

The representation of peasantry, which, according to Darré, played an important role in the revival of Germany as “the *Volk*’s life source,” found great favor among the rural population since it promised to raise its social status. Darré was convinced of the beauty of the “Nordic people’s” body, mind, and character and regarded their rural nature as the foundation for their supposed perfection and superiority.<sup>22</sup> He believed the “Nordic race” to be distinguished by special hereditary leadership qualities.<sup>23</sup> He had no doubt that the “true wealth of our *Volk* . . . is its good blood”<sup>24</sup> and considered it necessary to deliberately strive for the “propagation of the good blood of the German species” to stop the alleged degeneration of the “Nordic race.”<sup>25</sup> Establishing a bond between peasant and soldier suggested itself, as Darré saw both as the foundation of the *Volk*:

“Peasantry and soldiership are the prerequisites for seeing our Germanic-German *Volk* defend its freedom in the struggle for survival. Yet it is only in the affirmation of the idea of species-conscious breeding that the *Volk* secures the future preservers of its existence . . . : the perpetuity of the German *Volk* is rooted in the trinity of peasantry, breeding, and soldiership.”<sup>26</sup>

For Darré, an especially important part in breeding fell to the peasant, who tilled the “soil of German blood” and was tasked with freeing the German *Volk* from “the weeds of Jewish blood.”<sup>27</sup> Drawing on this gruesome imagery, Darré maintained that the “weeding” had begun and that laws were called for to induce the “increase of valuable blood stems.”<sup>28</sup>

Darré used his “knowledge” of the breeding of animals, particularly of horses, the principles of which he recklessly transferred to man.<sup>29</sup> The

22 RWD drew on Hans F. K. Günther, *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes* (Munich, 1922), 201. See Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, 40.

23 *Ibid.*, 201.

24 RWD, *Neuordnung unseres Denkens* (New Order of Our Thought, Goslar, 1940), 14.

25 *Ibid.*, 16.

26 RWD, “Bauern und Soldaten” (*SA-Führer*, issue 8, 1938), in *id.*, *Um Blut und Boden*, 158–161, here: 161.

27 RWD, *Neuordnung unseres Denkens*, 16.

28 *Ibid.*, 28.

29 The scientific value of this “knowledge” is more than doubtful. RWD had pursued no intense investigations in the field.



5 · Anna Kopplitz, *Students of the Reich School Burg Neuhaus performing gymnastics exercises during the exhibition of the Reich Food Estate in Leipzig, 1939*, gelatin silver print, 22.9 × 16.4 cm

“breeding objective of the German *Volk*” was to be achieved by means of selective breeding, based on laws of inheritance, and through the meticulous control of procreation.<sup>30</sup>

The first measure Darré demanded was a tightening of marriage rules. The state was to control marriages and start a personal file of every marriageable male to determine his “value” and marriageability. He found that the female’s “genetic value” was even more important, since she transmitted her blood to her children and was thus decisive for their “genetic value.”<sup>31</sup> Whereas the female’s “genetic value” lay in nothing but her blood and in procreation, the male’s was based on his character, his health, and his achievements. The woman’s achievement “are her children.”<sup>32</sup> Darré differentiated women into four categories, only two of which should be allowed to reproduce by giving birth. The two lower classes comprised prostitutes, the mentally ill, and other women “suffering from a hereditary disease.” These women should be excluded from marriage, undergo sterilization, and be denied the possibility of giving birth under all circumstances. Darré’s views were part of a pseudo-scientific raciology that explicitly endorsed mass murder and categorized people into groups worth and not worth living.<sup>33</sup>

To underpin his theories, Darré drew on now-questionable historical and sociological studies according to which the ancient Germanic peoples had made their appearance on the stage of history as peasants. These works maintained that the Germanic peoples despised cities and settled in the country, where they “took root” in the soil throughout generations.<sup>34</sup> Life in the country was supposed to have had a formative influence on them, furnishing them with certain character traits that guaranteed their superiority. In his book *Das Bauerntum als Lebensquell der Nordischen Rasse* (Peasantry as the Life Source of the Nordic Race), Darré claimed that the “Nordic race” had become unsurpassable in the course of history. He argued that it had lost

its leadership qualities on account of industrialization and urbanization in the nineteenth century because these had destroyed the foundation of Germanhood and spoiled its “racial quality.” Darré regarded “the drift to the cities” as the greatest evil of the time<sup>35</sup> since it quashed the “peasant character of the Nordic race” and deprived people of their good character traits, forcing them to adapt to the city’s living conditions.<sup>36</sup>

Darré’s blood-and-soil ideology was not only profoundly conservative and reactionary but also anti-Semitic and racist. According to it, the Semites stood in sharp contrast to the settled peasants as the basis of the “Nordic race.” “The original inhabitants of the steppe and desert” had not settled but, as nomads, turned into “parasites” and become a “destructive part of mankind.”<sup>37</sup> Darré ascribed a natural dislike of the city to the Germans as he believed that the city implied “the death of the peasant soul.” Darré warned that Germany would lose its claim to leadership and its leadership character along with its peasant character.<sup>38</sup>

This was the starting point of Darré’s ideological and political struggle. He was convinced that only a radical about-face of the developments would be able to stop the “decline of the German race.” He emphasized the fatal consequences of the liberal economic development of the past century and maintained that the abolition of serfdom had ultimately turned out to be an “uprooting of the peasants,”<sup>39</sup> considering that industrialization had lured manpower into moving from the countryside to the city.<sup>40</sup> The massive “rural exodus” that followed had continued into the twentieth century and destroyed the Germans’ “law of life.” Industrialization had ruined the peasantry, sacrificed it, and ultimately doomed Germany to perish. The evidence Darré furnished for the corrupting influence of the city, which, as he put it, devoured man and “bled the country dry”, were demographic figures meant



6 · Anna Koppitz, *Students of the Reich School Burg Neuhaus*, 1939, gelatin silver print, 19.1 × 16.8 cm

to show that the city could not regenerate on its own but depended on human supply from the country.<sup>41</sup>

Darré embraced the racist doctrine to counter these socio-economic upheavals.<sup>42</sup> He did not consider the ideas brought forth by agrarian romantics in recent decades who had merely lamented urbanization and industrialization suited to stop or even reverse the decline.<sup>43</sup> He rather held the opinion that the “peasant blood of the Nordic race” had to be renewed to see Germany “reborn.” Economically speaking, this meant exiting the capitalist market order and concentrating on the nation’s economic independence.

This would also make Germany less vulnerable in the next war.<sup>44</sup> Darré’s argument fell on sympathetic ears with the Nazis, who were eager to prevent a repetition of the great famine in the First World War by all means. The Nazis thought that the First World War had been lost because the nation’s basic food resources had run out and the home front had therefore broken down. This is why they regarded Germany’s dependence on food imports as the greatest weakness; they were convinced that only an economically self-sufficient Germany would be able to win a war.<sup>45</sup> Darré and his followers saw Germany’s only future in a regenerated rural nation in which the peasant would take on the leadership role.

#### Celebrating the Ideal Peasant Body

Darré’s ideas provided the foundation for the Nazis’ murderous legislation. The already mentioned Marriage Order issued by the SS Race Office in December 1931 stipulated a premarital examination of the racial “quality” of both husband and wife for SS men in order to guarantee the “selection” of the leading group. The Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring (*Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses*, 1933) referred to the same principle of “breeding” and the elimination of those deemed “unworthy of life.” It required the compulsory sterilization of all citizens categorized as suffering from “hereditary disease” and, two years later, deprived them of the permission to marry. In 1935, the so-called Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor, passed as one of the Nuremberg Laws, forbade marriages between “Jews” and “Aryans.” All sexual intercourse between Jews and non-Jews was prosecuted under criminal law.<sup>46</sup>

In the late 1930s, Darré increasingly lost his sway, and in 1938 Himmler made Darré step down as leader of the RuSHA.<sup>47</sup> Although Darré officially

44 RWD, “Zur Wiedergeburt des Bauerntums” (*Deutschlands Erneuerung*, vol. 9, 1931), in id., *Um Blut und Boden*, 60–68, 62–68.

45 See Gerhard, *Nazi Hunger Politics*, 20–27.

46 An estimated total of 400,000 persons were forcibly sterilized on the basis of this law between 1933 and 1945. See Paula Diehl, “Körperbilder und Körperoraxen,” 24.