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Anja Schüler

The "Horror on the Rhine":

Rape, Racism and the

International Women's Movement

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In a filibuster on the Fair Employment Practices Committee in June of 1945, Senator James Eastland from Mississippi charged that for five days, French Senegalese soldiers in Germany had imprisoned and sexually assaulted 5 000 German girls in a subway.¹ Like most other charges made by Eastland in this filibuster, the accusations were completely unsubstantiated. However, they echo an extensive propaganda campaign against the use of Colonial troops during the French occupation of the Rhineland more than twenty years earlier, the so-called "Horror on the Rhine". From its very beginning, the initiators of this campaign had recognized the importance of generating international rather than national protests. They especially targeted the United States and American women, counting on American racism and American leverage in the Post-war world to discredit the French occupation.² This paper will look at the role women played in the German

propaganda campaigns and at the reaction of American women to the racist szenarios depicted in the pamphlets that reached them. It is an attempt to explain, why the appeals for race and gender solidarity largely failed and why gender played only a very minor role in the protests that were voiced in the United States.

Like in France in 1914, in Berlin in 1945 and recently in Bosnia, women undoubtedly become part of the booty during the French occupation of the Rhineland after World War I. It is always extremely difficult and not the subject of this paper to determine the extent of rapes and attempted rapes during wartime and occupation. The case in point is no exception. One has to account for a number of assaults that were never reported as well as for exaggerated statements. In fact, even the number of atrocities reported by the German authorities - 132 rapes and attempted rapes in a period of 22 months - does not seem totally unbelievable.³ What is more important for my argument

¹ 91 *Congressional Record*, June 29, 1945, 6991-7005.

² There can be no doubt that the end of the French occupation and not simply the withdrawal of the Colonial troops was the ultimate goal of the campaigns, cf. Gisela Lebzelter, "Die 'Schwarze Schmach.' Vorurteile - Propaganda - Mythos," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 11 (1985), 42 ff.

³ The Reich Commissioner presented the Interallied Rhineland Commission with two memoranda in 1920, one in August, claiming 116 sexual assaults by French troops, and one in November, claiming an additional 16 which led to 16 indictments and 10 acquittals. G. Maréchal, "La Campagne contre les troupes noires" [Interallied Rhineland Commission, 1921].

is that there is no proof that French Colonial soldiers, depicted in the German propaganda material as the primitive savage with an uncontrollable sexual appetite, committed a disproportionately large share of sexual assaults in the Rhineland. It seems, however, as if they were punished more severely than white soldiers by the French authorities.⁴ Nevertheless, German newspaper accounts of brutal rapes and murders, mostly based on pure imagination, revelled in racial stereotypes, multiplied the number of victims by the hundreds and did not shy away from pornographic descriptions. Male anxieties and male sexual phantasies did not only manifest themselves in pseudo-factual pamphlets but in a number of novels and even a movie.⁵

The alleged rapes of fair-haired German maidens by French Colonial soldiers, who had come straight from the jungle to the cradle of German culture, figure disproportionately in the debate on

⁴ Lebzelter, 44-46.

⁵ For example Guido Kreuzer, *Die Schwarze Schmach. Roman des geschändeten Deutschlands* (1921); anon., *Ruhrpachen. Der Roman von Frankreichs Blutschuld* (1923); and *Die Schwarze Schmach*, published as an installment novel 1923 in the *Rheische Beobachter*. The movie "Die Schwarze Schmach," produced by a company in Munich, was not widely distributed, except in South America, since the Foreign Ministry feared a severe backlash to this extremely crude form of propaganda; cf. Gräber/Spindler, *Revolverrepublik am Rhein. Die Pfalz und ihre Separatisten*. I. (Landau: Pfälzische Verlagsanstalt, 1992), 74.

the French occupation. The German discourse of the time was actually very similar to the French propaganda against the *enfants du barbare*, children whose mothers had been raped by German soldiers in the early months of the war. One physician actually did compare Franco-German involuntary unions with the rape of white women by black men in America.⁶

The employment of Colonial troops as part of the French occupational forces had already been an issue during the peace negotiations in Versailles. Instructions of the German delegation specified, that "colored troops should not be made part of the army of occupation." Race subsequently became, in the words of Keith Nelson, "perhaps the most surprising and certainly the most treacherous weapon which France and Germany mobilized against each other."⁷

Occasional protests against the use of French Colonial troops had appeared in German newspapers since early 1919, but the propaganda campaigns really started in April of 1920 with the deployment of French Moroccan troops in Frankfurt, Darmstadt, Hanau and Homberg to enforce reparation payments. The campaigns reached their

⁶ On the *enfants du barbare* see Ruth Harris, "The 'Child of the Barbarian'. Rape, Racism and Nationalism in France during the First World War," *Past and Present* 141 (1993), 170-206.

⁷ Instructions cited in Keith L. Nelson, "The 'Black Horror on the Rhine'. Race as a Factor in Foreign Relations in Post World War I Diplomacy," *Journal of Modern History* 42 (1970), 609. Nelson's quote on 606.

height in 1921, paralleling the tug-of-war over reparations, slowed down significantly in 1922 and practically ended with the Ruhr-occupation, when France renounced the use of Colonial troops.

The French occupation in the Rhineland, initially 200 000 troops in November 1919, was reduced to 85 000 after the Versailles Treaty went into effect in January 1920. From the beginning, the racial make-up and the number of Colonial troops were matters of intense debate. The German Foreign Ministry as well as the German propaganda brochures estimated the numbers of the Colonial troops with 30 to 40 000, almost half of the entire occupational force. Allied observers counted between 14 000 and 25 000 Colonial troops, depending on the season, which matched the numbers given by the French and seems more accurate.⁸

⁸ Some historians like Reiner Pommerin and Keith Nelson have inaccurately relied on the estimates of Edgar Morel and the German authorities, cf. Reiner Pommerin, *'Sterilisierung der Rheinlandbastarde.' Das Schicksal einer farbigen deutschen Minderheit, 1918-1937*, (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1979), 12 and Nelson, 610-611. For allied observers cf. Lebzelter, 37. According to Robert C. Reinders, "Racialism on the Left. E.D. Morel and the 'Black Horror on the Rhine'," *International Review of Social History* 13 (1968), the number of Colonial troops in the Rhineland fluctuated between 5 000 and 20 000. Official French reports number 23 000 Colonial troops, the French counterpropaganda surprisingly more than double that number, cf. Maréchal, "La Campagne". According to the reports of the American General Allen, the Colonial troops numbered 25 000 on average between January of 1919 and June of 1920, when France withdrew the majority of the Senegalese troops.

From the start, the German propaganda campaign had its main ally in the British journalist Edgar Morel, who kicked off the international campaign with a series of articles on the "Horror on the Rhine" in the *Daily Herald*. In the initial article from on April 6, 1920, Morel depicted the ordeals the population of the Rhineland has to bear under the occupation of the "black savages," "primitive African barbarians," with "barely restrainable bestiality." He did, however, not sympathize as much with the Germans as he appealed to his working class readers, suggesting that the French government could also use Colonial troops against defenseless British colonies or during labor unrests in its own country. Morel, who had indeed pleaded the cause of the exploited African colonies during the preceding years, emphasized in this and later writings, that he was by no means a racist. According to Robert Reinders, his liberal credentials were "unimpeachable."⁹ Nevertheless, his arguments that constantly played on the "tremendous sexual instincts" of Africans were as anti-anti-imperialist as they were racist.

After being supplied with material from the German Foreign Ministry and a fact finding trip to Germany in summer of 1920, Morel published his pamphlet *The Horror on the Rhine*, which went through eight editions in less than a year

⁹ Reinders, 2.

and was translated into German, French, Dutch and Italian.¹⁰ Although the Allied Rhineland Commission prohibited its circulation in the occupied zone, copies were most likely distributed there. Morel found it quite natural that Colonial troops were bound to behave worse than native French troops, because they did not have their families with them and because polygamy was legal in Africa. To Morel the African was a child who was to be kept in its Eden. He suggested, that Britain would ultimately be drawn into war again, because France was sowing the "seeds of racial hatred and racial prejudice ... which is so disturbing a feature in the social conditions of the southern States of the American Union."¹¹ Morel projected that the African who has once shot a white man and raped a white woman will eventually also turn against the colonists in Africa. He then went on to describe "with the gloves off" the establishment of brothels in the occupied Rhineland as well as about eighty cases of rape and attempted rape, conceding that the French authorities have punished the rapist in quite a few cases. Morel's language perpetuates the image of the "primitive brute" and the pure German country girl, while on the whole maintaining the innocence of the "big stalwart men from warmer climes, ... living unnatural lives

¹⁰ Cf. Lebzelter, fn. 19.

¹¹ E.D. Morel, "The Horror on the Rhine," London 1920, 10.

of restraint, their fierce passions roaming hot within them."¹²

British left-wing circles reacted favorably to Morel's pamphlet, but the the Foreign Office thought them to be anti-French propaganda.¹³ Nevertheless, several British women and labor organisations passed resolutions against the deployment of French Colonial troops. Morel stressed from the beginning, that his protests were part of an international movement, and indeed, French socialists and Socialist women's organizations also attacked their government, emphasizing, however, class over race and rarely playing on sexual fears.¹⁴

In Germany, the propaganda campaigns were carried out by a number of organizations. The Heidelberg group (Heidelberger Vereinigung) with prominent members like Prince Max von Baden, Luji Brentano, and Marianne Weber sponsored a German edition of Morel's *Horror on the Rhine*. Other writings of Morel were also translated and widely published in the German press. He lectured in Germany on several occasions. The German National Association 'Save the Honour'

¹² op. cit., 12.

¹³ Cf. John Davis, American Embassy in London, to Bainbridge Colby, July 9, 1920. National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State (NA RG 59) 862 T.01/136.

¹⁴ Reinders, 12-13. A standard explanation for Morel's writings is that he was committed to the survival of the Weimar republic and feared that the French occupation policy would destroy it; Reinders, 27.

(Volksbund 'Rettet die Ehre') founded by the provost Hartwich in Bremen, played a key role in the international campaign. After consultation with the Foreign Ministry, this organization sent a petition signed by 66 Dutch, Swedish, Austrian and German women's organizations, including the prominent Association of German Women's Clubs (Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine), to the League of Nations in October 1920. In the American edition, published in Philadelphia in the same year, the undersigned claimed that they did not only protest on behalf of Germany, but on behalf of "the entire white race" and even "with regard to the colored people. For all white people work in their missions since tens of years to educate the colored people to conquer their low instincts and to lift them up to higher culture."¹⁵ The German National Association distributed this appeal and other pamphlets in the United States, where they targeted prominent women reformers and even the NAACP!¹⁶

The "German National Emergency Society against the Black Horror (Deutscher Notbund gegen die Schwarze Schmach) in Munich was also secretly supported by the Foreign Ministry, which

¹⁵ Memorandum of the "Organization against the Cruelties of the Coloured French Troops of the Army of Occupation of Germany," Philadelphia [1920], Jane Addams Papers (JAP) MF 32.

¹⁶ Assistant secretary Walter White realized its potential in its appeal to American race prejudices. Walter White to M. Longuet, June 22, 1920, and White to Bruno Lasker, July 22, 1920, both NAACP Archives, Library of Congress, Group I, Box 377, "Senegalese Soldiers."

aided the distribution of their publications abroad. The society published pamphlets on a regular basis as late as June 1922.¹⁷ They featured alleged outcries over the occupation by Colonial troops from all five continents and claimed branches in Argentine and Uruguay.¹⁸ Another organization that specifically published propaganda material for foreign countries was the decidedly antisemitic German Fichte Association (Deutscher Fichte-Bund) in Hamburg. Their publications for North America especially applauded the lynching of alleged rapists, according to the authors a tradition of the "Wild-West."¹⁹ The Pfalzzentrale in Mannheim, originally founded to stifle separatist movements in the occupied territories, for a while functioned as the major coordination agency for the propaganda campaigns against the "Black Horror". It was dissolved in the spring of 1921, but its head, August Eberlein, continued his propaganda efforts.²⁰

¹⁷ Lebzelter, 54. "Die Schmach am Rhein. Monatsschrift des Deutschen Notbundes gegen die Schwarze Schmach e.V.," Vol. I and II. The publications of this organization were by no means short-lived, as Pommerin assumes. There were at least 16 editions of the pamphlet between 1920 and 1921, cf. JAP MF 32. Report on a mass meeting of the society on June 14, 1922 in American Vice Consul in Munich to Secretary of State, June 19, 1922, NA RG 59 862 T.01/427.

¹⁸ Bruno Stehler, "Die farbigen Fronvögte am Rhein. Eine Tragödie." n.d., JAP MF 32.

¹⁹ "In the Wild-West when a coloured man outrages a white woman, he is lynched without much ado." "Notruf Nr. 4 an die Nordamerikaner. Gegen die Schwarze Schmach." Fichte Gesellschaft, Hamburg, n.d. JAP MF 32.

²⁰ Cf. Gräber/Schindler, chapter 6.

Although publications like Morel's, that probably did contain some elements of truth, can be distinguished from the pamphlets that outdid each other in pornographic descriptions and the most blatant racial stereotypes, the structure of the propaganda material was quite similar overall. Even considering its hateful character and strong tendency to exaggerate, the descriptions did not come close to the accounts of German atrocities in France in World War I, in Russia in World War II, the rapes by Russian soldiers after World War II or the sexual assaults committed in Bosnia. Almost without exception, the writings focused on rapes and attempted rapes committed by black soldiers and often pretend to reproduce police records. Rape victims or witnesses were identified by their initials to retain a minimal amount of authenticity. The propaganda occasionally questioned the morality of German women, but more often emphasized the sexual respectability of the victims. Reports on brothels that were set up by the French army are a central feature of much of the propaganda and were probably not completely unwarranted. Allegations that German women were forcibly recruited as prostitutes, however, were purely invented. The authors' warnings about venereal diseases and the "contaminating seeds" of the Africans were coupled with the fear of a takeover of the Colonies and eventually of Europe. Although the propaganda

produced for the United States alluded to the American "tradition" of lynching, the propaganda distributed in Germany did not suggest this in any case, but rather that the "savages" be sent back to the "jungle". In a later phase, the German propaganda started to recognize the damaging potential of detailed descriptions of rapes or attempted rapes, and concentrated on quotes from foreign newspapers to validate their claims.²¹ Overall, national and international propaganda mainly reflected male concerns like the invasion of their country and the seizure of "their" women and less concerns of the victim like their status in society and fears of an unwanted pregnancy.

The French counterpropaganda, supported by separatist movements and the Independent Socialist Press in Germany, tried to prove that the majority of alleged rape cases in the German propaganda material were fabricated, that soldiers who had in fact committed those crimes were drastically punished, and pointed to the many voluntary unions between German women and French soldiers.²²

Surprisingly, women did not play a central role in the German propaganda efforts. With a few exceptions, written

²¹ Eberleins "Schwarze am Rhein" is a good example, especially p. 123.

²² G. Maréchal, "La campagne" Eberlein countered with "Schwarze am Rhein. Ein Weltproblem. Französische-Deutsche Schrift und Gegenschrift," Davos 1921 that came out at a time when the German campaigns had been totally discredited abroad.

and oral agitation was carried out by men. One of the women who did achieve some prominence in this campaign was Margarethe Gärtner. She had joined the department for occupied territories in 1919, which was originally a department in the Reichszentrale für Heimatdienst and in 1920 became an independent agency. It published its own periodical, the "Rhenish Observer" ("Rheinischer Beobachter"). Gärtner's work was to counteract the cultural activities of the French in the occupied territories, but she emphasized in her memoirs that from the beginning she saw her main task in informing the world about the alleged atrocities of the Colonial troops. With the explicit approval of the Ministry of the Interior, Gärtner founded the Rhenish Women's League, "neither a Women's Club, nor an umbrella organisation of existing clubs, but a mouthpiece for a certain purpose and a limited time."²³ According to her memoirs, Gärtner's work had the support of the large mainstream women's organisations. She traveled to the Rhineland to mobilize large and small, religious and secular, academic, professional and housewives' organizations alike. "This amazing unity of the women's organizations did not last very long," commented Gärtner later, "but long enough for our purposes."²⁴

The League constituted by no means a grass-roots organisation, its members

rather endorsed more or less Gärtner's writings. She, in turn, reported on a regular basis to the Ministry of the Interior. A Berlin news agency apparently supplied articles in the name of the Rhenish Women's League for newspapers around the country.²⁵ Although a certain Felicitas Buchner acted as president, it was under Gärtner's auspices that the League collected and published information about rapes by French soldiers and brothels for the French army in the occupied territories. The brochure came out in early summer and went through four editions by August. It can certainly be considered the most successful of all the German propaganda publications, was translated into five languages and distributed in Europe, North- and South America with the covert help of the Foreign Ministry. According to Reiner Pommerin, even the Pope received a copy and allegedly asked the French government to stop the deployment of Colored troops.²⁶ A US-edition, "Colored Frenchmen on the Rhine. An Appeal of White Women to American Womanhood" was published in Chicago in 1921.²⁷ Keith Nelson and other historians have established beyond doubt that there was official subvention for these and other pamphlets.²⁸ Like Morel's *Horror on the Rhine* that was

²⁵ Cf. Karen Bramson, "La légende des troupes noires," *Le Matin*, August 2, 1920.

²⁶ Pommerin, 19.

²⁷ "Colored Frenchmen on the Rhine. An Appeal of White Women to American Womanhood" Chicago [1921].

²⁸ Cf. Nelson, fn. 60; Pommerin, 17, fn. 28.

²³ Gärtner, 62, my translation.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 64, my translation.

published at the same time, this brochure contained detailed accounts of every alleged rape and attempted rape and every brothel supposedly established for the French army. The authors concede, however, that the most of the rapists had been arrested by the French authorities and also cite examples of rapes by white soldiers.

The League made arrangements for sympathetic observers from England and Scandinavia to investigate conditions, and made police reports accessible to Morel and other less notorious journalists. Gärtner supplied women members of the Reichstag with propaganda material and pre-fabricated lectures that were held before women's clubs around the country. For no apparent reason, Gärtner quit her work for the League in January 1922 and it dissolved quietly under her successor.²⁹

Another prominent woman in the German propaganda campaign was Ray Beveridge. She gave a large number of lectures on the "Black Horror" and accompanied August Eberlein on his speaking tours in the spring and summer of 1921. Beveridge had apparently worked for the German embassy in Washington, referred to the German emperor as "my kaiser" and had organized public protest meetings against the peace treaty. She passed herself off as an American, although some reports have her holding a German

passport.³⁰ She also pretended to be deeply involved in the Quaker efforts to feed German children, which was a constant source of embarrassment to the Quaker mission in Berlin. On July 14 (!) 1920 she spoke at a protest meeting, characteristically organized by the League of Rhenish women at the University of Berlin, where she severely attacked Wilson and French politics and openly called for lynchings of the Colonial soldiers. Other speakers at that meeting suggested that the French policy had also "increased the immoral greed of the American negro for the American white woman." The tone of the meeting was so violently anti-American, that the American Commissioner in Berlin reported it to the State Department. Even Reichstag member Koch distanced himself from her, arguing that "the facts which we have to advance are so weighty and so portentous that no exaggeration is needed."³¹

Beveridge certainly was the most notorious woman in the entire campaign. Because she passed herself off as the voice of American womanhood, she nurtured the illusion that American women, known in Germany for their

³⁰ There were conflicting reports in a letter by A. Magruder, American Charge D'Affaires in Helsingfors, to Charles Hughes, December 7, 1921, NA RG 59 862 T.01/ who believes she was German. The American consul in Berlin thought she was American, cf. "Colored Troops in the French Army." 66th Congress, 3rd Session, Document No. 397. Washington, GPO, February 15, 1921, 6.

³¹ Cf. Ellis Dresel to Bainbridge Colby, July 16, 1920, NA RG 59 826 T.01/154; Cf. *Berliner Lokalanzeiger* July 22, 1920.

²⁹ Gärtner, p. 66 and 78.

political activism, would lend an ear to the German grievances and act on behalf of the German women. Beveridge made no secret of her strong disdain for African-Americans, reproducing the all too common stereotypes of "the primitive instincts," "the less mental power but all the more sexual desire of the black man." If Beveridge was to be believed, women in the South were only safe because of the constant threat of lynching, but even that did not always suffice for the black man to "govern his animal nature." On more than one occasion, Beveridge openly appealed to the men in her audience to take the law into their own hands and resort to mob violence, even if it meant risking their lives: "German men! ... Your weapons have been taken from you, but there is always a rope and a tree! Take up the natural weapons used by our men of the South: lynch! ... And even if you have to die as martyrs, then you die as heroes - worthy of Germany."³² In her speeches Beveridge appealed as much to a German as to an American audience, since some of them were translated and distributed in the United States. Beveridge certainly employed some of the strongest and most hateful phrases used in the entire campaign, which for the most part depicted the African

soldier less as the sexual brute and more as the primitive native who quite naturally could not control his instincts. Surprisingly enough, Beveridge, who saw herself as a crusader for the purity of German womanhood, hardly mentions her three years of campaigning against the "Horror on the Rhine" in her memoirs.³³

One of the few German women associations other than the Rhenish Women's League that made an international appeal was the Association of the Women's Societies of the Protestant Churches. Interestingly enough, only a minority of its 14 000 members actually living in the Rhineland. It demanded the withdrawal of the Colonial troops, addressing, among others, the American State Department. Supposedly voicing the demand of "the million of German women [who are] ... members of this ... union" the Association asked American officials to bring the issue to the attention of the French and the League of Nations.³⁴

Women politicians of the Weimar republic were fairly prominent in speaking on the "Black Horror." In the Reichstag, Chancellor Müller briefly touched on the issue of the Colonial

³² Excerpts are from a speech in Hamburg, probably in the summer of 1921. "Americans listen to your country woman Miss Beveridge," Flyer, JAP MF 32. Another occasion that has been documented was Beveridge's speech in the Löwenbraukeller in Munich on February 23, 1921, cf. Gräber/Schindler, 84.

³³ Ray Beveridge, *Mein Leben für Euch*. (Berlin: 1938).

³⁴ Cf. Ellis Dresel to Bainbridge Colby, July 5, 1920, citing a report from the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 24, 1920, NA RG 59 862 T.01/144, p 7. Alexandra von Kendall for the Vereinigung Evangelischer Frauenverbände to Department of State, June 4, 1920, NA RG 59 862 T.01/126.

troops in his protest against the occupation of the Rhineland on April 12. The issue was raised again on April 23 by an interpellation of members of the DNVP, among them Käthe Schirmacher, a well known figure in the international women's movement.³⁵ SPD party members Marie Ansorge and Klara Bohm-Schuch successfully appealed to the party committee [Parteiausschuß] to pass a resolution against the use of French Colonial troops.³⁶ On May 11, Frau Amman from the Bavarian People's Party appealed to the Bavarian Parliament to induce the German government "in the name of all women" to file a complaint with the French. Amman referred explicitly to lynchings in the United States and was wholeheartedly supported by the Bavarian government which in turn emphasized the importance of foreign propaganda.³⁷ On May 20, an interpellation of the Social Democratic Party, signed by all parties with the exception of the Independent Socialists, was debated in the Reichstag. Social-democratic Reichstag member Frau Röhl stressed the importance of enlisting other countries and especially their women in

the campaign. She further emphasized that the parliament did not condemn the race of the troops, but rather the French occupation as such. The ensuing debate made quite clear, that protest against the Colonial troops did not develop along gender but rather along party lines. Only Luise Zietz of the Independent Socialists did not subscribe to the apparent consensus in the Reichstag. She condemned the alleged atrocities, which to her they were the result of "brutalization through militarism." Zietz caused a substantial uproar in the house when she uncovered the double standard of the entire debate, comparing the alleged atrocities of the French troops to the crimes of German soldiers in Belgium, France, China and the German colonies.

The anti-French propaganda in Germany failed to involve women on a broad scale, but female voices that tried to set the record straight were not numerous, either. They were largely confined to the pacifist and suffragist wing of the Bourgeois Women's Movement and the Independent Socialists. One of the main goals of the German branch of the WILPF, for example, was a reform of the school curriculum that would include pacifist teachings, some of them specifically dealing with occupational armies.³⁸ Articles that criticized the propaganda campaigns would generally only appear

³⁵ On Schirmacher's career from an internationally minded liberal to a member of the DNVP cf. Anke Walzer, *Käthe Schirmacher. Eine deutsche Frauenrechtlerin auf dem Wege vom Liberalismus zum konservativen Nationalismus*, Frauen in Geschichte und Gesellschaft, (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1991).

³⁶ Cf. Lebzelter, 38-39.

³⁷ Cf. Pommerin, 13, fn. 19.

³⁸ Cf. Memorandum of the German branch of the WILPF, folder "WILPF," JAP MF 44.

in local papers, the newspapers of the Communists and Independent Socialists and small feminist periodicals like "Woman and State" ("Die Frau im Staat"). Pacifist Lilly Jannasch, for example, denounced the propaganda campaign as an obstruction of the League of Nations and reminded her readers of the atrocities German soldiers had committed in France in World War I. She duely remarked that none of the big German women's organizations had ever spoken out or expressed regrets about the incidents at Lille, where hundereds of French women had allegedly been deported and sexually assaulted by German soldiers.³⁹

The reaction of women's organizations in other countries seemed promising at first. Already Morel's articles in the *Daily Herald* had called for a united female action against the alleged atrocities, and German politicians echoed him again and again. Shortly after his first publications, the Conference of Labour Women in Britain and the British Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom passed resolutions against the deployment of Colonial troops in the Rhineland. The proceedings of the latter, that appealed to the League of Nations to prohibit the use of any colonial troops outside of their own country, were published and distributed in Great

³⁹ Lilly Jannasch, "Schwarze Schmach und Weiße Schande," *Die Frau im Staat* 2, no. 4 (1921).

Britian.⁴⁰ According to Morel, 59 Swedish women's organisation and 50 000 individuals signed a petition protesting the use of French Colonial troops and published it as a pamphlet: *Coloured Frenchmen on the Rhine*. Swedish commissions traveled to the Rhineland.⁴¹ Norwegian, Italian and French women also sent petitions to the League of nations, as well as the Associaion of Dutch Women for Social Welfare. Although the British WILPF had endorsed Morel's campaign at first, it became more critical of its racist character and quickly adopted the positon that occupation of any kind bore a potential danger for women and eventually called for an end of the French occupation.⁴²

In the United States, the issue stirred only minor interest until the summer of 1920, although Morel was asked to lecture a few times. Some American periodicals like Oswald Garrison Villard's *Nation* assigned reporters to

⁴⁰ WILPF, British Section, *Coloured Troops in Europe*, London, 1920. The mass meetings are also mentioned in an article in *Viereck's* [May 1920] 116, "France's Black Reign of Terror in Occupied Germany. Will Uncle Sam look on Indifferently?" Copy in JAP MF 32.

⁴¹ Cf. "The Evidence Concerning the Horror on the Rhine. A Memorandum Prepared for the Members of the U.S. Congress by the campaign Against the Horror on the Rhine." JAP MF 32, 8. The evidence in the memorandum is heavily based on Morel's pamphlet. Morel's statements seem credible here. Swedish doctors also appealed to their American colleagues, cf. Anton Carlson, University of Chicago, to JA, January 31, 1921, JAP MF 13.

⁴² Resolutions of the Conference on the Consequences of an Army of Occupation held by the British WILPF on June 8, 1921 cf. Reinders, 19.

investigate the situation in the Rhineland who as a rule concluded that there were fewer assaults than charged, that not all of them had been committed by African soldiers and that the French military investigated and punished all offenses.⁴³ Similarly, the *New Republic* editorialized less against the supposed atrocities and more against the enlistment of Colonial troops in general.⁴⁴ American liberals generally proved to be too skeptical to believe the German propaganda, except for publications on the far left like the *Masses*.

Within the American Women's Movement, the German propaganda efforts centered on settlement-founder and pacifist Jane Addams. Her connections to the German women's movement dated back to the turn of the century, and her writings as well as her sympathy towards the defeated Germany were well known in that country. In the United States, however, she had been branded as a political radical during and after the war, and the considerable influence that she had professed during the Roosevelt and Taft administrations had vanished. Certainly, her influence was completely overestimated by the German propagandists. During 1920 and 1921, Addams received a number of pamphlets from the Fichte-Association, the German Emergency Union, the writings of Morel and several German-

American organizations "against the Black Horror," as well as an appeal by the Catholic Women's Association of Germany, and an American edition of the pamphlet of the Rhenish Women's League, distributed by the German Emergency Union.⁴⁵ Strangely enough, none of this material actually originated in the Rhineland.

An American member of the WILPF, that Addams had co-founded the year before, brought the matter to her attention in the spring of 1920, but Addams was not really concerned until the end of that year.⁴⁶ In November, she encouraged the publication of an article on the debate in the *Crisis*.⁴⁷ She was probably well informed about the efforts of the Scandinavian and Dutch women, and as president of the WILPF certainly about the resolutions of the British branch.⁴⁸ The German-American "New York Committee against the Horror on the Rhine" asked her, the "best known representative of American womanhood" to speak at a mass meeting in Madison Square Garden in February 1921, but

⁴⁵ JAP, MF 32.

⁴⁶ Agnes Flehinghaus to JA, March 12, 1920, JAP MF 12. See also anonymous to JA, September 29, 1920, with a report on Wiesbaden, JAP MF 13. It cannot be fully determined how much mail Addams received on the subject, since she routinely let several Hull House residents answer a good part of her daily bulk of letters.

⁴⁷ JA an W.E.B. Du Bois, November 20, 1920, JAP MF 13.

⁴⁸ For resolution of Swedish doctors see Anton Carlson, University of Chicago, to JA, January 31, 1921, JAP MF 13.

⁴³ "The Black Troops on the Rhine," *The Nation* 12 (March 9, 1921), 365-366.

⁴⁴ For example in "African Troops on the Rhine," *The New Republic*, March 9, 1921.

Addams declined, officially for health reasons.⁴⁹

The question of whether the accusations about the Colonial soldiers reflected the actual circumstances in the occupied territories or simply racial prejudice temporarily caused a heated debate within the American branch of the WILPF. An appeal of Addams and the chairwoman of the American branch to the Secretary of State illuminates the position of this group. Addams and Mabel Kittredge pointed out to Hughes that "German women are eargerly joining our Women's International League in great numbers" and that the occupation by the Colonial troops were the main reason while Germany did not fulfill its reparation obligations. The two women quoted extensively from the appeal of the German, Austrian, Dutch and Swedish organizations to the League of Nations. In a new twist on the topic, Addams and Kittredge argued that "German men will not disarm while the agonized cry of German women goes thus unheeded." They were careful not to condemn blacks as a race, but rather the French Colonial troops specifically, "because they are Negroes hardly emerged from barbarism." The appeal asked for an "official protest" of their government and its insistences on "immediate withdrawal." Addams and Kittredge emphasized that they were not only speaking for the American branch

of the WILPF, but also for the 26 member nations of the international organization and particularly the "many fine colored women of our own nation."⁵⁰

Apparently, they had failed to consult one of the most prominent of those "fine colored women," Mary Church Terrell, notably a charter member of both the NAACP and the WILPF. The Executive Board of the American branch of the WILPF, of which Terrell was a member, was convinced that an appeal for the withdrawal of the Colonial troops would contribute to peace in Europe. "Sureley this is our problem," wrote one of its members to Addams, "if anything ever was since women are so intimately concerned with it." For Terrell, the campaign against the "Black Horror" was clearly inspired by racial prejudice, while the majority of the board members argued that the WILPF would also show "sympathy" when the "welfare [of Colonial women] is jeopardized by white men."⁵¹ She refused to sign the petition that was to follow the letter to Hughes, and quickly succeeded in convincing Addams that the German claims were completely exaggerated. In a letter to Addams, Terrell expressed her sympathies to the German women but made clear that German and American soldiers were guilty of the same crimes.

⁴⁹ Edmund von Mach to Ja, Febraury 14, 1921, JAP MF 13.

⁵⁰ JA and Mabel Kittredge to Charles Hughes, March 5, 1921, JAP MF 13.

⁵¹ Harriet Connor Brown to JA, March 5 and 15, 1921, JAP MF 13.

She shrewdly pointed out that "the black soldiers are committing no more assaults ... than that any race of soldiers would probably commit upon women in occupied territory," and thereby firmly established that "the propaganda against the black troops in this country is simply another violent and plausible appeal to race prejudice."

Terrell also reported that several liberal German feminists had told Carrie Chapman Catt, a veteran of the American woman suffrage movement and president of the International Woman Suffrage Association, that there was no substantial movement in Germany for the removal of the Colored troops and that most of the charges had been proven untrue after investigation.⁵² Undoubtedly, the last argument was especially convincing for Addams, since liberal German feminists had constituted her main contacts with the German women's movement.

The appeal to Hughes remained the only instance where American feminists employed openly racist arguments. After Terrell's intervention, the American branch of the WILPF followed the policy of the international headquarters in Geneva, that on the whole avoided discussing alleged rapes by black soldiers. Already in December of 1920, the WILPF had petitioned the League of Nations to renunciate "the right to

conscript inhabitants of colonial or mandatory territories." A reservoir of "docile and cheap soldiery" followed by an increased competition for colonial territories would, according to the League, increase the likelihood of wars. At their third international Congress in Vienna in the summer of 1921, the WILPF passed a resolution against the "Military Use of Native Populations of Colonies," similar to the aforementioned petition to the League of Nations, that made clear that the women purposely avoided the rape issue: "This was from no lack of sympathy with those who are suffering from this aftermath of war, but because these questions are of a quite different order and complicate the issue."⁵³

In an article in the *Woman Citizen*, the weekly of the League of Woman Voters, Catt supported Terrell's claims publicly. She seemed to be convinced, that the propaganda originated in the United States: "If it is German propaganda, as some claim, it surely is of a definite German-American variety."⁵⁴

Indeed, if any one group exerted pressure worth mentioning it was the

⁵² Mary Church Terrell to JA, March 18, 1921, an JA to Mary Church Terrell, March 29, 1921, JAP MF 13.

⁵³ Cf. letter of the WILPF to the Permanent Advisory Commission for Military, Naval and Air Questions, League of Nations, December 14, 1920, JAP MF 46 and Emily Greene Balch to Miss Ovington, March 16, 1921, NAACP Papers, G I, B 377, "Senegalese Soldiers." Report of the Third International Congress of Women, Vienna, 1921, p. 76-78, JAP MF 43
⁵⁴ Carrie Chapman Catt, "The Truth about the Black Troops on the Rhine," *The Woman Citizen* (March 5, 1921), 1038.

German-Americans. Although an American liaison officer had already warned the French in June 1919 that a German propaganda effort against the use of Colonial troops would be especially targeted towards the southern United States, the State Department was not overly concerned with the issue until the summer of 1920.⁵⁵ By then, letters of German-American and church organizations had started to pour into the White House, the offices of Congressmen and the Department itself. Not surprisingly, the most outraged and outrageous letters were received by Congressmen from states with a large German population.⁵⁶ From that time on, Secretary of State Colby requested and received a number of reports on the conduct of the French troops in the Rhineland from the embassies in Paris and London, the American commissioner in Berlin and General Henry Allen at the Interallied Rhineland High Commission.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Cf. Nelson, 610.

⁵⁶ An early example is Ellen Starbeck to Woodrow Wilson, May 27, 1920, NA RG 59 862 T.01/167. A typical example for a grossly racist letter was Abner Strobel to Senator Morris Sheppard, July 4 and July 17; Sheppard then inquired with the Department of State about the truth of the allegations, cf. Sheppard to Bainbridge Colby, August 23, 1920 and Colby to Sheppard, September 8, 1920, NA RG 59 862 T.01/159. See also Edward Voigt (Rep/WI) to Bainbridge Colby, September 2, 1920, NA RG 59 862 T.01/162 and October 15, NA RG 862 T.01/189. Sen. Arthur Capper, Kansas, to State Dept., November 11, 1920, with a petition of his constituents bearing about 150 names, NA RG 59 862 T.01/200.

⁵⁷ Cf. e.g. W. Phillip to Lansing, May 26, 1920, NA RG 59 862 T.01/117. Wilson instructed Lansing to secure the opinion of American

Allen conducted a fairly thorough investigation of alleged sexual assaults by Colonial troops. He reported that with an average of 25 000 Colonial troops, "66 cases of alleged rape, attempted rape, sodomy or attempted sodomy" had been brought to the attention of the French authorities between January of 1919 and June of 1920. Although Allen thought that the sentences were milder than in an English or American court, he dutifully reported that 28 soldiers had been convicted of the crimes and punished, with penalties ranging from thirty days in prison to ten days of hard labor. 11 soldiers had been acquitted and 23 cases were still pending. These recurring figures clearly show that the French authorities acted when the reports were credible and that a large part of the alleged German "documentaries" were fabricated. Allen cited examples of reports from the German press which he found to be grossly exaggerated and unsubstantiated. He established beyond doubt that the propaganda campaigns originated in Berlin and were "an adroit political move which would tend to sow antipathy against France ... especially in America where the Negro question is always capable of arousing feeling." Allen also reported that the worsening economic conditions furthered prostitution and commented on marriages between German women and

ambassador Wallace in Paris, who reported back that agitation was being carried on with a particular eye to the American reaction, cf. Nelson, 617.

French Colonial soldiers, implying that the latter were somewhat socially acceptable. "[T]he color line is not regarded here by the French or the Germans as we regard it in America: to keep the white race pure."⁵⁸ The American Commissioner in Berlin, Ellis Dresel, transmitted several memoranda on the German protests and on mass meetings of Americans in Germany. Dresel also submitted a memorandum of the German Foreign Ministry that contained detailed descriptions of 12 cases of rape, 25 cases of attempted rape and 4 cases in which boys were raped by Colonial soldiers, including the date, location and name of the victims.⁵⁹

The American Ambassador in Paris spoke informally with the French Premier and warned him about the effect the propaganda might have in America. Millerand, who had been quite aware of the extent of the international propaganda campaign, predictably remained uncommitted.⁶⁰ By the middle of the summer, the State Department firmly had established the policy to denounce all attacks on the behaviour of

the French troops as Anti-French propaganda.⁶¹

The campaign in the United States, however, did not cease, but reached new heights during the election campaign of 1920. With the prospect of a new administration the pressure on elected officials continued, and State Allen's and Dresel' reports were published as a Senate Document.⁶² However, with the exception of a few ethnic and religious women's organizations, American women did not voice a collective protest against the alleged sexual assaults on their German sisters.

The pressure on elected officials originated chiefly from their German-American constituencies, although there were notable exceptions, like the open letter of the Western Orthodox Church (American Catholic) to the French ambassador in Washington, that was also sent to the foreign affairs and foreign relations committees, individual members of Congress and veteran organisations. Its authors emphasized that "it would be tragic for Americans who have served in the late war to realize that their contribution to the success of the Allied victory should result in turning loose of negroes upon helpless white women."⁶³ Congressmen

⁵⁸ General Allen to Bainbridge Colby, July 2, 1920, NA RG 59 862 T.01/147. The numbers that Ambassador Wallace transmitted in February of 1921 were similar. Wallace to Colby, February 3, 1921, NA RG 59 862 T.01/231.

⁵⁹ Ellis Dresel to Bainbridge Colby, July 5, 1920, NA RG 59 862 T.01/144; July 16, 1920, NA RG 59 862 T.01/141, July 16, NA RG 59 862 T.01/153 and 154;

⁶⁰ Senate Document No. 397, 9

⁶¹ Cf. Bainbridge Colby to Berlin Mission, June 19, 1920, NA RG 59 862 T.01/124.

⁶² "Colored Troops in the French Army." 66th Congress, 3rd Session, Document No. 397. Washington, GPO, February 15, 1921.

⁶³ Open letter of the Western Orthodox Church (American Catholic) to the French Ambassador in Washington, April 14, 1920. JAP, MF 32.

and the State Department received petitions from immigrant organizations like the "Sons of Hermann," a "Union of American Citizens for Protecting the Women and Girls in Germany," the St. Paul "Catholic Order of Foresters" and several church organizations.⁶⁴ Propaganda material was inserted in philatelist reviews and advertisements of a Dresden hardware company.⁶⁵ Only in May of 1922 did the *National Council of Catholic Women* appeal to the State Department by forwarding a protest note of the League of Catholic Women in Bohemia that assigned a special responsibility to America because of its own race relations.⁶⁶ Protests of women's clubs outside of ethnically homogenous areas were weak.

The claims of German-Americans had some support in the state legislature. Representative Fred Britten from Illinois even introduced a House joint resolution that demanded the immediate withdrawal of the French Colonial

troops.⁶⁷ Only very rarely would a German-American unmask the accusations as German propaganda.⁶⁸

By the beginning of 1921, propaganda had become so widespread in the United States that the French ambassador in Washington saw it fit to inform the State Department and set the facts straight one more time.⁶⁹

American protest campaigns was chiefly organized by German-American and Irish-American organizations. The Steuben Society asked the Department of State to forward a protest to Marshall Foch and the French Premier, a request that the Department declined.⁷⁰ The Steuben-Society and the "New York Committee on the 'Horror on the Rhine'" jointly published a "Catechism" on the "Horror on the Rhine," which strongly reflected Morel's pamphlet and asked its readers to write to their Congressmen. The campaign of the "New York Committee" reached its height with a mass meeting in Madison Square Garden on February 28, 1921 that attracted over 15 000 people. Although the addresses at the meeting reflected its blatantly racist

⁶⁴ NA RG 59 862 T.01/168 and 173. "Foresters" see "Colby Sees Berlin Behind Rhine Tales," *New York Times*, February 9, 1921. Petitions of National Catholic Central Society Texas Section and Catholic Women's Union, Texas Section in Representative Buchanan to State Dept., 16.10.1920, NA RG 59 862 T.01/192. Protest of St. Paul Evangelical Brotherhood against the "Black Horror," February 1922, and response of Hughes to Representative King, Minnesota, NA RG 59 862 T.01/361.

⁶⁵ G. Heymer Company to Anderson Manufacturing, Des Moines, and Birch and Son Construction Company, South Fargo, in August and September 1922, NA RG 59 862 T.01/503.

⁶⁶ National Council of Catholic Women to Charles Hughes, May 10, 1922, NA RG 59 862 T.01/402.

⁶⁷ House joint resolution No. 433, 66th Congress.

⁶⁸ So far I have found only one example - a letter of Robert Sachs, former Secretary of the thoroughly pro-German "American Truth Society," to the French Commissioner in Mainz, quoted in F.M. Dearing, Asst. Sec. State, to Senator Spencer, January 24, 1922, NA RG 59 862 T.01/349 A. Cf. "Colby Says Charges are Propaganda," *New York Times*, February 13, 1921.

⁶⁹ Jusserand to Norman Davis, February 5, 1921, NA RG 59 862 T.01/233.

⁷⁰ State Dept. to Steuben Society, December 1921, NA RG 59 862 T.01/327.

and Anti-Wilson character, there is surprisingly little appeal to race and gender solidarity. Not one of the male speakers referred to the rape of white women by black men. The one female speaker, California (!) suffragist Sara Bard Field, spoke only very vaguely of the "menace [to] the purity and race integrity of Germany" and the "blot against civilization." The meeting resolved to petition Congress to demand immediate withdrawal of the "uncivilized French colored troops" and pass the Britten resolution.⁷¹ Excerpts of the speeches were published by the Pfalzzentrale in Germany.⁷² The "New York Committee" also prepared a Memorandum for the Members of Congress, that reported the birth of hundreds of children from forced or voluntary union between German women and Colonial soldiers and suggested that the alleged behavior of the French troops was "a marvelous encouragement [for] the children of long benighted races. ... The question of the Horror on the Rhine is an American question."⁷³ The American Legion and other veteran organizations organized a protest meeting against the "New York

⁷¹ "Addresses Delivered at the Horror at the Rhine Mass Meeting in Madison Square garden, New York City," 28.2.1921, p. 26-27 and 44. JAP, MF 32.

⁷² "Amerika und Deutschland - Wie aufrechte Amerikaner über den Waffenstillstand, den Friedensvertrag, den Schrecken am Rheine denken und sprechen." Mannheim/Heidelberg 1921.

⁷³ "The Evidence Concerning the Horror on the Rhine," 9.

Committee" three weeks later.⁷⁴ Parts of the immigrant press reported regularly on on alleged atrocities of the French Colonial troops, like *Viereck's Monthly*. The New York *Staatszeitung* reprinted some of Morel's material.⁷⁵

There was a final upsurge of German propanda in the summer of 1922, especially in the Midwest. Senator Hitchcock from Nebraska even publicly debated Clemenceau, when the French ex-premier visited the United States.⁷⁶ By the end of 1922, the propaganda campaigns had almost ceased completely in Germany. At least according to one Congressman from Connecticut, they had so seriously started to affect the image of France in the United States that it seemed to be in the national interest to bring the matter up with France again.⁷⁷ In America and Europe, the propaganda effort had lessened because the Ruhr became the dominating topic and because overall it had proven to be more harm- than helpful.⁷⁸

The strategy that Germans thought would work particularly well with Americans - alluding to the powerful image of the "savage rapist" that was supposedly so well known in America-

⁷⁴ The "New York Committee on the Horror on the Rhine" also published their addresses. "The American Legion's Answer to the Horror on the Rhine Mass Meeting in Madison Square Garden, New York City, 18.3.1921." JAP, MF 32.

⁷⁵ E.g. "Schwarzengreuel im besetzten Gebiet," *New Yorker Staatszeitung*, May 23, 1920.

⁷⁶ For Hitchcock cf. Nelson, 623; for German propaganda in the Midwest cf. L.B.

⁷⁷ John Tilson to Charles Hughes, Decmeber 7, 1922, NA RG 59 862 T.01/480.

⁷⁸ Lebzelter, 56.

had failed. Likewise, their appeal to gender solidarity proved unsuccessful, because a part of the woman's movement had at that time already been active in the anti-lynching movement and because German members of the International Women's movement - all of them pacifists - spoke out against the propaganda. Even a more active involvement of the mainstream German women's movement probably would not have resulted in an organized protest of American women. With the exception of avowed pacifists like Lida Gustava Heymann or Anita Augspurg, the Bourgeois German women's movement had cut its ties from the international movement in 1914 and would only rebuild them hesitantly in the 1920s. In addition, many of their pre-war allies had been discredited during the Red Scare that followed the war on the other side of the Atlantic. German-Americans, proved to be the most effective pressure group to Congress, but it was clear that they too were still discredited after the war. Already in May of 1921 did the *New York Times* remark that the German strategy had completely backfired.⁷⁹

France renounced the use of Colonial troops when the occupation of the Ruhr began in 1922, probably because they felt that they were giving the Germans a propaganda weapon that after all had resulted in some criticism of

French occupation policy.⁸⁰ Lloyd George had made it quite clear in the secret proceedings in Spa, that the British would only support the French occupation of the Ruhr if no black troops were to be deployed. "It was no use irritating the Germans unnecessary."⁸¹ The French government withdrew Senegalese troops during the Spa conference in July and Malagasian troops in November 1920.⁸² There was another interpellation in the Reichstag in October of 1921 and several published memoranda of the Ministry for the Occupied Territories in 1923 and 1925. Accusations of rapes by Moroccan soldiers returned only briefly in January of 1925, when the Allies refused to evacuate the Northern zone of the occupied territory.⁸³ The French Government significantly reduced the number of Colonial troops in the Rhineland after the Locarno treaties. Only 2 000 Colonial troops remained in May of 1927, 1 000 in 1929.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ "Germans Retract Rhine Horror Charges, Finding That They Are Keeping Tourists Away," *NYT*, May 25, 1921.

⁸⁰ Cf. Herrick to Charles Hughes, January 10, 1923, NA RG 59 862 T.01/512.

⁸¹ Reinders, 24.

⁸² Cf. Nelson, 616.

⁸³ Cf. Lebzelter, 56.

⁸⁴ Cf. Nelson, 625.



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