

Marriage and Fatherhood in the Nazi SS

By Amy Carney. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. Pp. 328. \$34.95 (PB). ISBN 9781487522049.

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In 1946, as he awaited the hangman's noose, SS General Ernst Kaltenbrunner penned a loving memoir to his three children. The highest-ranking member of the *Schutzstaffel* to face trial at Nuremberg, Kaltenbrunner had been sentenced to death for crimes against humanity in his capacity as head of the Reich Security Main Office. He urged his children to take care of their mother Elisabeth and assured them that the "truth" about his work would emerge before long. He hoped that they would be "proud of your Daddy as a man who sacrificed all to the greater good" (quoted 165).

Fecund, physically imposing, and a fanatical National Socialist, Kaltenbrunner was a role model of SS masculinity. In addition to his three children with Elisabeth, Kaltenbrunner was the father of twins born to his long-term mistress, a German countess, in the final months of the war. He more than fulfilled the SS injunction to its members to raise *kinderreich* (child-rich) families of at least four children. As Amy Carney demonstrates in her absorbing monograph, Kaltenbrunner was decidedly atypical in living up to the SS's pronatalist ideals.

European states had fretted about declining birth rates since the late nineteenth century. These anxieties were heightened by the dysgenic impact of the Great War, whose demographic toll had fallen heaviest on young men of marriageable age. In Germany, the statistician Richard Korherr caught the public mood with the publication of his dissertation *Birth Decline: An Admonition to the German Race* (1927). The second edition, in 1935, boasted a preface by the Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler. For Himmler, the SS was to be the cavalry in what German eugenicists dubbed the "battle of the cradle" against the prolific Slavic races. The pages of the SS weekly newspaper *Das Schwarze Korps* teemed with birth announcements, photographs of toddlers, and tips for fatherhood (143–146). Practical incentives accompanied the exhortations, including monthly stipends for large families (66), the provision of runic cradles (147), and the symbolic capital of SS name consecration ceremonies (148). The imperative for SS men to reproduce transcended all personal desires and moral codes. Himmler viewed the stigma of illegitimacy as a tiresome vestige of petit bourgeois Christian morality. The SS *Lebensborn* (Fount of Life) program, which provided facilities for more than 7,000 unmarried mothers to give birth, institutionalized the sentiment.

This was the totalitarian face of National Socialism. It eroded, as Carney puts it, "any boundary between an SS man's private life and his service to the organisation and the state" (126). The call for more births in SS families was paired with the insistence that they be racially elevated births. Carney's first chapter recounts the implementation of the SS Marriage Order issued on December 31, 1931, which obliged all SS members to secure permission from the "clan department" (*Sippenamt*) of the SS Race and Resettlement Main Office (RuSHA) before marrying. The aspiring groom was required to prove that both parties' family trees since 1800 (1750 for SS officers) were unblemished by racial or eugenic impurities. The dates reflected a preoccupation with the French Revolution and, particularly, the Napoleonic emancipation of Jews in defeated Prussia and Austria after 1807 (27). If racial purity could not be established, or if the proposed bride failed her medical, the marriage was prohibited. If a condition specified under the 1933 Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring was discovered on the SS man's family line, he was to be expelled from the

organization. The same fate awaited an SS man found (it is unclear how) during the assessment process to be impotent and therefore, purportedly, unable to produce a child-rich family (34).

One of the most striking themes in Carney's research is the chasm between the exacting familial regulations of the SS and their patchy enforcement. In 1937, Himmler decreed that SS men would no longer automatically be punished for violations of the Marriage Law (40). In 1940, he ruled that men expelled prior to 1937 could be readmitted if the RuSHA was prepared to grant retrospective approval to their marriage (87). In principle, having children was a criterion for SS promotion; in practice, it seldom played any discernible role (99). The SS officer corps and, most especially, its senior ranks teemed with educated professionals of the kind who tended throughout Europe to have lower fertility rates than the broader population. The rank-and-file SS, meanwhile, were mostly very young men who were not eligible to apply to marry until they were 25. The recruitment of ever younger males into the Waffen-SS field divisions, particularly after the catastrophe at Stalingrad, was a dysgenic peril in the longer term. As Carney writes, "[w]hile the military victory was supposed to work in tandem with the victory in the cradle, in reality, trying to achieve the former greatly impaired the success of the latter" (178).

Marriage and Fatherhood in the Nazi SS makes an important contribution to historical knowledge on the pronatalist ideals of the organization. It also leaves ample scope for further research. Carney's method is to "allow SS leaders and members to speak for themselves" (11), and this works well in revealing formal ideology. It sheds less light on the culture of the SS, on the unspoken norms, values, habitus, and everyday family life of its members. The book has little to say about the entanglement of gender, sexuality, and power in the all-important SS trope of "decency" (*Anständigkeit*). But it marks, nevertheless, a welcome step forward in the gendering of family ideals in Nazi Germany.

doi:10.1017/S0008938922000085

Wie schwer ein Menschenleben wiegt. Sophie Scholl – Eine Biografie

By Maren Gottschalk. 2nd ed. Munich: C.H. Beck, 2020. Pp. ix + 347. €24 (HB). ISBN 978-3-406-75562-0.

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Over one hundred years after the birth of Sophie Scholl, is it possible to see beyond the heroic figure to the real person behind the myth? This is the central question of Maren Gottschalk's new biography. The book provides extraordinary detail of the life of Sophie Scholl and the Scholl family through letters, diaries, and interviews with the family members who survived, their friends, and colleagues. It traces the origins of Scholl's political resistance through the anti-war beliefs of her parents and their dedication to democracy during the Weimar era. In later chapters, we also gain insights into Scholl's developing network of anti-Nazi friends and how her beliefs and opinions were shaped and challenged by those around her. For all those interested in how political resistance is informed and shaped by the intricacies of daily life and in particular how people can be compelled to take huge risks to campaign for change, this book is a useful source.