. 23:50, Segment 14, on 6 December 2015.

URL <http://vha.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=52499&returnIndex=0>.

Testimony 2: USC Shoah Foundation VHA. Edith Biró. 16:02, Segment 76, on 6 December 2015. URL <http://vha.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=9010&returnIndex=0#>.

Testimony 3: USC Shoah Foundation VHA. Hedda Gomba, 16:02 Segment 48, on 6 December 2015.

URL <http://vha.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=515&returnIndex=0>.

Testimony 4: USC Shoah Foundation VHA. Nina Kaleczka. 02:19, Segment 62, on 6 December 2015.

URL <http://vha.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=13024&returnIndex=0#>.

Testimony 5: USC Shoah Foundation VHA. Norma Falk. 08:33, Segment 55, on 6 December 2015. URL <http://vha.usc.edu/viewingPage.aspx?testimonyID=42082&returnIndex=0>.

Trial testimonies

Testimony 6: War Crimes Trials - Vol. II The Belsen Trial. *The Trial of Josef Kramer and Forty Four Others*. Deposition of Edith Trieger, on 6 December 2015. URL http://www.bergenbelsen.co.uk/pages/Trial/TrialAppendices/TrialAppendices_Affidavits_62_Trieger.html.

Testimony 7: War Crimes Trials - Vol. II The Belsen Trial. *The Trial of Josef Kramer and Forty Four Others*. Deposition of Gertrud Diamant, on 6 December 2015. URL http://www.bergenbelsen.co.uk/pages/Trial/TrialAppendices/TrialAppendices_Affidavits_06_Diamant.html

Testimony 8: War Crimes Trials - Vol. II The Belsen Trial. *The Trial of Josef Kramer and Forty Four Others*. Gitla Dunkleemann, on 6 December 2015. URL http://www.bergenbelsen.co.uk/pages/Trial/TrialAppendices/TrialAppendices_Affidavits_08_Dunkleemann.html.

Testimony 9: War Crimes Trials - Vol. II The Belsen Trial. *The Trial of Josef Kramer and Forty Four Others*. Deposition of Ilona Stein, on 6 December 2015. URL http://www.bergenbelsen.co.uk/pages/Trial/TrialAppendices/TrialAppendices_Affidavits_100_Stein.html.

Testimony 10: War Crimes Trials - Vol. II The Belsen Trial. *The Trial of Josef Kramer and Forty Four Others*. Deposition of Katherine Neiger, on 6 December 2015. URL http://www.bergenbelsen.co.uk/pages/Trial/TrialAppendices/TrialAppendices_Affidavits_43_Neiger.html.

Testimony 11: War Crimes Trials - Vol. II The Belsen Trial. *The Trial of Josef Kramer and Forty Four Others*. Deposition of Luba Triszinska, on 6 December 2015. URL http://www.bergenbelsen.co.uk/pages/Trial/TrialAppendices/TrialAppendices_Affidavits_63_Triszinska.html.

Testimony 12: War Crimes Trials - Vol. II The Belsen Trial. *The Trial of Josef Kramer and Forty Four Others*. Statement of Irma Grese, on 6 December 2015. URL http://www.bergenbelsen.co.uk/pages/Trial/TrialAppendices/TrialAppendices_Affidavits_88_Grese.html.