

Lynda Willett

2014 HGSA Conference

UMass Boston

March 29, 2014

On the 6 November 1933, Adolf Hitler made a speech declaring: “When an opponent says, “I will not come over to your side,” I calmly say, “Your child belongs to us already... You will pass on. Your descendents, however, now stand in the new camp. In a short time they will know nothing else but this new community.” These words show the importance Hitler attached to the absolute inculcation of National Socialist ideas into German youth. The case study of Melita Maschmann shows that despite the deep manipulation and gender discrimination she was subject to in her youth by National Socialism Maschmann made her own free choices as an adult and chose to zealously absorb its political ideology. The general assumption is that National Socialism, and fascism, were male dominated political ideologies in which women played a passive role, such as that professed by Gertrude Scholtz-Klink. However, many women found National Socialism appealing and became active supporters of its ideals. The purpose of this paper is to explore that appeal and analyze why certain women such as Maschmann became such strong supporters of this political ideology.

In 1933, when Hitler gained power in Germany, Melita Maschmann was fifteen years old. Maschmann joined the female section of the Hitler Youth, the (BDM), and became an ardent supporter of National Socialism and Hitler. Maschmann underwent denazification after World War II and in the 1960s wrote *Account Rendered, A Dossier on my Former Self*, in letter and

essay form to a German Jewish friend believed to be living in New York. In her writing Maschmann attempts to explore and justify some of her actions and beliefs under National Socialism. Maschmann's interpretation of National Socialism shows the appeal of the political movement led by Hitler to Germans and provides proof of the intense but hidden manipulation National Socialism applied to young German women. Maschmann's experiences and explanations for her behavior provide a very detailed account of the effect of Hitler's policies and propaganda on young women. The influence was insidious; Maschmann at times questioned the logic of what she saw around her, but never took any action against stopping the injustices she witnessed. Maschmann was too young to vote for National Socialism but every aspect of her life was heavily influenced by its policies toward young women. Maschmann's parents disapproved of National Socialism, but had very little success when trying to remove Maschmann from the influence of National Socialism. Maschmann's essay is not an unknown historical text. Richard Evans, Jill Stephenson, Daniel Goldhagen, Claudia Koonz and Elizabeth Harvey all use Maschmann as a primary source. But, these historians only use extracts from Maschmann's memoir. Goldhagen uses Maschmann to explore anti-Semitism, Koonz uses Maschmann to explain the appeal of the Hitler Youth and Harvey uses Maschmann as a primary source for German occupied Poland. Also, Maschmann's memoir is not always used correctly. For example, Martyn Housden refers to Maschmann as an SS Officer. It is easy to mistake Maschmann for an SS officer as on more than one occasion she co-operated very closely with the SS. But, as a woman Maschmann could never have been in the SS. Also, despite the frequency of the use of Maschmann's memoir it is not without controversy.

Koonz states how Maschmann's "recollections convey the same self-justification of Scholtz-Klink's reminiscences." Koonz writes of interviewing Gertrude Scholtz-Klink in the 1980s. Scholtz-Klink was in charge of the National Socialist Women's League and a fervent member of the National Socialist Party. Maschmann never met Scholtz-Klink, but Scholtz-Klink had a huge influence over Maschmann and all German women during WWII. However, Maschmann is still worthy of study because of the differences between her and Scholtz-Klink. Maschmann had no intention of sitting at home in Germany during WWII. She volunteered to go to the Eastern occupied territories both as a member of the BDM and later as a Maidenfuhrerin. She fervently believed in the Germanization programs for German occupied Poland and assisted the SS in expelling Polish farmers and replacing them with German settlers. Her belief in the ideology of National Socialism led her to choose to continue her work with the SS and she underwent a personal crisis over her Christian beliefs, which she found contradicted strongly with her commitment to the political ideology of National Socialism. In 1939 Maschmann was a 21 year old single woman heading out to German occupied Poland. Scholtz-Klink was about to embark on her third marriage. Maschmann never, at any time, mixed with the Nazi elite. Scholtz-Klink speaks openly to Koonz of her meetings with Hitler and her relationships with other top Nazis. Scholtz-Klink also spoke freely to Koonz of her attempts to recruit German housewives with her "cradle and ladle" campaign. However, Maschmann replaced her own middle class credentials in favor of the anti-materialism and class free creed of National Socialism. One of the reasons Maschmann supported the war effort of Germany was because she believed the war offered more opportunities to German women. This certainly was not the view of Scholtz-Klink. Koonz asked Scholtz-Klink if she felt Hitler's policies for German women were adequate. Scholtz-Klink

stated “Absolutely.” Maschmann wished for more emancipation, but Scholtz-Klink simply wanted more Nazi women at home, cooking Nazi approved recipes.

Toward the end of WWII Maschmann was desperate to stay and defend Berlin. When this became impossible she joined a werwolf group with a group of SS officers and underwent some form of explosives training. However, Scholtz-Klink actively campaigned against German women volunteering for the German military in 1944.<sup>11</sup> Scholtz-Klink and Maschmann are of a different age group and mentality, but both are capable of providing historians with vital information on the female supporters and activists of National Socialism.

Koonz writes of how archivists and members of the National Socialist party were issued with kerosene in 1945 and told to burn their records of the Nazi era. Scholtz-Klink informed Koonz that on receipt of her issue of kerosene she immediately burned all her papers. As a consequence of this, and the Nuremberg Trials, there are few truthful accounts by women of the reasons why they chose to support National Socialism.

Maschmann claims to have no knowledge of the concentration camps and the eventual fate of the Poles she expelled from their homes. Maschman also claims to have failed an interview after WWII to help National Socialists escape justice. It seems more than likely Maschmann was lying simply to protect herself and others from further prosecution and imprisonment but this is now impossible to prove.

Maschmann's memoir is very conflicting. Maschmann wrote the memoir in the 1960s but even twenty years after WWII her explanations and memories promote, at times, nauseating National Socialist beliefs. This influence is particularly dominant when she writes of the Jewish ghetto she observed and her memories of her experiences of the peoples of Eastern Europe. Maschmann shows a full awareness of the consequences of some of her actions and is clearly at times using evasion and concealment in her memoir. But, Maschmann is also, at other times, brutally honest. Interpretation of Maschmann's text should not be based solely on her gender and with the assumption that she was a victim of a patriarchal system. This would profoundly underestimate Maschmann's commitment to the political ideology of National Socialism. Maschmann, as a young woman under the age of eighteen, was indeed indoctrinated by National Socialism. However, as time progressed, she made the choice to move from being a victim of National Socialism to becoming a perpetrator. There was not a country, political system or educational establishment that offered the same opportunities to women that were offered to men in the 1940s and National Socialism was not unusual in its discrimination against women. However, it was unusual in that it expected women to fulfill a very specific role as homemakers and producers of children fully committed to its political ideology.

Possibly if Maschmann's full commitment to National Socialism and her close work with the SS in Poland had been known her interrogation – and the jail sentence she was given - would have been very different. Women like Maschmann had a vested interest in ensuring that the belief that women within National Socialism were always victims; this idea has been continued over time. Maschmann's involvement in the BDM campaign against the Lebensborn program shows the irony of this belief. Maschmann regarded the Lebensborn program to be an aberration of

National Socialism and the one part of its ideology that she, and the other members of the BDM, was vehemently against. However, at the end of WWII Maschmann found when undergoing interrogation by the Allied forces that she was not viewed as a National Socialist but as someone whose sole purpose within National Socialism was to help replace the population losses incurred by the SS during WWII.

Maschmann could not have been the only National Socialist to find the ghettos, violent anti-semitism and treatment of the inhabitants of Eastern Europe as sub-human acceptable. But, Maschmann may well be one of the few people prepared to write frankly, albeit with limitations, about why she believed them to be necessary. Harvey refers to Maschmann's essay as an "often quoted memoir." But, Maschmann's memoir is much more than simply being a useful primary source of a young German woman in WWII that can be quoted piecemeal. If Maschmann's beliefs and actions are interpreted via fascist ideology and within their historical context – the Treaty of Versailles, the economic and political collapse of Weimar Germany, the Nazification of German society - a different perspective is obtained and a deeper understanding of National Socialism, its influence on German society and young German women is achieved.

### *Werwolf Groups in Germany*

As it became clear that Germany was losing the war Maschmann was specifically chosen to attend werwolf training by the SS. It is unclear exactly how the SS chose Maschmann, she does not provide the details or list the selection process that was used. But, although Maschmann evades telling the reader how she was selected what is clearer is why Maschmann was hand-picked by the SS for werwolf training.

Maschmann's commitment to National Socialism had not wavered for a moment. She was regularly risking her life by taking trips to the very frontlines of east Berlin with groups of children from the Hitler Youth, who would sing to the German soldiers to encourage them to fight on against the Russians. Maschmann was also fitting out evacuated houses on the eastern front of Berlin for the soldiers to use as temporary housing. This work was extremely dangerous; Maschmann was in constant danger from the Russian snipers, airplanes and artillery shells and on more than one occasion was nearly killed. However Maschmann claims "I was firmly convinced that I would not outlive the 'Third Reich.' If it was condemned to go under, then so was I." Maschmann had not altered or changed her commitment to National Socialism at all over the years, even though she had witnessed its brutality in Eastern Europe, and was now witnessing its collapse. However, Maschmann initially refused to abandon Berlin and chose to ignore the first order from the SS to attend werwolf training. It is clear that Maschmann did not ignore this order out of fear of the risks that would entail from joining a werwolf group. Not only was Maschmann prepared to risk her own life defending Berlin, she had also risked the lives of the German children she took to the frontlines. To Maschmann it was incomprehensible that anyone, including children, could abandon National Socialism. Maschmann claims "I had gone into the war prepared to die, and this I was still ready to do." Sadly, Maschmann was prepared to take small German children with her as well. However, Maschmann's decision to ignore the first order for her to attend for werwolf training shows the degree of freedom and choice she still had over how far to take this commitment to her political ideology.

Maschmann makes it clear that although she was told to attend for werwolf training she chose to ignore the first instruction and eventually reported for werwolf training after leaving Berlin.

There were no repercussions or unpleasant consequences to Maschmann that she initially chose to ignore this order. Maschmann decided when she should start her werwolf training, not the SS. Scholtz-Klink had argued against women being allowed to serve in the German military, but by the time the Red Army began to advance on Berlin even Scholtz-Klink learned to use a sub-machine gun. Scholtz-Klink was arrested by the Red Army, but later escaped and went into hiding. However, to Maschmann the thought of hiding was abhorrent. Maschmann, like Scholtz-Klink, experienced complete despair as Berlin began to collapse around her and had to be forcibly placed into a truck that was fleeing the advancing Red Army. The other occupant of the truck used physical force to stop Maschmann from trying to escape to re-join what was left of the desperate attempt by the Germans to defend Berlin. Maschmann states that she eventually “made no further attempt to leave the truck. But for years afterwards I was ashamed that I had not.” Maschmann eventually met up with a werwolf group and began to make plans to take on the Allied troops as they advanced through Germany.

Maschmann ended up at Innsbruck and at a meeting with the Tyrolean Hitler Youth underwent ‘werwolf’ training which consisted of sabotage techniques taught by SS Officers. Maschmann states that the werwolf group she belonged to achieved very little in the way of attacks on the American occupying forces. It seems strange that Maschmann, trained in guerrilla warfare, prepared to risk her life defending Berlin claims to have only ever provided laundry and cooking services to this group. But, it does seem feasible that her group never achieved one successful attack on the Americans. However, Innsbruck was full of SS officers training people in sabotage techniques prior to the arrival of the Allies. There was a fear within National Socialism in 1943 after the collapse of Italy that Germany could need to withdraw rapidly from certain areas. An

Alpine fortress was considered advisable and construction began of ammunition dumps and a mass production of small arms useful for the werwolf movement. The Allies knew of these arrangements and that there were at least seventy underground stores around the Tyrol area known to the Allies. Maschmann, after her werwolf training, claims she was approached by an SS Officer who asked her to provide laundry and cooking services for his commando group while they launched guerrilla attacks from the mountains of the Tyrol on the American forces that were about to occupy Innsbruck. Maschmann and other colleagues from the Hitler Youth agreed to help this group of men. One puzzling occurrence is the ambiguity of the local populace to the German soldiers that flooded into the Tyrol area as the Allies approached.

The anti-Nazi writer Luise Rinser was living in this area with family after being released from prison. Rinser recalls being visited one night by Germans claiming to need urgent medical assistance. It was clear that these men were SS officers on the run. At the time Rinser did not report these men, despite her anti-Nazi beliefs. This was not an uncommon reaction. There could be a number of reasons why the people living in the Tyrol did not fully co-operate with the Allies. First, it is important to remember that the worst excesses of the SS officers and the concentration camps had not yet become common knowledge. Also, there was confusion within the population of the Tyrol over whether they were Italian, Austrian or German. With the population of the Tyrol in such confusion over whether they wished to be Italian, German or Austrian this area was ripe for exploitation by any werwolf group. The werwolf groups may not have needed the support of the local people but they would at the very least have needed a fairly acquiescent population to carry on their activities. Also, so many German soldiers had withdrawn to the Tyrol that when the Allies first began to move into this area they were

originally outnumbered by a ratio of sixty to one. The civilian population of the Tyrol may have kept quiet about werwolf activities simply as a matter of self-preservation. However, Maschmann did not hide out in the Tyrol mountains above Innsbruck for very long. Maschmann became ill and made her way down the mountains to a youth hostel set up as a temporary respite for medical care. Maschmann writes

After about four weeks an attack of flu forced me to go down into the valley and seek refuge for a few days...I found two of my BDM comrades there as well. They had left their groups and passed themselves off to the Americans as the owners of the hostel. A secret field hospital for members of our commando group who fell sick was to be set up here.

By this time American soldiers occupied the valley in which the youth hostel was situated and had become very aware of the werwolf groups hiding in the mountains. Maschmann came under suspicion by the Americans and eventually was arrested, interrogated and imprisoned. However, she does state that the imprisonment did nothing to help decrease her commitment to National Socialism.

## MASCHMANN'S SUPPORT OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM AFTER WWII

### *Assisting imprisoned National Socialists escape justice*

Maschmann, after her release from prison, still continued to attempt to help and assist former National Socialists. Maschmann had no intention of abandoning her political beliefs, despite the growing evidence of the concentration camps and the brutal excesses of the SS.

After staying for a while in the German countryside with old friends of her parents to avoid housing and food rationing problems Maschmann returned to the town where she had spent her imprisonment. Maschmann began to visit National Socialists who were still in prison and writes I undertook to look after the most prominent of the political prisoners, who was still in the men's camp there. I had meanwhile obtained a job as a reporter on a daily paper...at least for the time being my employers were not to be told about my political past.

The fact that Maschmann's new employers were not told of her political past proved to be a serious error. Maschmann states:

I drove to see the chief of the Hessian Denazification Authorities and explained to him that I had been sent by my office to interview him. This official willingly answered my questions, and I managed to wrinkle out of him some important information about the forthcoming trial of the prominent prisoner I was looking after. Naturally he asked me to regard some of what he told me as 'off the record.' Fortunately this man never subsequently bothered to find out why the interview had not appeared in the paper.

Maschmann never names the prisoner she helped. Neither does she specify exactly what she did with the information she obtained. However, Maschmann does admit to being contacted by a former colleague who seemed to be interviewing her for recruitment to an organization that helped National Socialists in prison escape from the Allies. Maschmann leaves the reader with the impression that it was a small group of concerned individuals. However, Maschmann states: I learned how tangible this help could be a few days later when I heard on the news that a certain leading National Socialist had escaped from prison. My visitor had told me...that this man

expected to be transferred to Dachau in a few days' time, where he would have to undergo a very grueling trial. 'We shall have to make sure he disappears before then.'

Maschmann claims that the unnamed colleague who attempted to recruit her never contacted her again. In fact, Maschmann states that she must have failed the interview. It is difficult to fully believe Maschmann when she claims this group of concerned individuals rejected her as their latest recruit. But, clearly, this group was working as an effective unit that certainly helped at least one former National Socialist escape justice.

There has been much speculation about the escape routes used by former National Socialists. *The Odessa File* by Frederick Forsyth fostered much of the speculation. This book, and the film that it inspired, was fictional and muddied the waters for any serious scholar of the subject. However, there were escape routes for former National Socialists but these escape routes were not as well organized as generally believed. There were

millions of refugees on the move, trying to find their homeland, their families, or possibly what was left of their possessions, or else to seek a new existence anywhere else. Those who were fleeing were not just fugitive Nazis and war criminals, but also exiles from the eastern German regions, collaborators and anti-communists from the countries of Europe that were occupied by the Red Army, deserters, prisoners of war, slave laborers, displaced persons, soldiers and survivors of extermination camps and concentration camps.

Any National Socialist wishing to escape from the Allies exploited this chaos. The escape was made even easier by the fact that thousands of people at the end of WWII had no documentation

to prove who they were. The Red Cross was empowered by the United Nations to provide travel documents that became known as a Red Cross passport. The photographs of the bearers of these passports were only fixed on with paste; the photograph was very easy to remove and replace with another if necessary. The printed inscription on a Red Cross passport read “The present document has been established at the request of the bearer and because he has stated that he possesses no regular or provisional passport and that he is unable to procure one.”

It is impossible to prove how involved Maschmann was with any organization or group of concerned individuals that helped National Socialists escape. But, it is an established fact that these groups existed and were successful. The most prominent and well-known National Socialists who escaped and ended up in South America were Adolf Eichmann, Klaus Barbie and Josef Mengele.

There is absolutely no suggestion that Maschmann was involved with helping Eichmann, Barbie or Mengele escape, but clearly Maschmann was involved in helping other less prominent National Socialists avoid justice. At the very least Maschmann passed on information to people that would have seriously jeopardized the legal process and corrupted the trial. Maschmann admits to carrying out this work on her own but denies working with other people to achieve this goal. Maschmann leaves the reader dangling, unsure of how involved and successful she was in these activities. Also, Maschmann’s claim that she failed her interview to become more involved in helping National Socialists escape justice sounds strange considering that she openly admits she had already passed on information to a National Socialist about to be put on trial.

Maschmann never claims that she helped this man escape, simply that she passed on information to him vital for his trial, which would of course have given him a chance to prepare a defense which may well have been far from the truth and ensure a reduced sentence. Maschmann's true depth of involvement in the escape or corruption of the trial of any National Socialist is probably lost to history.