

## Chapter in edited volume

'Housework, domestic privacy and the "German home": paradoxes of private life during the Second World War', in: Rüdiger Hachtmann and Sven Reichardt, eds, *Detlev Peukert und die NS-Forschung*, pp. 115-131

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In February 1943, the periodical *Der Hoheitsträger*, targeted at Party rank and file officials, ran an article on the 'servant question' which was strikingly illustrated by a photograph of a smiling young woman with an embroidered apron seated with her arms round two small children and a picture book open on her lap. In drastic contrast to this conventionally appealing image of domestic security and comfort, a stern caption told readers what was wrong with this picture: "Es handelt sich bei unserem Bild um eine fremdvölkische Hausgehilfin. Wir nehmen diese Veröffentlichung zum Anlass, um energisch darauf hinzuweisen, dass trotz der vorhandenen Fähigkeiten die Beschäftigung mit den Kindern im erzieherischen Sinne restlos der Mutter zukommt, und dass sie in vielen Fällen die Hausgehilfin bekommt, um für diese Zwecke frei zu sein."<sup>1</sup> Given the recognition among Nazi propagandists of the power of photos, this clumsy attempt to correct the impact of the image suggests that this item was unlikely to have had the desired "deterrent" effect on readers. But it is interesting, firstly, for the way it presents – in the context of guidance to Party officials – the private sphere as a target for scrutiny and for its absurd suggestion that regulations could dictate how mistress and servant interacted in the home. Secondly, it focuses our attention on race and racism as a dimension of domestic life in wartime. The image evokes the home as a site of intimate familiarity and cosy security, while the caption suggests the ease with which its order could be threatened and subverted: the uncanny scenario conjured up here is that of the mother supplanted in the nursery by a beguiling imposter. An observer might ask: if she is doing exactly what a mother would do with her children – looking at a book with them – what difference does it make? But the caption insists that there is every difference: domestic order requires the guiding authority and touch of the housewife and mother and is threatened by the presence of an "alien" servant.

Only around 10% of German households in the Second World War had servants, and the "fremdvölkische Hausgehilfin" was something relatively few Germans

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<sup>1</sup> Rahlenbeck, Rassenpolitisches Amt, 'Ein Beitrag zur Hausgehilfinnenfrage', *Der Hoheitsträger* Jg. 7 (1943), Folge 2, S. 35.

experienced.<sup>2</sup> That said, the regime had far-reaching aspirations to use 'Ostarbeiterinnen' to relieve the burdens on German housewives. In April 1942, Fritz Sauckel as Generalbevollmächtigter für den Arbeitseinsatz proclaimed his intention "aus den östlichen Gebieten etwa 400,000 – 500,000 ausgesuchte gesunde und kräftige Mädchen ins Reich hereinzunehmen", and in September 1942 guidelines were published regarding their deployment.<sup>3</sup> In the end, the number of Ostarbeiterinnen who came to be employed as servants in German households – an estimated 50,000 by 1944 - was much more modest than Sauckel's original target.<sup>4</sup>

This policy of employing Ostarbeiterinnen as domestic servants, riddled as it was with contradictions, offers a starting-point for considering the Nazi regime's attitude towards household arrangements and housework as one dimension of the private world of home and family. If contemporary critics and observers of the regime at the time emphasised the way in which the regime crushed individuality and eliminated privacy, there is now an established strand of thinking among historians that the regime did not simply aim to undermine private life in the name of the Volksgemeinschaft. Instead, it is argued, the regime combined an urge to control and instrumentalize those aspects of life lived behind closed doors with the promise to Germans who conformed politically and racially to the regime's norms that they could expect to enjoy a degree of security and privacy from the demands of the state.<sup>5</sup>

One of the historians who did most in the 1980s to grapple with the paradoxes of private life under National Socialism was Detlev Peukert. In his project of combining the history of everyday life with the analysis of the regime's techniques of domination, exploitation and exclusion, the question of private life posed itself repeatedly both within the context of the regime's goals and strategies and in relation to patterns of individual and group responses to repression and terror. The instinct of many Germans in face of the destruction by the Nazi regime of their familiar neighbourhood networks and social

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<sup>2</sup> In May 1939, 912 000 households employed a servant or servants, and just over 1 million household servants (hauswirtschaftliche Gehilfen) lived in the household of their employer. Ulrike Winkler, 'Hauswirtschaftliche Ostarbeiterinnen': Zwangsarbeit in deutschen Haushalten, in: Ulrike Winkler (Hg.), *Stiften gehen: NS-Zwangsarbeit und Entschädigungsdebatte* (ORT, JAHR), here S. 149. In March 1944, c. 100,000 foreign servants were working in German households, of whom an estimated 50,000 were from the occupied Soviet Union. Winkler, p.

<sup>3</sup> Beauftragte für den Vierjahresplan/GBA, 8. September 1942 an die Landesarbeitsämter und Arbeitsämter, Sonderaktion des GBA zur Hereinholung von Ostarbeiterinnen zugunsten kinderreicher städtischer und ländlicher Haushaltungen. *Reichsarbeitsblatt* Teil 1, Nr. 27, 1942, S. 411.

<sup>4</sup> Mareike Wittkowski, In untergeordneter Stellung: Hausgehilfinnen im Nationalsozialismus, in: Nicole Kramer und Armin Nolzen (Hg.), *Ungleichheit im Dritten Reich*, S. 165.

<sup>5</sup> Moritz Föllmer, Individuality and Modernity in Berlin (ORT, JAHR), S. 107-8, 129-131.

organizations, he suggested, was “der Rückzug ins Private”.<sup>6</sup> That retreat, however, was not just a reaction to the regime but also the result of a longer-term social trend towards the emergence of the modern nuclear family as a unit of consumption. Meanwhile, the regime both penetrated and threatened the sphere of the private when this might allow alternative and dissenting identities to flourish, and at the same time fostered a conditional and conformist “retreat” into a world of leisure and (controlled) consumption.<sup>7</sup> What remains ambivalent, in Peukert’s interpretation, is the meaning of individual withdrawal “in die kleinräumige, gemütliche Vertrautheit der Privatsphäre”.<sup>8</sup> For Peukert, such a withdrawal could signal on the one hand an individual’s desire to turn their back on the regimented mass in order to preserve a sense of personal autonomy and integrity, even if the idea of an autonomous realm in which one could still “be oneself” was an illusion. On the other hand, “retreat” could also mean a depoliticized self-adaptation by the majority of Germans to the regime’s barbaric “normality” and an atomization of social relations that served to stabilize the regime.<sup>9</sup>

For all the insights Peukert offers in relation to the relationship between terror and everyday life and between the orchestrated monumentality of public life and the retreat into the private, he has – as Birthe Kundrus already noted – relatively little to say about the gendered connotations of domestic privacy.<sup>10</sup> However, if one is discussing, within the context of the Nazi dictatorship, the option or strategy of withdrawal to a “private sphere”, it seems relevant to ask how contemporary social norms positioned a person in relation to the “private sphere” to start with. In particular, it is worth considering how women were conventionally regarded as responsible, through their domestic work in the household, for creating the comforts and reassurances of domestic privacy.

Exploring how concepts of public and private were gendered was already in the 1970s and 1980s an important issue for feminist historians, political scientists and sociologists, and their insights have since shaped historical research on women and gender relations in modern Europe and the western world, including specialist work on Nazi Germany. From this diverse body of work has emerged the by now well-established critique of bourgeois gender ideology and its notions of a ‘natural’ complementarity of the sexes, and an analysis of the conceptual division of the social world into a public sphere coded as masculine and a private realm, coded as feminine, within which women are expected to perform the emotional labour of rearing children and restoring the energies of their menfolk.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Detlev Peukert, *Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde*, S. 90-91.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, S. 92.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, S. 225.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, S. 225, 232, 280, 282-4.

<sup>10</sup> Birthe Kundrus, *Kriegerfrauen: Familienpolitik und Geschlechterverhältnisse im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg* (ORT, JAHR), S. 286.

<sup>11</sup> Karin Jurczyk and Mechthild Oechsle, *Privatheit: Interdisziplinarität und Grenzverschiebungen*. Eine Einführung in: Karin Jurczyk / Mechthild Oechsle

In addition to considering the normative concept of a “private sphere” and the way its demarcation served to assign different social tasks to women and men, feminist scholars have also discussed the practices and experiences associated with privacy. Although the idea of the “private sphere” suggests the possibility of autonomy and being “left alone”, an analysis of the specific relationships and practices of “privacy” represents a distinct effort to find out under what conditions and to what extent such autonomy could be achieved.<sup>12</sup> If feminist research has often depicted the home as an often hidden site of unequal gender relations, a ‘black box’ potentially concealing abuse, recent contributions have reminded us that women as well as men may experience domestic privacy as a realm of selfhood, self-realization and autonomy.<sup>13</sup> Other contributions have focused from a postcolonial perspective on domestic privacy as a site of class and racial privilege, the place where a “bounded and secure” identity is shored up through the exclusion and exploitation of others.<sup>14</sup> Such analyses include analyses of colonial household formations in which the housewife’s conventionally subordinate position is balanced by her power as an employer of servants.<sup>15</sup>

If these broader discussions of the private often refer to the place of domestic privacy and the meanings of home in liberal societies, they nevertheless suggest questions that are pertinent to other types of regime, including Nazi Germany. Since Peukert’s work appeared, a large volume of work has illuminated the gendered and racist dimensions of private life and state-society relations in Nazi Germany. Along with work on the history of sexuality, marriage and motherhood<sup>16</sup> there have been studies of attempts to rationalize housework and reconcile housework with paid employment, the regime’s attempts to mobilize housewives, and policies towards domestic servants.<sup>17</sup> These studies, together

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(Hg.), *Das Private neu denken. Erosionen, Ambivalenzen, Leistungen* (Münster, 2008), S. 8-47, here S. 9-11.

<sup>12</sup> Iris Marion Young, “House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme”, in: *Intersecting Voices. Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy and Policy*, Princeton, NJ, 1997, pp. 134-64, here pp. 162-3.

<sup>13</sup> Beate Rössler, *Privatheit und Autonomie: zum individuellen und gesellschaftlichen Wert des Privaten*, in: Sandra Seubert und Peter Niesen (Hg.), *Die Grenzen des Privaten* (Baden-Baden, 2010), S. 41-57.

<sup>14</sup> Young, *House and Home*, S. 157.

<sup>15</sup> Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda (Hg.), *Domesticating the Empire. Race, Gender and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Dagmar Herzog, *Sexuality and German Fascism*; Gabriele Czarnowski, *Der Wert der Ehe für die Volksgemeinschaft: Frauen und Männer in der deutschen Ehepolitik*, in: Kirsten Heinsohn, Barbara Vogel and Ulrike Weckel (Hg.), *Zwischen Karriere und Verfolgung. Handlungsräume von Frauen im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland* (Frankfurt, 1997); Irmgard Weyrather, *Muttertag und Mutterkreuz: Der Kult um die “deutsche Mutter” m Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt, 1994); ADD titles on homosexuality.

<sup>17</sup> Birthe Kundrus, *Kriegerfrauen: Familienpolitik und Geschlechterverhältnisse im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg, 1995); Ingrid Schupetta, *Frauen-*

with the conceptual discussions just outlined, provide the basis here for considering one particular aspect of domestic privacy in wartime Nazi Germany, namely the question of housewives, housework and paid domestic help. It keeps in mind the broad paradox identified by Peukert about the relationship between public and private under National Socialism - that the regime both combated and promoted the "Rückzug aus der öffentlichen Sphäre ins Private" - while taking account of the particularly gendered dimension of domestic privacy. The following discussion starts by asking whether wartime efforts both to "communalize" housework and to increase Party and state intrusion into private households amounted to a redrawing of the boundaries of public and private. It goes on to consider some of the contradictions and conflicts that arose from the regime's wartime attempts to monitor household arrangements. It then looks at domestic privacy and the home as a site of social and racial privilege, considering what implications the territorial expansion of Nazi Germany had for the question of household management and housework within the Reich.

### **I The "deprivatization" of housework and the housewife?**

Home and the pleasures and comforts of the domestic realm were vital but fraught topics on the German wartime home front. Domestic stability and security stood for a normality that seemed ever-receding in wartime, but was all the more powerful as a vision of a future after victory.<sup>18</sup> This raised the question of how the regime could continue projecting this promise while enforcing compromises and sacrifices in the present. Alert, in light of the experiences of the First World War, to the need to manage morale both within the armed forces and on the home front, the regime faced from the start multiple conflicts between supporting the families of enlisted men and avoiding drastic cutbacks in domestic consumption while satisfying the demands of the war economy for labour and material resources on the other. If frictions were evident from the start at a time when the total mobilization of German resources seemed avoidable, they increased rapidly after the launch of the attack on the Soviet Union when the rising death toll at the front and intensified conscription brought a crisis in the labour supply that could only partly be met by the import of foreign forced labour.<sup>19</sup>

One consistent theme in wartime propaganda to the housewife was saving time and saving resources. In an article published in early 1942 in the periodical *NS-Monatshefte*, Dr Else Vorwerck addressed the question of making housework

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und Ausländererwerbstätigkeit in Deutschland von 1939 bis 1945 (Köln, 1983); Nicole Kramer, *Volksgenossinnen an der Heimatfront: Mobilisierung, Verhalten, Erinnerung* (Göttingen, 2011); Carola Sachse, *Der Hausarbeitstag*; Mareike Witkowski, *In untergeordneter Stellung*; Nancy Reagan, *Sweeping the German Nation*; Sybille Steinbacher, "Differenz der Geschlechter? Chancen und Schranken für die "Volksgenossinnen" in Wildt / Bajohr, eds, *Volksgemeinschaft*.

<sup>18</sup> Peukert, *Volksgenossen*, S. 85; Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, S. 59.

<sup>19</sup> Kundrus, *Kriegerfrauen*, S. 246.

more efficient at a time when the war was placing ever greater demands on housewives and working women and when paid help in the household was in short supply. On the one hand, Vorwerck amplified and celebrated the significance of women's domestic labour, home-making and child-rearing as a resource for the community and as service to the nation. Building on a well-established tradition of scientific housekeeping, she conjured up a vision of labour-saving techniques and appliances to streamline cleaning, cooking and laundering. Given that promoting efficient housekeeping was Vorwerck's chief function as head of the Volkswirtschaft/Hauswirtschaft section of the Reichsfrauenführung, this part of her argument was hardly surprising. What was perhaps more surprising was her insistence, ultimately at odds with her "efficiency" message, on the unique quality of domestic labour that set it apart from other forms of work. Reproducing the classic ideology of bourgeois domesticity, she presented the home as the site of "ideal" qualities, the basis of personality formation, individual judgement and interpersonal relationships.

"Wohl kann die Windelwäsche durch Waschmittel und Waschgerät weitestgehend mechanisiert werden. Aber das Aus- und Einwickeln des Säuglings kann der Menschenhand nie abgenommen werden. Wohl kann die kompletteste Badeeinrichtung vorhanden sein. Aber ohne das energische mütterliche Handanlegen wird der Junge nie zur Sauberkeit gewöhnt werden. Wohl kann der Staubsauger mit seinen Spezialteilen die Reinigung des Schreibtisches erleichtern. Aber daß der Hausherr die gewohnte, persönlich individuell gestaltete Ordnung findet, dazu ist das persönliche Eingreifen der Frau unerlässlich."<sup>20</sup>

This "human" essence of women's work of home-making was, this passage suggested, incommensurable with rationalization. Preserving this individual and emotional dimension of housework was also, argued Vorwerck, a bulwark that would protect the German family and the German nation from collectivization and ultimately from Bolshevism. "Reichen Zeit und Kraft nur für die äußerst notwendigen technischen Vorrichtungen hin, so verliert damit die hauswirtschaftliche Leistung als solche ihren Sinn und die Gefahr der "bolschewistischen" Lösung, der kollektiven Entwicklung, ist gegeben."<sup>21</sup>

Vorwerck's argument revealed a tension at the heart of the regime's efforts to tackle the issue of the domestic sphere and the burdens of housework in wartime. On the one hand housework was labour that was capable of being re-organized, and it has recently been suggested that the efforts by the Nazi regime to manage and rationalize housework amounted to the 'deprivatization of the housewife and of housework' (Entprivatisierung der Hausfrau bzw. der Haus-

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<sup>20</sup> Else Vorwerck, Leistungssteigerung und Rationalisierung in der Hauswirtschaft, Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte, Jg. 13, Heft 43-4, Feb/März 1942, 96-104, here p. 102.

<sup>21</sup> Vorwerck, Leistungssteigerung, p. 104.

und Familienarbeit).<sup>22</sup> This, it is argued, involved greater public intervention into household matters and attempts to promote and support, but also to control and oversee, the performance of household tasks. One example was the regime's attempt to reconcile women's paid employment with the burden of wartime household tasks: the unpaid "housework day" once a month for German women workers with their own household who worked at least 48 hours per week, introduced in October 1943, was promoted as a benefit, though its main purpose was to curb absenteeism.<sup>23</sup> Efforts to "deprivatize" domestic labour also entailed Nazi women's organizations claiming that voluntary and communal efforts could relieve the burden of individual housewives. With its empire-building urge, the Reich Women's Leadership built up the Hilfsdienst apparatus it had founded in 1936 and claimed that in wartime it was coming into its own.<sup>24</sup> In 1941 it trumpeted the expansion of sewing workshops, which sewed garments for the Wehrmacht but also repaired clothing for "overburdened" working women, and the achievements of the "neighbourhood aid" service (Nachbarschaftshilfe), which offered help at home to hard-pressed mothers.<sup>25</sup> Such communal endeavours were presented as exporting the caring qualities of the domestic sphere into the community.<sup>26</sup>

But Vorwerck's text, as we have seen, also projected a sentimentalizing and mystifying vision of the private home as a distinctive realm of identity formation, comfort and familiarity for which the housewife and mother stood as guarantor. This strand of her argument is suggestive of the efforts of the regime in wartime to affirm the legitimacy of the private sphere for 'deserving' Volksgenossen and at the same time to instrumentalize domestic privacy as a resource that was particularly vital for Germans to cultivate and preserve. For all the restrictions placed on consumption by those in charge of the war economy, scope was still allowed for a vision of private material comfort: advertising for consumer goods was scaled back, but advertisers and manufacturers of household goods continued to project the future possibilities of pleasurable consumption and the chance even in wartime for using familiar products and practices – such as taking family snapshots - to create domestic closeness and contentment.<sup>27</sup> The regime's concern with the morale of men in the armed forces was a powerful motive to promote family life as a resource to regenerate men, both through the binding together of home and front through Feldpost and through the granting of

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<sup>22</sup> Nicole Kramer, Haushalt, Betrieb, Ehrenamt, in: Marc Buggeln / Michael Wildt (Hg.), Arbeit im Nationalsozialismus (Göttingen, 2014), S. 33-51, insbesondere 42-45.

<sup>23</sup> Carola Sachse, Der Hausarbeitstag, S. 35-47.

<sup>24</sup> Nicole Kramer, Volksgenossinnen an der Heimatfront: Mobilisierung, Verhalten, Erinnerung (Göttingen, 2011), S. 37-8, 71-3.

<sup>25</sup> Hauptabteilung Hilfsdienst, in: Deutsches Frauenschaffen im Kriege: Jahrbuch der Reichsfrauenführung 1941, S. 25-29. On the Nähstuben, see Kramer, Volksgenossinnen, S. 73-4.

<sup>26</sup> Ruth Hildebrand, Die Frauen in der Neuordnung Europas, Deutsches Frauenschaffen im Kriege, S. 8-17.

<sup>27</sup> Pamela Swett, Selling Under the Swastika: Advertising and Commercial Culture in Nazi Germany (Stanford, 2014), S. 185-226.

home leave. The magazine for male Party functionaries already mentioned, *Der Hoheitsträger*, reminded its readers in 1942 that “Der Urlaub dient dem privaten Glück des Soldaten” and that men on leave should be left alone, not continually pestered to take part in communal events: the soldier and his family should be allowed “möglichst viel Zeit für sein Privatleben”.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, in ideological terms, the upholding of the private family unit and the unique qualities of family life were supposed to serve, as Vorwerck claimed, as a marker to distinguish German culture from that of ‘Bolshevik’ collectivism.<sup>29</sup>

## **II Wartime household arrangements and housework: scrutiny and assertions of privacy**

An acknowledgement of the need for a degree of domestic privacy as a counterbalance to the stresses of wartime did not preclude attempts to control and monitor home life and police the domestic consumption of labour and material resources. The explosion of social need created by wartime – separation, deaths in action, homelessness and displacement caused by air raids – multiplied the contacts between state and Party agencies and individual families. Cases proliferated where women as soldiers’ wives, as bereaved dependants of soldiers, or as evacuees became dependent, with their children, on formal and informal welfare.<sup>30</sup> The provision of this welfare in turn entailed the external monitoring of family circumstances as a precondition of receiving benefits and support. Such support, granted to ‘valuable’ members of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, was supposedly generous, unbureaucratic and tailored to individual need.<sup>31</sup> But the scrutiny of household arrangements by social workers and Party agencies, sometimes involving home visits, was part of a process that could also serve to challenge supposedly “unworthy” claimants or unwarranted claims.<sup>32</sup>

The coupling of wartime welfare and support with control and scrutiny produced clashes and protests in which some individuals asserted in different ways their right to be left in peace. Nazi women’s organizations made it their business to identify “needy” and “deserving” families who needed help in the home, but such offers were not always welcome.<sup>33</sup> The *Hauptabteilung Hilfsdienst* urged *NS-Frauenschaft* local groups to do more to persuade women

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<sup>28</sup> Die Betreuung des Urlaubers, in: *Der Hoheitsträger*, Folge VII/VIII 1942, S. 17-19.

<sup>29</sup> See also Lydia Ganzer-Gottschewski, *Der Auftrag der deutschen Frau, Frauenkultur im Deutschen Frauenwerk*, Zehntes Heft 1941, S. 4-5.

<sup>30</sup> On Familienunterhalt for soldiers’ wives, see Kundrus, *Kriegerfrauen*, S. 245 ff; on support for bereaved relatives of fallen soldiers by the Wehrmachtsfürsorgestellen and NSKOV, see Kramer, *Volksgenossinnen*, S. 206-245; on welfare support for evacuees, see Kramer, *Volksgenossinnen*, S. 247-305.

<sup>31</sup> Kundrus, *Kriegerfrauen*, S. 272, 284; Kramer, *Volksgenossinnen*, S. 227-8.

<sup>32</sup> Kundrus, *Kriegerfrauen*, S. 292, S. 301-2; Kramer, *Volksgenossinnen*, S. 215, 219-220.

<sup>33</sup> Kramer, *Volksgenossinnen*, S. 73.



workers to accept help from Hilfsdienst volunteers: “Wir wissen, daß oft die bestehende Hilfsbereitschaft unserer Frauen von der werktätigen Kameradin nicht angenommen wird, da diese keine fremden Menschen in ihrem Haushalt dulden will.”<sup>34</sup> Having been assured that their claims for Familienunterhalt would be treated unbureaucratically, soldiers’ wives resented having their circumstances and decisions scrutinized by the welfare authorities. One soldier’s wife, challenged on her claim for financial assistance to buy a stock of coal, pointed out that she had a right not to be treated as if she were part of a Wohlfahrtsfamilie and have her decisions on household matters questioned as if she were a potentially undeserving claimant.<sup>35</sup>

Not all households were exposed to these forms of scrutiny and judgement, and complaints arose in Party circles that there were far too many privileged households, particularly among the traditional elites, whose private arrangements were not being scrutinized rigorously enough. It was a routine trope for Friedrich Hildebrandt, Gauleiter of Mecklenburg, to refer to the scandal of overprivileged wives of officers, lawyers and Beamten with grown-up children employing servants, Pflichtjahrmädchen, and gardeners, or an officer’s widow living in a house with 16 rooms.<sup>36</sup> Discussions of the servant shortage in wartime repeatedly pointed to the “unsocial” distribution of servants: two-thirds of domestic servants, it was claimed, were working in small or childless households.<sup>37</sup> However, there was great reluctance to use compulsion to tackle the issue: labour offices were empowered in 1941 to tell households with more than one servant to give them up, but households with only one servant, even if there were no children in the family, were left alone until September 1944, when domestic servants were subject to registration for war work.<sup>38</sup> With the Nazi leadership reluctant to apply coercion to conscript servants, it was left to Party agencies to coax and persuade housewives to manage voluntarily without a servant out of a spirit of comradely solidarity.<sup>39</sup> The Party women’s press urged local groups of the NS-Frauenschaft to persuade comfortably-situated housewives with a servant to do without one for the sake of other women who needed help more. There was also the suggestion that a husband, where he was

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<sup>34</sup> Hauptabt. Hilfsdienst, Rundschreiben 70/40 an alle Gaufrauenchaftsleiterinnen, 10.7. 1940: Nachbarschaftshilfe für die werktätige Frau. BA Berlin, NS 44/49.

<sup>35</sup> Kundrus, *Kriegerfrauen*, S. 273.

<sup>36</sup> Buddrus (Hg.), *Mecklenburg im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, S. 183, 496, 626.

<sup>37</sup> Dr Molle, *Die Hausgehilfinnen in Zahlen*, Reichsarbeitsblatt Teil , 1942, Nr. 9, S. 171-5, hier S. 175; Dörte Winkler, *Frauenarbeit im Dritten Reich* (Düsseldorf, 1977), S. 141-2. See also on the wartime servant shortage: Ingrid Wittmann, ‘Echte Weiblichkeit ist ein Dienen’: Die Hausgehilfin in der Weimarer Republik und im Nationalsozialismus, in: *Frauengruppe Faschismusforschung* (Hg.), *Mutterkreuz und Arbeitsbuch* (Frankfurt am Main, 1977); Mareike Witkowski, *In untergeordneter Stellung: Hausgehilfinnen im Nationalsozialismus*, in: Nicole Kramer and Armin Nolzen (Hg.), *Ungleichheiten im Dritten Reich*, S. 155-175.

<sup>38</sup> Winkler, *Frauenarbeit*, S. 142-48.

<sup>39</sup> J. Berghaus, *Zur Hausgehilfinnenfrage*, in: *Nachrichtendienst der Reichsfrauenführung*, Folge 8, August 1942, S. 110-114.

still living at home, and children might pitch in with 'small tasks' and enable a housewife to take on work outside the home: it was a wife's fault, it was suggested, if she would not trust her husband to carry out domestic tasks that as an army recruit he would have handled.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, the labour administration sought to alleviate the servant shortage through importing forced labour.

The proliferating encounters and negotiations between "Volksgenossinnen" who sought assistance and the state authorities and Party agencies involved in providing such support created new degrees of contact with the state and new forms of individual involvement with the regime.<sup>41</sup> But the gathering of information about private household arrangements, and the regime's commitment to tailor its support to families and households also created a climate for comparing notes and observing how others were more favourably treated.<sup>42</sup> Individualizing strategies to secure one's own perceived entitlements were one result of this; complaints about unfairness and denunciations of others whose private domestic arrangements seemed untouched by wartime constraints were another. However, the regime had no intention of equalizing the burdens of war on individual households through coercive means, and the very slipperiness of criteria for setting norms and standards in relation to domestic matters helped that stance: there appeared to be no clear yardsticks by which one could assess what level of domestic comfort and privacy was reasonable, whether a housewife's spending decisions were prudent or excessive, or whether her need for paid domestic help was legitimate. But this did not stop Party organizations grumbling about the damage to morale caused by private waste and frivolity.

### **III Conquest and comfort: privileged households as a microcosm of the racial new order**

Wartime propaganda messages about private life, home and housework were marked by conflicting sets of norms and expectations. One aspect of this, as we have seen, was the tension between promoting the household as a site of efficient reproductive labour and regarding the home as a private, essentially ungovernable domain of individual choice, decisions, taste and emotion. The second conundrum evident in discussions of the home and housework by NS-Frauenschaft spokeswomen was the simultaneous preaching of restraint and the projection of a vision of an expanded Reich with its promise of boundless space and resources. Discussions of wartime household management constantly urged housewives to do more with less and to manage without domestic help. But in parallel with such austere messages, the periodicals of the Party women's organizations in 1941 and 1942 were also encouraging readers to think of the German household and German housekeeping in relation to conquest, occupation and colonization.

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<sup>40</sup> Unter dem Gesetz der Front, in: Nachrichtendienst der Reichsfrauenführung, Jg. 12, 1943, Folge 3, März 1943, S. 31-3, here S. 32.

<sup>41</sup> Kramer, Volksgenossinnen.

<sup>42</sup> Kundrus, Kriegerfrauen.

In October 1941 Lydia Ganzer-Gottschewski (who had been the Nazi women's leader for a brief stint in early 1933) wrote in the magazine *Frauenkultur* published by the Deutsches Frauenwerk of the 'miracle' that the vast expansion of the territory under Nazi control was accompanied by the preservation of home life 'unchanged': "Daß ein Volk, dem solche Gigantenarbeit aufgetragen wird, sein innerstes Leben unberührt lassen kann, diese Tatsache grenzt an den Raum des Wunders."<sup>43</sup> Her bizarre claim that German "home life" had remained unchanged by the war ignored such obvious facts as evacuation and forms of labour service involving the separation of family members through enforced mobility. She invited readers to share in her professed astonishment at the notion that fact that given the stretching of the German population across the vast territories it occupied, collective solutions to domestic labour back home had not been resorted to: families, she claimed, had not been broken up, children not sent to children's homes, women not dispatched to work camps. Instead, she insisted, the 'German home' had been preserved – thanks to all the resources mobilized by the regime and its women's organizations to support it. By the end of her article, the expanding sphere of German power was reframed not as a threat to German family life back in the Reich but as the wider canvas for organized women's activity and a space of possibility within which German women as well as men would realize their respective 'mission'.

Ganzer-Gottschewski's article with the implicit anti-Bolshevism contained in the nightmare scenario of collective solutions to housework and family structures coincided with the international women's gathering organized in October 1941 in Berlin by the Reichsfrauenführung at which women representatives from Axis countries and those aligned with or occupied by Germany assembled to hear the message of the 'New Europe' mobilized under German leadership against Bolshevism.<sup>44</sup> By 1943, Nazi housekeeping experts had expanded their operations abroad in order to spread the message of rational housekeeping to Dutch and Norwegian women living under Nazi occupation, offering advice on how to manage their household, recycle and make footwear out of raffia in face of the shortages resulting from German occupation and plunder.<sup>45</sup>

Some of the goods that the Dutch and Norwegian housewives were missing would likely have found their way to Germany through unofficial channels as well as by the route of organized transfers of raw materials. Götz Aly's depiction of Wehrmacht soldiers buying supplies to take home, sometimes to specific orders their relatives had sent, particularly in the occupied countries of western and northern Europe, forms part of his wider argument about the financing of

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<sup>43</sup> Ganzer-Gottschewski, *Der Auftrag der Frau*, S. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Harvey, *International networks and cross-border cooperation: National Socialist women and the vision of a 'New Order' in Europe*, in: *Politics Religion, Ideology* 13: 2 (2012), 141-158.

<sup>45</sup> 'Wanderschau in Holland', *NRFF Jg 12, Folge 3*, March 1943; PAGE; 'Hauswirtschaftliche Beratungsstellen in Norwegen', *NRFF Jg. 12, Folge 9*, Sept 1943, S. 138-9.

Nazi Germany's war effort.<sup>46</sup> However, it can also be read as part of the history of wartime housekeeping and private consumption on the home front and it can serve as a counterpoint to a narrative of controls, rationing and austerity.

However, it was not just goods that enlisted men were bringing home: already in early 1942, members of the Wehrmacht coming home on leave from the occupied Soviet territories were bringing with them young women to work in their household.<sup>47</sup> This was one reason for Sauckel to launch his official recruitment drive. While his bid to use forced labourers to solve the servant shortage far outstripped anything that the labour administration had previously attempted, the Ostarbeiterinnen were not the first women recruited from conquered territories in eastern Europe to work as servants in the Reich: Polish women in particular had already been recruited before 1942 for work on German farms and households.<sup>48</sup> In 1943, Sauckel started a further campaign, this time to recruit 10,000 Latvian women as domestic servants for the Reich, but this was blocked in a notable demonstration of resistance to German rule by the Landeseigene Verwaltung and only a few hundred ended up in the Reich.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, informal channels of recruiting Ostarbeiterinnen as domestics continued. The Kreisleiter of Kreis Parchim in Mecklenburg reported in February 1943 that he was trying to crack down on this form of self-service, which he claimed had already brought a total of 61 Ostarbeiterinnen to Mecklenburg. In one case, reported the Kreisleiter, 'hat ein Major Wiese aus Neu-Kaliss sich drei Ostarbeiterinnen besorgt, die mit dem Urlauberszug mitgeschickt sind. Die Mädchen habe ich abgezogen zu Bauern.'<sup>50</sup>

The phenomenon of Ostarbeiterinnen as domestic servants in wartime German households can be understood as part of the history of Soviet citizens as forced labourers in the Reich, and as part of the history of domestic servants in Germany. But it also raises questions about the 'German home' and its privacy in relation to racial hierarchies and wartime territorial expansion. In one sense, the recruitment of young women from Belarus and Ukraine as domestic servants was completely logical as a response to the perennial but seemingly worsening 'servant problem', with a shortage of willing applicants creating upward pressure on servants' wages and German servants becoming allegedly more demanding about what positions and conditions they would accept. Housewives as employers of servants had found the Nazi regime amenable to their wishes to

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<sup>46</sup> Götz Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat: Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter*, S. 176.

<sup>48</sup> Witkowski, *In untergeordneter Stellung*, S. 165; Winkler, 'Hauswirtschaftliche Ostarbeiterinnen', S. 152-4.

<sup>49</sup> Tilman Plath, 'Immer wieder scheitern alle Planungen der Arbeitseinsatz-Dienststellen!' *Arbeitsverwaltung in den Generalbezirken des Reichskommissariats Ostland*, in: Karsten Linne and Florian Dierl, eds, *Arbeitskräfte als Kriegsbeute: Der Fall Ost- und Südosteuropa 1939-1945*, Berlin 2011, S. 241-269, here S. 247.

<sup>50</sup> *Mecklenburg im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, S. 563.

fend off regulations that would have improved the rights and entitlements of domestic servants.<sup>51</sup> If housewives generally regarded their negotiations with servants as a private matter where the state should be kept at a distance, they could expect even greater freedom and impunity to treat a Ukrainian servant exactly as they pleased.

At the same time, from the point of view of Nazi ideas about the German home conserving and reproducing German identity in the intimate spaces and personal interactions of domestic life, employing domestic helps who were both Soviet citizens and ethnically “alien” was problematic. One oddly-conceived solution was to try and make the problem invisible: the recruits should ‘resemble Germans as closely as possible’ (‘...deren allgemeines Erscheinungsbild dem deutschen möglichst nahekomm’t’).<sup>52</sup> This specification was coupled with an indication that in due course these young women might become Germanized.<sup>53</sup> In the meantime, however, the notion that they would blend in was contradicted by the rule that they were the OST badge on their clothing.<sup>54</sup> A second dimension of the regime’s attempt to manage the awkwardness of employing an Ostarbeiterin as a domestic help was that the household employing her was to be constituted as a microcosm of the Nazi racial order, complete with spatial and functional hierarchies and boundaries. Here, the Deutsches Frauenwerk asserted its role briefing and supervising housewives as employers of Ostarbeiterinnen.<sup>55</sup> The regulations issued on the employment of ‘hauswirtschaftliche Ostarbeiterinnen’ specified that an Ostarbeiterin working as a domestic servant could not share her quarters with a German servant.<sup>56</sup> She was to carry out domestic tasks ‘ohne in näherer Berührung mit der Familie zu stehen und in die Betreuung und Erziehung der Kinder eingeschaltet zu werden’.<sup>57</sup> Her employers, meanwhile, were told to instruct the Ostarbeiterin “in deutsche Ordnung und Haushaltsführung” and not to discuss “kriegsbedingte Schwierigkeiten und Sorgen” in front of her.<sup>58</sup>

From September 1942 onwards, private households seeking an Ostarbeiterin as a domestic servant had to apply to their local Arbeitsamt and have their

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<sup>51</sup> Wittmann, ‘Echte Weiblichkeit ist ein Dienen’, S. 41; Witkowski, In untergeordneter Stellung, S. 158-9.

<sup>52</sup> 8. Sept 1942, Sonderaktion des GAB zur Hereinholung von Ostarbeiterinnen, RAB I, 1942, Nr. 27, S. 411.

<sup>53</sup> Herbert, Fremdarbeiter, S. 176.

<sup>54</sup> Merkblatt für Hausfrauen über die Beschäftigung hauswirtschaftlicher Ostarbeiterinnen in städtischen und ländlichen Haushaltungen, RAB I, 1942, Nr. 27, S. 413.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., S. 415.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., S. 414.

<sup>57</sup> 8. Sept. 1942, Sonderaktion des GBA zur Hereinholung von Ostarbeiterinnen zugunsten kinderreicher städtischer und ländlicher Haushaltungen, RAB I, 1942, Nr. 27, S. 412.

<sup>58</sup> Merkblatt für Hausfrauen über die Beschäftigung hauswirtschaftlicher Ostarbeiterinnen in städtischen und ländlichen Haushaltungen, S. 413.

application checked by a local Party official.<sup>59</sup> Those whose applications were approved were summoned, as one former employer recalled, to select 'their' domestic servant at a line-up at the local Arbeitsamt.<sup>60</sup> From then on, whatever the regulations with regard to their accommodation and treatment, there are indications that employers regarded themselves as in a position to treat their servants as they pleased. At any rate, the SD report in January 1943 on experiences with 'hauswirtschaftlichen Ostarbeiterinnen' suggested the delight of housewives at getting a servant whom they could order around at will: 'Den Ostarbeiterinnen könne auch jede Arbeit aufgebürdet werden, selbst wenn sie noch so schmutzig und schwer sei' but also what was from the point of view of the regime an alarming trend for the rules on physical separation and social distance within the home to be ignored. Plausibly or not, the report quoted examples of servants allegedly receiving lavish gifts, treats and bonuses and being told to not bother with the OST badge, and urged that the Nazi women's organizations be brought in 'mit entsprechenden Erziehungsmitteln' to deal with the unruly housewives.<sup>61</sup> However, the report did also note that given the sheer variety of conditions in different households – for instance over whether it was even practicable for a servant should eat separately from the family – 'sei es außerordentlich schwierig, eine klare Linie zu finden'.<sup>62</sup>

Meanwhile, Anne-Katrein Mendel's collection of testimonies by Polish and Ukrainian former domestic servants together with the memories of former German employers and their children offer some glimpses, however partial, of the ways in which housewives and servants interacted. Testimonies of former employers and their children as well as of former servants recall – without labelling them as such - rituals of initiation and absorption into the household (including immersion in a bathtub on arrival and re-clothing).<sup>63</sup> There are indications of more relaxed inclusion: examples of private photographs in publications on the history of Ostarbeiterinnen show that there were some German families who included their Polish or Ukrainian servant in their photographic chronicle of wartime family life: one photo shows the servant sitting alongside her mistress, each of them holding a child on her knees.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Sonderaktion des GBA zur Hereinholung von Ostarbeiterinnen, RAB I, 1942, Nr. 27, S. 410- 412.

<sup>60</sup> Annekatrein Mendel, Zwangsarbeit im Kinderzimmer: ‚Ostarbeiterinnen‘ in deutschen Familien von 1939 bis 1945. Gespräche mit Polinnen und Deutschen (1994), S.165 (Franziska F.)

<sup>61</sup> Meldungen aus dem Reich Nr. 349, 11. Januar 1943. See also Herbert, Fremdarbeiter, S. 176; Witkowski, In untergeordneter Stellung, S. 169.

<sup>62</sup> Meldungen aus dem Reich Nr. 349, 11. Januar 1943.

<sup>63</sup> Mendel, Zwangsarbeit im Kinderzimmer, S. 166, 201.

<sup>64</sup> Zwangsarbeit im Kinderzimmer, S. ?. See also private photographs of ‚Ostarbeiterinnen‘ in domestic surroundings in Uwe Kaminsky, Gezwungenes Wollen: Der Einsatz ausländischer Arbeitskräfte in evangelischen Einrichtungen 1939-1945, in: Baldur Hermans, ed., Zwang und Zuwendung. Katholische Kirche und Zwangsarbeit im Ruhrgebiet, S. 184; Dokumentationszentrum NS-Zwangsarbeit der Stiftung Topographie des Terrors (Hg.) Alltag Zwangsarbeit, S. 135.

Finally, the phenomenon of the Ostarbeiterin in the household was simply normalized as part of a wartime world of conscription, as the daughter of a household employing a Ukrainian servant recalled in self-critical hindsight: 'Sie war eben einfach da. (...) Damals war ja alle Welt dienstverpflichtet! ..So haben wir Marias Zwangsverpflichtung wohl einfach hingenommen.'<sup>65</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

Peukert's insights into the way in which the Nazi regime both combated and promoted a 'Rückzug ins Private' have given historians an important point of departure for exploring the contradictions of regime policy regarding the home in wartime Germany as a focus for private desires and decisions and the hope of material comfort and security. As he already pointed out, the regime could allow room for such private aspirations, and satisfying them could help serve to bolster acquiescence to the regime's violent rule.

Peukert's presentation of 'the private' did not particularly focus on the question of domestic labour and the creation of the comforts, security and familiarity of the home, or the question of whose 'retreat' the home represented. But it has been argued here that looking at the gendered dimensions of the regime's promises to promote home and family life during wartime can help shed light on the ideas and practices associated with 'the private'.

One dimension of this, explored here, is the contradictory messages put out to housewives by Nazi women's organizations. The essential conundrum of domestic privacy, from the regime's point of view, was evident: on the one hand, the home was constructed as the 'cell' of the community, and was expected to perform its functions in line with regime norms. But was not the housewife's personal freedom to decide how to use her time, apply her ingenuity, take initiatives and spend money she saw fit to meet her family's needs the essence of what made a home a home? The housewifery experts of the NS-Frauenschaft/DFW thus imagined on the one hand twenty million households as a responsive community responding to the drive for efficiency. They conjured up visions of the waste that would result a single mistake in household management were repeated millions of times. But at the same time they celebrated the individual mystique associated with homemaking. The private energies and resources that women put into home-making, their personal decisions on furnishings and consumables for the household, were essential if domestic comfort was to be the framework for the programmed staging of "privates Glück" for the soldier on leave and more generally for the regeneration of the population on the home front.

Researchers since Peukert have also explored how regime pledges to uphold family life and the home as the bedrock of home front morale played out in practice. They have showed how women in encounters with welfare and Party

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<sup>65</sup> Mendel, Zwangsarbeit im Kinderzimmer, S. 89.

agencies developed individual strategies to assert their perceived entitlements to domestic security and to avoid intrusive scrutiny of their homes, and taken up Peukert's idea of the compatibility of individualizing strategies and regime stability: the soldier's wife who used her unaccustomed allowance to make seemingly extravagant purchases for the household was acting in accordance with an official vision of domestic satisfaction and the regime's proclaimed confidence in future prosperity.<sup>66</sup> That said, the pursuit and protection en masse of individual entitlements could also spread awareness of inequalities and heighten social tensions. This was, for instance, the case with the issue of domestic servants being kept on not by the most 'needy' but the most affluent households.

Peukert was also acutely aware of the structuring of daily life by racism and eugenics and he touched in his work on the presence in everyday wartime life of forced labourers deported from the countries occupied by Germany. Picking up that thread, a third aspect of domestic privacy examined here is the German home in relation to Nazi Germany's wartime expansion. Blatant absurdities, within the logic of the regime, were produced by the policy of importing forced labourers who were defined as being of 'alien blood' from occupied eastern Europe and placing them as domestic servants in German households in the Reich. One strand of the Party message about the German home was its role as a boundary marker of nationhood and of the Nazi New Order, sharply demarcated from Bolshevism. It was claimed that other nations lacked the German sense of home: in the words of the NS-Gaudienst in Mecklenburg in January 1944, 'Die Wärme und Gepflegtheit des häuslichen Heimes und der Familie bedeuten dem deutschen Menschen ja unendlich viel mehr als manchen andern Völkern.'<sup>67</sup> The Nazi leadership was fixated on the need to reward and preserve the privileged status of 'valuable' large families through securing them domestic help, and refused to tackle the issue of supposedly less needy households who hung on to their servants despite the moral pressures from the Party. The availability of what seemed in 1942 to be a limitless pool of labour in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union inspired Sauckel's gigantomanic vision of rewarding and supporting such families with virtually 'free' forced labour. However, spectre of the collapse of racial boundaries and hierarchies that would result from close daily contact in the home between German mothers and children and Ukrainian servants soon surfaced in the panicky reactions in the SD reports and in the caption to the image mentioned at the start. Whatever the actual experiences and encounters between Germans and Ostarbeiterinnen, rumours and stories fuelled the idea of the private in this case as ungovernable.

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<sup>66</sup> Kundrus, *Kriegerfrauen*, S. 284-5; Idem, *Greasing the Palm of the Volksgemeinschaft? Consumption under National Socialism*, in: Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto (Hg.), *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany: Social Engineering and Private Lives* (Oxford, 2014), S. 157-170, esp. S. 167-8.

<sup>67</sup> Nationalsozialistischer Gaudienst, 25.1.1944, cited in: Michael Buddrus (Hg.), *Mecklenburg im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Die Tagungen des Gauleiters Friedrich Hildebrandt mit den NS-Führungsgremien des Gaues Mecklenburg 1939-1945* (Bremen, 2009), S. 484.



