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FORCED PROSTITUTION: THE COMPETING AND CONTESTED USES OF THE
CONCENTRATION CAMP BROTHEL

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School-New Brunswick
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in History

written under the direction of

Professor Belinda Davis

and approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

May 2011

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation enhances and complicates the history of Nazi racial and sexual policies by examining the quotidian politics of ten brothels staffed by and for prisoners that operated in concentration camps in Germany and its occupied territories. Instituted in 1941 under the command of Heinrich Himmler with the goal of providing rewards for diligent labor among “prominent” male camp prisoners, the brothels constituted a unique space in which competing Nazi ideologies of race, power, and sex collided. This dissertation not only explores how the brothels functioned as part of a Nazi-inspired labor incentive program for “prominent” prisoners, but also reveals their unannounced functions, such as serving as laboratories of sexual experimentation for the “re-education” of homosexual prisoners. It shows too how prisoners instrumentalized sex and sexuality to their advantage. Although the majority of women and some men could not choose their level of participation in the brothel, in many instances they were able to use their time in the brothel to their advantage. For some female prisoners forced into

prostitution and for male prisoners earning the privilege of brothel visits, sexual activity inside the brothel provided brief moments of intimacy within the dehumanizing atmosphere of the camps. Sexual activity behind the brothel doors thus became a reaffirmation of humanity for certain prisoners and a pivotal element of their survival strategy. This history of the brothels makes three crucial interventions. The first is a reconceptualization of the choices made by women forced into prostitution by problematizing concepts like “volunteerism” and “prostitute” in this setting, this study makes plain the circumstances surrounding the agency of these women. The second is to complicate and add to the literature on the “gray zone” and notions of “cooperation” under Nazi rule. The third is to provide a nuanced, detailed analysis of the functioning of sex, race, and power in Nazi Germany. This research transforms and adds to our understanding of the role of sex in Nazi policy. Despite the regime’s desire to harness sexuality, it proved that even in a closely controlled atmosphere, to be beyond the state’s control.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have been mentally writing my acknowledgments for longer than I care to admit, so it is with a great sense of accomplishment that I finally see these words in print. This dissertation would not have been possible without my generous funding from Rutgers University, the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, and the American Association of University Women. Particular thanks go to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum for including me on the research expedition to the Red Cross International Tracing Services Archive in Bad Arolsen, Germany in 2008. The work I accomplished there is found on nearly every page of this dissertation.

I am grateful to the faculty and staff in the history department at Rutgers, my academic home throughout my Ph.D. journey. Special thanks to the irreplaceable Dawn Ruskai who has helped me navigate through the redtape and roadblocks at Rutgers both while in residence and away. I thank my dissertation committee whose support and varied perspectives have shaped this project. Bonnie Smith's insightful comments have helped me widen my perspective of histories of sexuality. She continues to inspire me to clarify and make bold claims. Paul Hanebrink has consistently provided me with concrete suggestions for furthering my work and I was lucky to work closely with him over the years, gaining invaluable insight into teaching. Atina Grossmann's excellent comments and thought-provoking questions have been critical to the final revisions of this dissertation. I thank Belinda Davis for advising this project and for her simultaneous support and insistence on greater analysis and clarity in my work.

I have been fortunate to be surrounded by so many fantastically intelligent, smart, and witty people during my tenure as a graduate student. I first thank my dear friend and

unofficial mentor, Dorothee Brantz, for sharing her enthusiasm for German history with a young and clueless former field hockey player. Louisa Rice and Carmen Khair are not only excellent historians, but friends who were quick to laugh and always eager for adventure. Rebecca Scales spent countless hours on the phone with me as both a soundboard and a cheerleader through the heartbreaks and successes of this project. I am so grateful for our friendship.

I thank my fellow Rutgers Germanists, Jennifer Miller, Laurie Marhoefer, and Carla MacDougall, for being the funniest and most fun-loving group of historians imaginable. I am grateful to Laurie Marhoefer's characteristic good cheer and willingness to read endless drafts of my work and answer all of my Weimar questions. I first met Carla MacDougall on my recruiting trip to Rutgers and my experience has largely been shaped by our friendship. I thank her for sharing her love of Berlin with me and making it my second home. I am indebted to Megan Mackey, Kate Carroll, and Mary Brown for always being there to talk, laugh, and get one another through life's ups and downs. Our friendships have always and continue to sustain me.

I am blessed to have two incredibly smart and talented brothers whom I appreciate deeply. To Christopher and David, thank you for being such important parts of my life. My dear Inge provided me with a home away from home while in Germany. I am truly indebted to her for sharing our family history with me. It is with the deepest and most heartfelt gratitude that I express my love and thanks to my parents who have always loved me unconditionally and supported all of my endeavors. They are a monument of love, compassion, and generosity. I hope to live life as they have. There

exists no better example of what hard work, perseverance, and enthusiasm can achieve than my father. I thank him for setting the bar so unbelievably high.

I am the daughter and granddaughter of extraordinary women. I hope my Grandma Ann and my Oma Emmy would see in me, if even just a little, some of their qualities. My Grandma Ann was the embodiment of intelligence and grace and my Oma Emmy was a woman of incredible bravery and faith. I know that these two women would have been so pleased to see their granddaughter earn her Ph.D. My mother was the first woman in her family to attend college. A familiar story told in our family is how her mother marched her tiny 4'10" frame to the front of the ceremony and asked them to pause the commencement so that she could take a picture of her daughter with diploma in hand. Soon after, my mother continued to make her mom proud by earning her Master's Degree. My mother instilled within me a love for learning and the notion that any dream was possible. I hope she is as proud of me as her mother was of her.

Finally, I thank my very patient and loving husband Daniel. Thank you for always encouraging me and often making sacrifices for my work. Your kindness knows no bounds and for that I love you. You have lived with this dissertation everyday and its final completion is a testimony to our partnership. Our greatest achievement, Samuel Augustus, is so wonderfully and frightfully made that all other feats pale by comparison. You are both my heart.

DEDICATION

**To my
Mom and Dad**

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Introduction

In the spring of 1941, SS *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler returned from a visit to the I.G. Farben plant outside of Oświęcim, Poland, excited by what he had witnessed. I.G. Farben had successfully been raising labor productivity by implementing a tiered incentive program—among the highest incentives offered was a visit to a supervised brothel. Men laboring diligently were rewarded with sex. Motivated by I.G. Farben’s favorable outcome, Himmler ordered a brothel be built in the Mauthausen and Gusen concentration camps in May 1941. Himmler’s decision marked a turning point in Nazi policy. Not until the summer of 1941 had concentration camp labor been considered in economic terms, nor as a possibly productive labor force. Until this point, forced labor in the concentration camps had primarily been utilized as a tool to punish, torture, and eventually kill prisoners. Himmler’s decision to open a brothel signified camp prisoners were an economically viable labor force warranting the establishment of an incentive program. Yet, in addition to its economic potential, Himmler also saw the brothel as his own “laboratory” where methods of “curing” homosexuality were attempted. Under Himmler’s orders, brothels opened in Auschwitz-Stammlager, Auschwitz-Monowitz, Neuengamme, Dachau, Mittelbau-Dora, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Mauthausen-Gusen, Flossenbürg, and Sachsenhausen, by 1944.

In accordance with Reich racial laws, the brothel would allow only privileged “ethnic” German men to have sex with German women. As racial degeneration stemming from miscegenation had long worried the National Socialists, it followed that

the brothel as an institution providing sex as a reward, had to uphold the racial laws set forth by the Nuremberg Laws outlawing *Rassenschande*, or “racial defilement.”¹ To staff the brothels, Himmler decided German female prisoners from the women’s concentration camp, Ravensbrück, and the women’s camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau would be asked to “volunteer” for brothel duty. It was Himmler’s intention to fill the brothels with former prostitutes imprisoned in the camp system as “asocials” to make certain the smooth operation of the brothel and the “professional” nature of its laborers. The Nazis used the term “asocial” to refer to individuals deemed unfit for society. This label included alcoholics, the “work-shy,” and prostitutes among other “unproductive” individuals. However, as this dissertation reveals, neither of these basic tenets of early brothel policy were upheld. Non-Germans both used the brothel as patrons and labored as “prostitutes.” Furthermore, the majority of the women working in the ten prisoner brothels were not former prostitutes but women arrested as “political” or “asocial” prisoners.

This project draws together the histories of the Third Reich, the Holocaust, and women and gender to probe a hitherto under-explored element of everyday history in the concentration camps. This history of the brothels makes three crucial interventions. The first is a re-conceptualization of the choices made by women forced into prostitution and an exploration of their agency as part of their life stories. By problematizing concepts like “volunteerism” and “prostitute” in this setting, this study makes plain the complications surrounding the agency of these women. The second is to complicate and

¹ On the passage of the Nuremberg Law and a specific discussion of the “Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor, see Lothar Gruchmann, “‘Blutschutzgesetz’ und Justiz: Zur Entstehung und Auswirkung des Nürnberger Gesetzes vom 15 September 1935,” in *Vierteljahrheft für Zeitgeschichte* 31 (1983): 418-42, 425; Michael Ley, “Zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes”: “*Rassenschandegesetze*” im *Nationalsozialismus* (Bodenheim b. Mainz: Philo, 1997); Uwe Dietrich Adam, “An Overall Plan for Anti-Jewish Legislation in the Third Reich,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 11 (1976): 33-55; Patricia Szobar, “Telling Sexual Stories in the Nazi Courts of Law: Race Defilement in Germany, 1933-1945,” in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 131-163.

add to the literature on the “gray zone” and the notion of “cooperation” under Nazi rule, by focusing on a group whose victimhood has been diminished due to historians’ own adoption of Nazi euphemism. The third is to provide a nuanced, detailed analysis of the functioning of sexuality, race, and power in Nazi Germany. The brothel, as a camp institution, was a physical space where these Nazi ideologies intersected. This research therefore transforms and adds to our understanding of the role of sex in Nazi policy by demonstrating how the regime sought to instrumentalize sexuality. It also hopes to show how even in a closely controlled atmosphere, sexuality proved to be something the regime could not, despite all intentions, control.

Whether to court Church or popular support, Hitler and the National Socialists used sexual politics to their advantage while coming to power and even moreso once the takeover of power was completed. Consequently, the reworking of sexual politics meant Nazi sexual policy was never coherent, nor straightforward, and indeed the use of sexuality was interpreted broadly, ambivalently, and often contradictorily. However, the idea that sex and sexuality could be used for the benefit of the state remained consistent. The seemingly contradictory policies all shared the same undercurrent: the idea that Aryan Germans had a sexual duty to perform for the state. It was how that duty was performed that shifted and evolved, not its existence. The Nazis may have touted a return to bourgeois values while decrying the degenerate politics of Weimar, but behind a façade of sexual respectability that was emphasized early on, sex was being used to increase support for the regime.²

² On the evolution of policy regarding venereal disease and prostitution, see Annette F. Timm, *The Politics of Fertility in Twentieth-Century Berlin* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Julia Roos, *Weimar Through the Lens of Gender: Prostitution Reform, Women’s Emancipation, and German Democracy, 1919-1933* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

The act of sex is at the core of this dissertation. Himmler understood sex to be potent enough to both motivate exhausted and starving camp workers to reach labor quotas and to “cure” homosexuality. This dissertation investigates these “official” or state sanctioned uses of the brothels. However, this is merely one side of the story. The prisoners used sex in other ways and it is the act of sex offered in the brothel that serves as a starting point to discuss a great many other topics. Sex is used to discuss agency—for both the women working as sexual laborers in the brothel and for men deciding to visit the brothel. I argue that despite attempts to control all aspects of the camp, and certainly the brothel, sex was used as both an act of resistance and a tool for survival. Furthermore, sexual intercourse should not be reduced to a simple biological act satisfying biological needs: it often impacted the lives of prisoners. It is through my investigation of sex in the brothels that I am able to contribute to several different aspects of Holocaust, Third Reich, German, and women and gender historiography.

This dissertation explores the “positive” uses of sexuality not tied to reproduction. It was a means of surviving imprisonment in the concentration camps. Sex was wielded as a tool of power and privilege by the Nazi regime. However, in 1941, in the midst of waging a two-front war and implementing the Final Solution, Himmler ordered the construction of a brothel in Mauthausen to provide sexual intercourse as a reward for diligent labor—an unprecedented means of using sex for the benefit of the Reich. Neither the women nor men in the brothels were free—all were members of an involuntary community. The entire history of the camp brothels transpires in the concentration camps, where an atmosphere of coercion wholly removed from the ordinary world, renders pre-existing concepts of choice and other paradigms of

prostitution highly problematic. This study, while explaining how the brothels functioned, goes beyond the logistics to investigate not only how the Nazi leadership attempted to control and harness sexual activity within the camps for the benefit of the state, but also how some concentration camp prisoners instrumentalized sex.³ Nazi leaders, while claiming interest in maximizing labor productivity by offering sex as a reward for diligent labor, also used these brothels as sites of sexual experimentation and humiliation. However, my research reveals camp prisoners, including the “prostitutes” themselves, used sex and sexuality in a manner wholly unintended by their Nazi tormentors: as part of a strategy for survival that resisted the processes of dehumanization and, moreover, reaffirmed their humanity.

My work adds to the literature on the nature of the concentration camp system by using sex in the brothel to work through concepts of power and choice in the camp system. The brothel is an under-analyzed space within the concentration camp where oppositional interests went head-to-head. The brothel was meant to offer labor incentives for the benefit of Reich’s war economy, and to an extent it did, function in this manner; however, in the brothel prisoners, despite their oppression, were struggling to survive. The goals of these parties are at odds and through my investigation of the camp brothel it is possible to discern how these oppositional courses unfolded. Prisoners naturally sought to survive the camps while the Nazi leadership intended to only keep prisoners alive for their own purposes. The brothel, despite Himmler’s intentions and quite likely without his knowledge, became a contested space. Wolfgang Sofsky’s work on the concentration camp system asserts the camp was a “dynamic field of action” where the

³ The term “instrumental sex” is used by Atina Grossmann to describe the relationships between the Western Allies and Gentile women in postwar Germany. Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), 53.

objectives of Nazi ideology, or more specifically, the camp leadership, were naturally at odds—prisoners wanting to survive despite the Nazi practice of *Vernichtung durch Arbeit*—with the objectives of the prisoners.⁴ The everyday reality of the camp was not always one with the objectives set forth by the highest echelons of Nazi leadership.

This study of the concentration camp brothels puts sex back into the camp experience by exploring how sex was used and understood by prisoners, as well as investigating its meaning. A discussion of sex is part of the *Alltagsgeschichte* of the camp. Daily life activities are at the heart of our continual attempts to expand our comprehension of life in the labor camps. Developments in the private sphere, in this case sexual relations, transformed in response to the atmosphere of the camps. What occurred on the ground in the camps did not necessarily mirror the ideology and politics of the Nazi regime. This study asks why some women “volunteered” to work in the brothel, and how these decisions impacted their incarceration and survival. The decision-making process in the camp tells us about the overall experience of the camps and in this vein, my dissertation adds to the canon of Holocaust historiography dealing with life in the camps.⁵ The wholly unnatural camp environment demanded a renegotiation of morality and perhaps nowhere is this better indicated than by the decisions made by women and men to use sex to their advantage, or most clearly, to aid their survival.

⁴ Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 13.

⁵ For example, see Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Eugen Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell: The German Concentration Camps and the System Behind Them*, rev. ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006); Hermann Langbein, *People in Auschwitz* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*; Tzvetan Todorov, *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996); Donald Niewyk, ed., *Fresh Wounds: Early Narratives by Holocaust Survivors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity* (New York: Collier Books, 1961); Abel J. Herzberg, *Between Two Streams: A Diary from Bergen-Belsen* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1997); Jack G. Morrison, *Ravensbrück: Everyday Life in a Women's Concentration Camp, 1939-45* (Princeton, N.J.: Wiener, 2000).

By investigating forced prostitution in the concentration camps, this specific historical “moment” allows for a historicization of sex in this period by the prisoners in the camp. Additionally, this study of forced prostitution uses the act of sex to examine its use as a tool of survival. Acknowledging the abhorrent nature of the brothels and the sexual exploitation of women and some men, I argue for the addition of sex and sexual relations to the survival tactic known as “mutual assistance.”⁶ Sex should be understood as an act of resistance because its participants were, in some cases, re-asserting notions of humanity, masculinity, and femininity. The reclamation of these components of identity were necessary parts of survival strategies.

Historiography

Only relatively recently has Holocaust history accepted gender history as an integral component in the ongoing attempts to reveal, or make sense, of the event known as the Holocaust. It took decades of lively and passionate debate for my colleagues who worked for decades in this field to establish the necessity of histories of sexuality as a new and important line of inquiry.⁷ As a result of the hard work that has come before,

⁶ On mutual assistance, see Judith Tydor Baumel, “Women’s Agency and Survival Strategies During the Holocaust,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 22:3 (1999): 329-47; — — —, *Double Jeopardy: Gender and the Holocaust* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1998); — — —, “Social Interaction Among Jewish Women in Crisis During the Holocaust: A Case Study,” *Gender and History* 7 (April 1995): 64-85; — — —, “Gender and Family Studies of the Holocaust,” in *Lessons and Legacies II: Teaching the Holocaust in a Changing World*, ed. Donald G. Schilling (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 105-117; Jutta T. Bendremer, *Women Surviving the Holocaust: In Spite of the Horror* (Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen Press, 1997); Esther Fuchs, ed., *Women and the Holocaust: Narrative and Representation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999); Myrna Goldenberg, “Different Horrors, Same Hell: Women Remembering the Holocaust,” in *Thinking the Unthinkable: Meanings of the Holocaust*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 150-166; Myrna Goldenberg, “Lessons Learned from Gentle Heroism: Women’s Holocaust Narratives,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 548 (1996): 78-93; Brana Gurewitsch, ed., *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters: Oral Histories of Women who Survived the Holocaust* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998); Joy Erlichman Miller, *Love Carried Me Home: Women Surviving Auschwitz* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Simcha Press, 2000); Nechama Tec, *Resilience and Courage: Women, Men, and the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 2003).

⁷ Ann Taylor Allen, “The Holocaust and the Modernization of Gender: A Historiographical Essay,” *Central European History* 30, no. 3 (1997): 349-364; Elizabeth R. Baer and Myrna Goldenberg, eds., *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003);

this dissertation sits at an intersection of several disciplines, its exploration of a singular theme—forced prostitution in the camp brothels—places it in the context of modern German, women's and gender, and Holocaust history. It is an examination of sexual victimization and sexual agency in a specific time, and place, asking new questions about an under-examined aspect of National Socialism, camp life, and camp survival.

Hitler and the National Socialists made their bid for power in part by railing against the leniency and “softness” of the Weimar Republic with regard to sexual politics. This call for a return to “bourgeois” values has been taken by scholars, until recently, at face value. Until the pioneering work of Dagmar Herzog, Annette Timm, Elizabeth Heinemann, and others, the scholarly consensus has been to view the Third Reich as sexually conservative and repressive.⁸ George Mosse's inquiries into sexuality during the Third Reich argue the Nazis were anti-sex. In his work, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe*, Mosse argues the Nazis sought to return to a culture of bourgeois propriety and restraint and this meant insisting marriage was sacred and any deviations from the married heterosexual norm were to be vilified.⁹ For Mosse, the Nazi preoccupation with sexual respectability and sexual repression were key components in maintaining the moral stability of the regime. Sex, according to Mosse, was reduced to a purely functional purpose—breeding children of

Baumel, *Double Jeopardy*; Baumel, “Social Interaction among Jewish Women;” Goldenberg, “Different Horrors, Same Hell;” Goldenberg, “From a World Beyond: Women in the Holocaust,” *Feminist Studies* 22, 3 (Fall, 1996): 667-687; Brana Gurewitsch, ed., *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters*; Marlene Heineman, *Gender and Destiny: Women Writers and the Holocaust* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986); Margaret Higgonet, ed., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Joan Ringelheim, “Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research,” in *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*, ed. Carol Rittner and John K. Roth (New York: Paragon House, 1993).

⁸ Erich Goldhagen, “Nazi Sexual Demonology,” *Midstream* (May 1981): 11; Friedrich Koch, *Sexuelle Denunziation: Die Sexualität in der politischen Auseinandersetzung* (Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1986); George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985); George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁹ Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, 158-9.

the “master race”—and not for pleasure.¹⁰ Historian Hans Peter Bleuel concurs with Mosse’s argument, writing, “What became known under National Socialism as ‘new morality’ was simply the old morality under different auspices. The petty bourgeois rites of propriety remained intact.”¹¹ However, as new work on sex and sexuality in the Third Reich has proven, Nazism was not sexually universally repressive, nor sex hostile.

The influential work of Dagmar Herzog has shown unequivocally that the Third Reich has been incorrectly labeled as sexually repressive.¹² My research makes another contribution to the existing and emerging work on sex and sexuality in the Third Reich by providing further proof again, that the Third Reich was not distinctly and uniformly sexually repressive. To the contrary, the existence of camp brothels indicates the intensification of sexually liberalizing tendencies at work in this period.¹³ The Nazis were in fact preoccupied with sexuality and sought to regulate it in both its “positive” and “negative forms.” The “positive” regulation of sex included incentivizing racially healthy Germans to reproduce by offering financial rewards, restricting birth control and

¹⁰ Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*; Also reinforcing the view that the Nazi regime was “sex hostile” are Stefan Maiwald and Gerd Mischler, *Sexualität unter dem Hakenkreuz: Manipulation und Vernichtung der Intimsphäre im NS-Staat* (Hamburg: Europa Verlag, 1999); Hans Peter Bleuel, *Das Saubere Reich: Theorie und Praxis des sittlichen Lebens im Dritten Reich* (Munich: Scherz, 1972).

¹¹ Hans Peter Bleuel, *Strength Through Joy: Sex and Society in Nazi Germany* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), 7.

¹² Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century German* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); — — —, “Syncopated Sex: Transforming European Sexual Cultures,” *American Historical Review* 114 (December 2009); — — —, “How Jewish is German Sexuality? Sex and Antisemitism in the Third Reich,” in *German History from the Margins*, ed. Neil Gregor et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); — — —, “Sexuality in the Postwar West,” *Journal of Modern History* 78 (March 2006): 144 - 171; — — —, “Sexuality, Memory, Morality,” *History and Memory* 17, nos. 1-2 (Spring 2005): 238-266; — — —, “Sex and Secularization in Nazi Germany,” in *Fascism and Neofascism: Critical Writings on the Radical Right in Europe*, ed. Angelica Fenner and Eric Weitz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). See also her edited collections, *Sexuality and German Fascism and Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹³ For example, see Annette F. Timm, “Sex with a Purpose: Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Militarized Masculinity in the Third Reich,” in Herzog, *Sexuality and German Fascism*, 223-255; Julia Roos, “Backlash against Prostitutes’ Rights: Origins and Dynamics of Nazi Prostitution Policies,” in Herzog, *Sexuality and German Fascism*, 67-94; and Terri J. Gordon, “Fascism and the Female Form: Performance Art in the Third Reich,” in Herzog, *Sexuality and German Fascism*, 164-200.

abortion, and pointed propaganda campaigns.¹⁴ While “negative” regulation evolved into an immense undertaking to prohibit those deemed “unworthy” from reproducing through forced sterilization, forced abortion, and outright murder,¹⁵ sex was tied to being *German* and to being part of the *Volk*. This association of sexuality and community subsequently made sex part of one’s patriotic duty. Sexual experience, for the German *Volk*, was both a patriotic duty and a reward as the Nazi party encouraged pre- and extra-marital sex among racially approved Germans.¹⁶ Annette Timm’s work argues the most significant form of venereal disease control in the Third Reich was the attempt to find a functional role for sexual deviance, namely, prostitution.¹⁷ She ties the Nazi state’s attempts to regulate venereal disease to the channeling the sexual energy for the use of the state, and these efforts re-designated previously private acts a matter of public significance.¹⁸ The Nazis took the regulation of prostitution even further by opening state-sanctioned

¹⁴ On Third Reich pro-natalist policies affecting women, see Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann and Marion Kaplan, eds., *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984); Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987); Irmgard Weyrather, *Muttertag und Mutterkreuz: Der Kult um die “deutsche Mutter” im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1993); Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Elizabeth D. Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make?: Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

¹⁵ On sterilization see Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986); — — —, “Sterilization and ‘Medical’ Massacres in National Socialist Germany: Ethics, Politics, and the Law,” in *Medicine and Modernity: Public Health and Medical Care in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. Manfred Berg and Geoffrey Cocks (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 149-172; — — —, “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State,” in Bridenthal et al., *When Biology Became Destiny*, 271-296; Stefan Kühl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁶ Annette F. Timm, *The Politics of Fertility*, 160; On some of these opportunities, see Hans Peter Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany*, trans. Maxwell J. Brownjohn (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), 169; Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 106-12. The Lebensborn e.V. program was an outgrowth of “positive” eugenics, see Catrine Clay and Michael Leapman, *Master Race: The Lebensborn Experiment in Nazi Germany* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995); Georg Lilienthal, *Der “Lebensborn e.V.”: Ein Instrument nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 2003).

¹⁷ Timm, *The Politics of Fertility*, 160.

¹⁸ Timm, “Sex with a Purpose,” in Herzog, *Sexuality and German Fascism*.

brothels throughout the Reich, but also in the concentration camps. No matter the direction of sexual politics, all policy was directed at harnessing sexuality for not only the ideological goals of the state, but its tangible needs as well.

Among the histories of sexuality during the Third Reich, the history of forced sexual labor and prostitution is a relatively new avenue of study. Pioneering works focused first on explaining the phenomena¹⁹ and then moved to discussions of the way to talk about forced sexual labor. Christa Paul's study of the brothel refers to the exchange of sex as forced prostitution (*Zwangsprostitution*) in order to highlight both the inadequacy and inappropriate nature of the term "prostitution." In applying the term "forced," she draws parallels to the other types of forced labor in the concentration camps. Christl Schikorra's work labels sexual labor as forced labor (*Zwangsarbeit*) and by doing so, firmly stating all work in the camp was compulsory and those women "recruited" to work in the brothels were actually in an *Arbeitskommando* and thus should be evaluated in the same manner.²⁰ Robert Sommer's extensively researched monograph, *Das KZ-Bordell*, has specifically focused on the operational logistics of the prisoners' brothels while providing demographical sketches of the women forced to work as

¹⁹ Christa Paul, *Zwangsprostitution: Staatlich errichtete Bordelle im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1994); Christl Wickert, "Tabu Lagerbordell: Vom Umgang mit der Zwangsprostitution nach 1945," in *Geschlecht und Gedächtnis: Deutungsmuster in Darstellungen des nationalsozialistischen Genozids*, ed. Insa Escheback, Digrid Jacobeit, and Silke Wenk (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2002); Christa Schikorra, "Prostitution weiblicher Häftlinge als Zwangsarbeit: Zur Situation "asozialer" Häftlinge im Frauen-KZ Ravensbrück," *Dachauer Hefte* 16 (November 2000): 112-124; Brigitte Halbmayr, "Sexzwangsarbeit in NS-Konzentrationslagern," in *Schwerpunkt: Frauen in Widerstand und Verfolgung Jahrbuch 2005* ed. Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005), 96-115; Kerstin Engelhardt, "Frauen im Konzentrationslager Dachau," *Dachauer Hefte* 14 (November 1998): 223; Robert Sommer, "Der Sonderbau: Die Errichtung von Bordellen in den nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern" (master's thesis, Institut für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaft der Humboldt Universität, 2003); Robert Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell: Sexuelle Zwangsarbeit in nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2009).

²⁰ Schikorra, "Prostitution weiblicher Häftlinge als Zwangsarbeit," Schikorra, "Forced Prostitution in the Nazi Concentration Camps," in *Lessons and Legacies Volume VII: The Holocaust in International Perspective*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 169-178.

“prostitutes” that debunk the Nazi assertions the women were all former German prostitutes. It is due largely to Sommer’s thorough study of the mechanics of the brothel that I am allowed to push the line of inquiry forward and examine the experience of the brothels and the ways in which the brothel and the sex it offered, were used not just by the Nazis in charge, but by the women and men within its confines.

Methodology

Writing a history of forced prostitution is fraught with difficulties because it is a subject that is considered both taboo and marginal. Memoirs, oral histories, and other valuable sources often have no mention of the “prostitutes,” nor their brothels. By “marginal,” I first refer to the interest of the Nazis themselves in the brothel. Beyond Himmler’s attention to the brothel’s capability to provide labor incentives or the solution for “curing” homosexuality, the SS certainly took voyeuristic pleasure in peeking at what occurred behind the brothel doors. Yet despite this, the SS scarcely bothered themselves with what was transpiring beyond keeping tallies and records. That is to say, as a historian, one can rely on the “official” documents to tell only the smallest piece of the story.

The official correspondence of the Nazi party is naturally a problematic source, not least because it is purposeful and problem-oriented and not explanatory.²¹ To begin, the “official” sources, which include rosters, receipts, correspondence, among other documents use Nazi terminology. This terminology relies on the heavy use of euphemism and consequently is culturally, racially, and gender biased. These documents need to be examined in much of the same way an oral history, memoir, or photograph,

²¹ On some of the problems with sources in Holocaust historiography see Raul Hilberg, “Incompleteness in Holocaust Historiography,” in *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and its Aftermath*, ed. Jonathan Petropoulos and John K. Roth (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 81-92.

might be as they too are subjective pieces of evidence. A reliance on “official documents” does a great disservice to our understanding of forced prostitution if not examined with caution. How the men and women may have utilized the brothel was of little importance to the SS and therefore left out of the documents that comprise the “official transcript” of the camp brothels.²² My assertion that certain prisoners used the brothel as a space in which to exercise their agency and implement their own survival strategies will never be proven by the “official” documents of the Reich.

Among the memoirs and oral histories of camp survivors, there is often no mention of either forced prostitution or the camp brothels. The topic of forced prostitution is “marginal” because except for the approximately 200 women working in the brothels and the extremely small group of men patronizing the brothel (for example, only far less than 1% of the prisoner population in Buchenwald and Dachau used the brothel), the brothel did not influence the daily lives of camp prisoners. In Anna Hájková’s work on sexual barter in Theresienstadt, she refers to the history of sexuality in the camps as history “collected from the margins.”²³ The marginal nature of this type of history is also a result of historians not asking questions about sex and sexuality. Survivors, whether due to discomfort or disinterest, often leave discussions of a sexual nature out of the main course of their narrative because they perceive it as irrelevant, uncomfortable, or beyond the scope of inquiry. In the course of researching this project, I have listened to hundreds of oral histories. Among most of these testimonies, the

²² James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

²³ Anna Hájková, “Sexual Barter in the Time of a Genocide: Sexual Economy of the Theresienstadt Ghetto” (paper presented at the 11th Biennial Lessons and Legacies Conference on the Holocaust: Expanding Perspectives on the Holocaust in a Changing World, Boca Raton, Florida, November 4-7, 2010).

question of sex or sexual abuse in the camps never arises. However, and even more importantly, there are many cases where the interviewer changes the subject or asks for a clarification of another detail when the survivor does broach this sensitive topic.

In his essay, “Incompleteness in Holocaust Historiography,” Raul Hilberg argues there is still much work to be done. He attributes what has not been accomplished to two reasons. The first is the inability of the historian to be more “comprehensive, accurate, or descriptive, and the second, is due to a “form of self-restraint in confrontation with sensitive subject matter.”²⁴ This dissertation asks new questions of some “new sources” but also of many “old sources”—that is the official documentation, testimonies, and oral histories of survivors. The perhaps involuntary omission of a history of forced prostitution in the camps from the Holocaust historiography canon is more likely a result of previous historians bypassing facts I argue are relevant and telling.²⁵ The camp brothels are not a hidden history, but a history that has only recently been opened and still leaves much room for scholarly analysis.

The second difficulty in writing this type of history is that it has been considered a taboo topic. Discussing sex and sexual activity has long been a topic that people argue is best left to private discussions.²⁶ When researching a topic as sensitive and important as

²⁴ Hilberg, “Incompleteness in Holocaust Historiography” in *Gray Zones*, 82.

²⁵ In *Shoah*, Claude Lanzmann interviews Raul Hilberg, Hilberg states the following: “In all of my work I have never begun by asking the big questions, because I was always afraid that I would come up with small answers; and I have preferred to address these things which are minutiae or details in order that I might then be able to put together in a *Gestalt* a picture which, if not an explanation, is at least a description, a more full description of what transpired.” Raul Hilberg quoted in Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah: An Oral History of the Holocaust. The Complete Text of the Film* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 70.

²⁶ See Elizabeth D. Heineman, “Sexuality and Nazism: The Doubly Unspeakable?” in Herzog, *Sexuality and German Fascism*, 54. Anecdotally, I have also been part of conversations at academic conferences where it is debated whether or not such discussions should take place in the presence of Holocaust survivors. Most recently, a conversation of this manner took place at the Lessons and Legacies Conference held in Boca Raton, FL in November of 2010. However, despite the reticence of some, there were two panels discussing sexual violence during the Holocaust at the Lessons and Legacies Conference in November, 2010.

forced prostitution in the concentration camps, it is absolutely necessary to investigate every source, whichever form it takes. There is a tendency for those who suffered from sexual violence to remain silent. Many survivors experience guilt over their survival and consequently render their suffering as less consequential when compared with the suffering of those who perished. Or, silence is due to the manner in which they survived, particularly when it involved sexual abuse, or consensual sexual acts. The silence of victims of sexual violence has been trans-historical, common, and has paid no heed to gender in the world.²⁷ There is often a reluctance to discuss these matters out of a fear of creating a hierarchy of suffering. However, how does discussing the suffering of one diminish the suffering of others? The Nazi treatment of its victims depended on numerous factors including “race,” “social status,” nationality, and other criterion. Not all prisoners in the camp were treated the same, therefore it is logical that among the prisoner strata there were various types of suffering.²⁸

Where stories do exist, whether in memoir or interview form, they should be taken as seriously as any other historical document—otherwise these individuals are written out of history. In this matter, I have taken the approach Jan Gross advocates in his history of the murder of the Jedwabne Jews.²⁹ Gross suggests approaching sources, including oral

²⁷ Consider the limited knowledge we have on the *Piopl*, young boys used for sex, in the camps.

²⁸ Often the historiography of the Holocaust does not have the following topic in their indices: sex, brothel, rape, prostitution. As examples, see Donald L. Niewyk and Francis R. Nicosia, *The Columbia guide to the Holocaust Columbia Guide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Niewyk, *The Holocaust: problems and perspectives of interpretation* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1992); Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996); Omer Bartov, Atina Grossmann, and Mary Nolan, eds., *Crimes of War: Guilt and Denial in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New Press, 2002). Nor do works focusing on women necessarily include these topics, see Mosse, *Nationalism*; Rittner and Roth, *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*.

²⁹ Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

histories, not from the standpoint of “a priori critical” but as “affirmative.”³⁰ He encourages accepting accounts as fact until strong arguments to the contrary are found. He writes, “the greater the catastrophe, the fewer survivors. We must be capable of listening to lonely voices reaching us from the abyss,” a methodological approach I found to be necessary in studying the camp brothels.³¹ Not only is the material sensitive, but those willing to talk about it are few—and those often discussing the brothel, or its workforce, are the “others,” that is not the direct participants, but commentators. As Jan Gross had difficulty understanding the magnitude of the story he was told, I can similarly relate my experiences and the continued work it took to look beyond the “official transcript” and move past the titillation the material provides to arrive at an analysis of how prisoners used sex—not how the Nazis claimed it was used, but its actual usage.

It is not simply the absence of evidence that has kept the stories of the women forced into sexual labor out of, or at best in the margins of Holocaust historiography. Rather it is the assumption that such topics cannot be researched either due to a lack of sources or the historians’ unwillingness to examine such events. For example, historian Joan Ringelheim concedes to not knowing how to handle an interview in which the woman admitted she had been raped. She writes, “I believe we avoid listening to stories we do not want to hear. Sometimes we avoid listening because we are afraid; sometimes we avoid listening because we don’t understand the importance of what is being said. Without a place for a particular memory, without a conceptual framework, a possibly significant piece of information will not be pursued.”³² This dissertation provides a

³⁰ Gross, *Neighbors*, 92.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Joan Ringelheim, “The Split between Gender and the Holocaust,” in *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 342.

conceptual framework through which to expand our understanding of how forced prostitution operated in the camps and how the act of sex could transform into a survival strategy.

In the course of researching this project I have looked through Himmler's correspondence in the Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde, collated brothel "receipts" in the Archiv der Mahn-und Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, and translated handwritten notes from women in the brothels to their parents from the International Tracing Service of the Red Cross in Bad Arolsen, Germany. My analysis of the array of sources I have collected reveals that prisoners, male and female, used sex, and moreover, the available moments of intimacy, to reaffirm their humanity and survive their incarceration. My broad source base has led me to maintain that the acceptance of the Nazi "transcript" citing sex in the brothel as simply part of the labor incentive program is reductive and simply false. My analysis follows the theory James Scott posits in his work, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Scott argues that power relations affect discourse and that structures of domination, in this case the camps and their leadership, prompt reactions of resistance.³³ However, since the structure of the camps does not allow for open resistance (punishable by death), resistance emerges in created spaces. I argue the camp brothel, designed to be a panopticon, is transformed into one of these spaces and within this space the prisoners, female and male, create their own "hidden transcripts" of resistance. Scott argues that often historical accounts are primarily driven by hegemonic discourse—if only for the reason that these were the actors keeping records and documentation and this public, or "official" transcript tells only a very small segment of

³³ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

the story and may “conspire in misrepresentation.”³⁴ The following chapters will discuss how the Nazi regime labeled the women in the brothels as “prostitutes” and as “volunteers” thus indicating they were complicit in their persecution. The subordinate group, in this case the women working in the brothel and their male clients, are unable to resist openly and create their own “hidden” transcript. I argue some of these prisoners used their time in the brothel to resist the camp and to enact survival strategies unknown or unrecognized by the SS. Furthermore, Scott gives three characteristics of the hidden transcript that apply to my investigation of the brothel and the prisoners’ instrumentalization of sex. First, he argues the hidden transcript is specific to a social site and actors; it contains not only speech but also actions; and the no man’s land between those in power and those subordinate is a zone of struggle.³⁵ The prisoners used the brothel in a manner unanticipated and unintended by the state. Despite Himmler’s plans, the brothel was not merely another tool of exploitation, but a space where prisoners could act once again like human beings, sharing conversations and physical contact that aided their daily struggles to survive.

***Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the
Concentration Camp Brothel***

Although the early Nazi rhetoric and policies called for the abolition of prostitution, Chapter One, “Scourge or Necessity? The Evolution of Nazi Prostitution Policy,” traces how this goal was quickly modified, with Himmler’s urging, from abolition to regulation. As the war continued and the need for the slave labor force in the camps was heightened, Himmler realized the potential sex had as a labor incentive. The

³⁴ Ibid., 2.

³⁵ Ibid., 14.

“official” reason for opening camp brothels was to increase labor production. Yet, the chapter establishes that the opening of the camp brothels also allowed Himmler to use them for his own personal experiments on male homosexuality. Under Himmler’s direction, the brothel became a “reeducation” center for studying and combating homosexuality. This chapter both details the evolution of Nazi prostitution policy, and explores and analyzes how the state used and benefited from the state-sponsored camp brothels. The conclusion of this chapter gives the necessary background and “micro-histories” of the ten camps that had prisoner brothels.

The questions of which women worked as forced sexual laborers in the camp brothels is addressed in the second chapter, “Soliciting “Cooperation”: Recruiting the Camp Brothel Workforce.” This chapter answers the question of “who” worked in the brothels and builds upon the theoretical texts of Giorgio Agamben, Eugen Kogon, and William Sofsky in order to discuss “choice,” “agency,” and “coercion” in the camp atmosphere of terror and uncertainty. These women were referred to as “volunteers” by both the Nazis and by their fellow camp inmates. As the brothels existed within the camp universe, the camp environment contributed to female inmates’ decision to “volunteer” for brothel duty. Historical evidence in this chapter reveals that the majority of women forced into prostitution were not former prostitutes, nor all ethnic Germans. The very nature of the concentration camp made nearly every act compulsory: this chapter investigates how the agency of individuals was severely limited once inside the camps (Ravensbrück and Birkenau) from which the women were “recruited.” In doing so, the problematic nature of the term “volunteer” the Nazis euphemistically labeled these women emerges. Furthermore, the inadequacies of the normative prostitution paradigm

for understanding forced prostitution in the camp brothels become clear. Under Himmler's command, the SS singled out certain strata of the prisoner population to "recruit" for sexual labor while simultaneously offering incentives such as early release from camp custody. The latter half of this chapter is dedicated to an analysis of the "recruiting" practices of the SS to solicit "volunteers" for this labor and specifically details the conditions in the Ravensbrück and Birkenau camps.

The third chapter, "Life in the Brothel," investigates how the brothel operated on a daily basis and gives insight to how the women lived and worked within its confines. It specifically focuses on the brothels in the Dachau and Buchenwald camps. The discussion of everyday life in the brothel also concentrates on the risks associated with forced sexual labor: pregnancy, venereal disease, and the fate of the women once the brothels ceased to operate prior to the end of the war. The fourth chapter, entitled "Prisoner Johns: The Eager, the Reluctant, the Curious, and the Forced," begins by deconstructing the prisoner classification schema that largely determined a prisoner's likelihood of survival. It was among the highest strata of prisoners, ethnic Germans, who made up the majority of participants in Himmler's incentive program offering sex as a reward. This chapter utilizes the brothel, as a Nazi institution, to explore the ties between race, power, privilege, and sex in a new way. It uses archival evidence from the Mauthausen camp to render a demographic and social history of the men who visited the brothel while explicating how the Nazis fastened sex to power and race. Once again it draws on the brothels in the Dachau and Buchenwald camps to depict the "experience" of visiting the brothel and to discuss how frequently men visited and under which conditions. For some of the men a trip to the brothel was not simply about sex but also

about companionship. As with the women, men could, and did, use the brothel as a space of resistance and as a means of increasing their ability to survive.

Chapter Five, “Instrumental Sex in the Concentration Camp Universe,” investigates and discusses the means by which camp prisoners utilized sex and intimacy as part of a survival strategy. Applying a discursive analysis to an oral history and memoir source base, I reveal that the brothel was not simply a location where sexual intercourse occurred but rather an available physical space where both men and women were able to resist the processes of dehumanization. Sex and intimacy became a survival tactic that I maintain should be considered another facet of “mutual assistance”—that is the formation of relationships between individuals for both material and emotional support. This chapter gives examples of how sex, even in the SS-supervised brothels, was not always abusive and in some cases helped prisoners to resist dehumanization and to reinvigorate them by providing the support needed to survive.

The brothels did not function solely for the benefit of the SS and Nazi leadership. This dissertation explores how the Third Reich harnessed the sexual labor in the brothels for its own ends, but also moves beyond this functionality to investigate the ways in which the camp prisoners used the brothel. Prisoners also used and manipulated sex and sexuality to their advantage. By drawing together the histories of the Third Reich, the Holocaust, and women and gender, I probe a hitherto under-explored element of everyday history in the concentration camps by examining all that followed from Heinrich Himmler’s decision, in the spring of 1941, to open concentration camp brothels.

Chapter One

Scourge or Necessity? The Evolution of Nazi Prostitution Policy

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler argues that Germany's soul has been poisoned by the spread of syphilis. Hitler ardently believed syphilis was a modern day plague and only the nations strong enough to eradicate it would survive. For Hitler in 1925, it was a Darwinian struggle. He wrote:

Which people will be the first and only one to master this plague by its own strength, and which nations will perish from it?...Here again we have a touchstone of a race's value—the race which cannot stand the test will simply die out, making place for healthier or tougher and more resisting races.¹

Hitler claimed that syphilis was a result of Germany's "prostitution of love."² In addition to the grievous health problems that syphilis caused, Hitler was even more troubled by the "moral devastations" that accompanied the disease. Hitler came to the conclusion that moral degeneracy, if not thwarted, would result in the destruction of the German people. At the center of his argument was the figure of the prostitute—the very personification of a "prostitution of love" and "moral devastation." Hitler's emphasis on the dangers of prostitution in *Mein Kampf* foreshadowed the significant place in Nazi policy prostitution would occupy.

Hitler's writing and rhetoric made clear that he viewed prostitution as a "disgrace to humanity" and once in power his early policy decisions appeared to mirror this view. Hitler cultivated an image of the purifier of Germany and this purification meant ridding

¹ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 249.

² *Ibid.*, 247.

Germany of its inferior racial and social elements. However, prostitution policies did not follow a straightforward path, but rather meandered and evolved as Hitler reassessed what he considered to be the needs of Germany. Prostitutes were initially considered the scourge of society but then later deemed as necessary to the health of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Prostitutes, whether held responsible for the spread of venereal disease and vice, or touted as an essential tool to thwart the spread of homosexuality, figured largely in both Nazi rhetoric and policy. Prostitution policy is perhaps one of the most blatant examples of the ability of the Nazi leadership to “coordinate” policy so that it benefited the needs of the state. Under Nazism the prostitute was simultaneously arrested for contributing to the moral decline of Germany and while imprisoned used as a sexual laborer for the economic improvement of the Reich. In both instances prostitution was used to the Third Reich’s advantage.

This chapter explores the early Nazi rhetoric and the policies that followed that ultimately led to the re-establishment of the regulation of prostitution as official policy. This shift in policy, despite Hitler’s protestations in *Mein Kampf* about the evils of prostitution, resulted in the harnessing of prostitution that ultimately resulted in the opening of ten prisoners’ brothels in the concentration camps. The regulation of prostitution was directly tied to the fight against a perceived rise in venereal disease (VD) rates following World War I. This chapter focuses Himmler’s decision to open state-sponsored brothels as a “prophylactic measure”³ to combat both venereal disease and homosexuality.⁴ The final step in Himmler’s pursuance of the regulation of prostitution

³ Alain Corbin, “The Victory of the New Strategies,” part III in *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

⁴ On the continuities and ruptures between Weimar and Nazi Germany’s regulation of VD see Annette F. Timm, *The Politics of Fertility*.

was his decision to open the camp brothels to bolster the state's economic production and war economy. The regulation and control of prostitution was directly tied to economic production and more specifically, to the war economy. This chapter documents the evolution of prostitution policy beginning briefly with regulation in the nineteenth century and then continuing with a discussion of Weimar Germany's progressive legislation. The Nazi takeover of power in 1933 was initially followed by measures that mirrored Hitler's protestations that prostitution contributed to the moral decay of Germany and needed to be eradicated. However, by the end of 1933 and certainly after 1934, the abolition of prostitution was no longer policy as the Nazis moved to reintroduce regulation. The 1939 invasion of Poland and the start of WWII saw an unprecedented widening of regulation and the institution of a brutal program of forced prostitution.

German Prostitution Policy: Fin de Siècle to Nazi Takeover

Until 1927, prostitution was generally illegal in Germany; police only tolerated "regulated" prostitutes (*Kontrollmädchen*). This policy, referred to as regulationism (*Reglementierung*), was common prostitution policy in Germany and elsewhere since the nineteenth century.⁵ Regulation generally meant prostitutes had to register with the police, undergo medical check-ups, and in some cities, live in brothels or closed-off districts known as red light districts. A special police division known as the morals

⁵ On prostitution in Germany see Richard J. Evans, "Prostitution, State and Society in Imperial Germany," *Past & Present*, no. 70 (1976): 106-29; Regina Schulte, *Sperrbezirke: Tugendhaftigkeit und Prostitution in der bürgerlichen Welt* (Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1979); Lynn Abrams, "Prostitutes in Imperial Germany: Working Girls or Social Outcasts?" in *The German Underworld: Deviants and Outcasts in German History*, ed. Richard J. Evans (London: Routledge, 1988), 189-209; Sybille Krafft, *Zucht und Unzucht: Prostitution und Sittenpolizei im München der Jahrhundertwende* (Munich: Hugendubel, 1996); Julia Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*; and Michaela Freund-Widder, *Frauen unter Kontrolle: Prostitution und ihre Staatliche Bekämpfung in Hamburg vom Ende des Kaiserreichs bis zu den Anfängen der Bundesrepublik* (Münster: LIT, 2003); Julia Brüggemann, "Through the prism of prostitution: State and society in Hamburg, 1800-1914" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 1999).

⁵ Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*.

police (*Sittenpolizei*) was responsible for overseeing the control of prostitution. If women did not comply with the control measures they could be arrested and imprisoned.⁶ In 1899, abolitionist groups campaigned for a repeal of laws governing police regulation of prostitution as police regulation was perceived as marginalizing women for their “immoral” behavior while simultaneously producing a “health guarantee” for men. Police regulationism had not deterred men from going to the brothel or red light district but was understood as possibly legitimizing their visits by offering medical care to the women. The 1907 law shifted the prior emphasis of police control of prostitution to medical supervision, while efforts were expanded to provide services for “fallen girls.”⁷ These welfare agencies (*Gefährdetenfürsorge*), set up homes and services for girls seeking to either escape or avoid a life of prostitution in the years following WWI. The purpose was to aid and rehabilitate the prostitute. Slowly municipal and provincial governments began to fund and monitor these services.⁸ At the same time, there existed the sexual reform movement that was made up of a diverse collection of groups (feminists, social democrats, birth control advocates etc.) that sought to manage the decline of the birthrate and, according to Atina Grossmann, adhered to the “motherhood-eugenic consensus” assuming motherhood to be the desirable role for women and thus encouraged and regulated.⁹

Under the Weimar Republic, sexual immorality, venereal disease (VD) and

⁶ Julia Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*, 17.

⁷ Julia Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*; Annette F. Timm, *The Politics of Fertility*; Julia Brüggemann, “Through the prism of prostitution”; Laurie Marhoefer, “Among abnormals: The queer sexual politics of Germany's Weimar Republic, 1918—1933” (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2008).

⁸ Annette F. Timm, *The Politics of Fertility*, 49.

⁹ Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 14-15.

consequently prostitution, were hotly debated issues.¹⁰ Women had gained the right to vote in 1918 and this spurred collaboration among anti-regulationist groups.¹¹ Following, in 1919 the Reich Health Office conducted a national survey to gauge the extent of VD in Germany. This survey determined that there had been a substantial rise of these diseases and that strong measures were justified.¹² During the Weimar Republic's tenure, support for state-regulated prostitution declined, but in no way was the abolition of prostitution regulation a foregone conclusion.¹³ Many women criticized regulated prostitution for upholding a double standard that punished prostitutes while still allowing men to engage unabatedly in the process.¹⁴ Social Democrats voiced objections to state-regulation stating the *Sittenpolizei's* methods and goals of regulation were no longer compatible with the new state constitution.¹⁵

In 1927 a coalition of women's groups, moderate Catholics, Social Democrats, physicians, and public health groups, succeeded in passing the Law for Combating Venereal Diseases (*Reichsgesetz zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten*).¹⁶ The law was passed on February 18, 1927 and its major provisions effectively made medical treatment compulsory, eradicated state-sponsored prostitution, and legalized (or de-

¹⁰ See Timm, *The Politics of Fertility*; Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*; Paul Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics Between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945*, (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹¹ Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*, 35.

¹² Paul Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics*, 357. Although, historians such as Richard Bessel and Cornelia Osborne argue that post WWI VD measures were an overreaction to a fictional increase in VD rate, Annette Timm's new work on the subject indicates it is impossible to really get to the exact figure and that reactions to the VD "crisis" were influenced more by fears of sexual degeneration than by actual disease rates.

¹³ Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*, 54.

¹⁴ On the effect of women's suffrage on the prostitution question see Anna Pappritz, "Die Abolitionistische Föderation," in *Einführung in das Studium der Prostitutionsfrage*, ed. A. Pappritz (Leipzig, 1919), 220-60.

¹⁵ Julia Roos, "Backlash against Prostitutes' Rights: Origins and Dynamics of Nazi Prostitution Policies," 70.

¹⁶ The legislation was passed under the second *Bürgerblock* government and was supported by the Catholic Center Party, Bavarian People's Party, German National People's Party, and Social Democratic Party. This was a widely based coalition that supported the 1927 anti-VD legislation.

criminalized) prostitution.¹⁷ The *Sittenpolizei* was thus abolished. However, it was a crime to have sexual intercourse while knowingly infected with a venereal disease, and if one resisted treatment the medical authorities could request police involvement.¹⁸ For prostitutes specifically, the reforms returned civil liberties to the women by granting their right to form associations and to protest repressive police measures.¹⁹ This legislation was the first health related law written based on the new Weimar Constitution. It was generally accepted as a significant advance in the treatment of both VD and prostitution because it was directed at both men and women and thus removed the common assumption that only females were responsible for spreading VD.

The 1927 legislation was, according to historian of German prostitution Julia Roos, “exceptionally liberal.” She argues that the abolition of regulationism and the decriminalization of prostitution tells a broader story about Weimar Germany by suggesting that Weimar era women’s emancipation successfully challenged both established aspects of sexual mores and patriarchal structures.²⁰ Weimar’s progressive and liberal relaxation of police control of prostitution occurred at a time when Europe was generally tightening control measures. For example, in France the system of regulation was expanded making prostitution outside of state tolerated “hygienic”

¹⁷ Prostitution was still illegal in towns with a population under 15,000 people. Feminists had compromised in this regard to gain the support of the religious conservatives needed to pass the legislation. Julia Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*, 2.

¹⁸ Timm, *The Politics of Fertility*, 58-61; Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*, 139.

¹⁹ Julia Roos, “Backlash against Prostitutes’ Rights,” 74.

²⁰ Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*, 4. Roos’ argument that this reform is liberatory, or an expansion of freedom, contrasts with the work of other historians who have pointed to the law’s interventionist or repressive aspects. See for example, Annette F. Timm, *The Politics of Fertility* and Laurie Marhoefer, “Among Abnormals.”

brothels illegal. Additionally, in Great Britain prostitution was not a criminal offense; however, laws for “procuring” were being increasingly tightened.²¹

Hitler and the Nazi party, according to Roos, capitalized on the backlash generated by right-wing conservatives toward the Weimar government’s perceived “moral” failings.²² The Weimar Republic, according to its conservative critics, had been soft on prostitution and as a result had failed to stop the spread of venereal diseases. After the passage of the 1927 legislation there was an increase in street prostitution, and this coupled with the perceived failure to decrease the spread of VD launched the right-wing backlash. As Roos writes, “the Nazis were keenly aware of the propagandistic value of the issue of prostitution.” Hitler thus railed against the Republic’s failure to supervise prostitutes and punish those guilty of spreading infections. Two days before the 1927 Law for Combating Diseases was passed, the Nazi publication *Völkischer Beobachter* ran a front-page article criticizing the reforms and claiming that the passage of the law would result in an increase in VD and the legitimization of prostitution as a profession.²³ Hitler himself had recently argued that the Weimar government was ineffectual in assessing the damages that prostitution and VD were unleashing on Germany. He wrote:

The struggle against syphilis and the prostitution which prepares the way for it is one of the most gigantic tasks of humanity, gigantic because we are facing, not the solution of a single question, but the elimination of a large number of evils which bring about this plague as a resultant manifestation. For in this case the

²¹ Ibid., 3.

²² Roos, “The Politics of “Immorality”: Prostitution Reform, the Conservative Backlash, and the Crises of Weimar Democracy,” chap. 5 in *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*, 177-211.

²³ See “Der Sieg der Prostitution über die ‘deutsche’ Demokratie” Das volkszerstörende Gesetz zur ‘Bekämpfung’ der Geschlechtskrankheiten als Wegbereiter der Prostituierung un Verseuchung der Ganzen Nation,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, September 29, 1927 quoted in Julia Roos, “Backlash against Prostitutes’ Rights,” 79.

sickening of the body is only the consequence of a sickening of the moral, social, and racial instincts.²⁴

Hitler ardently believed Germany to be in a state of decline and it was his goal to return Germany to its *völkisch* roots by purifying the country racially, socially, and morally. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler tied the spread of venereal disease and prostitution directly to the Jews; he was convinced the “Jewification” of life was resulting in the physical and moral decay of the German people. Hitler disseminated his view through his propaganda mouthpieces *Der Angriff* and *Völkischer Beobachter* that the Jews and communists controlled prostitution.²⁵ According to Hitler, the eradication of prostitution was integral to his goal of a new German society. Hitler believed prostitution to be so damaging that he often tied it to the other archenemies of National Socialism: the Jews and the communists.

Following the Nazi takeover of power, Hitler continued to present himself as a guardian of sexual morality. As part of his crusade to expunge prostitution from Germany, his first order of business was to do away with the “filth” that had permeated through the country. According to Hitler, “filth” included movies, vaudeville, cabaret, pornography and advertising; He wrote:

...anyone who wants to attack prostitution must first of all help to eliminate its spiritual basis. He must clear away the filth of the moral plague of big-city ‘civilization’ and he must do this ruthlessly and without wavering in the face of all the shouting and screaming that will naturally be let loose.²⁶

²⁴ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 255-6.

²⁵ On the propaganda spread about the Jewish control of prostitution, see Marion Kaplan, *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany: The Campaigns of the Jüdischer Frauenbund, 1904-1938* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979).

²⁶ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 255.

Hitler wanted Germany's youth to channel their energies into healthy outdoor exercises, believing exercise and physical training would keep sexual thoughts at bay.²⁷ Hitler's rhetoric was translated into action in the formation of the *Hitlerjugend* (Hitler Youth), *Bund deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls), and *Kraft durch Freude* (Strength through Joy) organizations.²⁸ According to historian George Mosse the Nazis, after the takeover of power, cognized the need to address the bourgeois sensibilities of the German people and this meant insisting upon the sanctity of marriage. Any deviation from the married heterosexual norm was to be vilified as a threat to the *Volk*.²⁹ On February 22, 1933, Hermann Göring announced revisions to the penal code that would grant police more authority to combat public prostitution but added that for the moment, police were using the existing legal provisions to battle street prostitution. The following day, February 23, 1933 Göring issued another decree suppressing lodging houses that prostitutes used.³⁰ These measures were undertaken to appease the religious right. Hitler wanted and needed to gain the support of the religious conservatives and understood VD and prostitution policy to be the avenues through which to gain this favor. In a speech to the Reichstag on March 23, 1933, Hitler demonstrated his commitment to defending Christian values and as a result the very next day the Enabling Act was passed with the support of the Catholic Center Party.

To continue to court the support of the religious right, Hitler passed several decrees against public immorality. Hitler passed the "Law for the Alteration of Criminal

²⁷ Ibid., 254.

²⁸ On the Hitler Youth, see Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth*; on the BDM see Dagmar Reese, *Growing Up Female in Nazi Germany*, trans. William Templer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); and, on the "Strength through Joy" program, see Hans Peter Bleuel, *Strength Through Joy*.

²⁹ Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, 158-9.

³⁰ Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*, 214-15.

Provisions on May 26, 1933 that made street prostitution illegal.” This legislation gave the police the ability to raid heavy sex-traffic areas and make mass arrests of prostitutes.³¹ As a result of the new law, thousands to tens of thousands of women were arrested in the summer of 1933.³² The new law was drafted with ambiguous language and written for broad interpretation to facilitate mass arrests. Under the law women merely “suspected” of promiscuity could be arrested.³³ This law, a further restriction of individual rights, followed behind the “Emergency Decree for the Protection of People and State,” passed on February 28, 1933 suspending constitutional rights and establishing a police state in Germany. The Nazi party made it possible to arrest and incarcerate people for crimes that were not clearly defined. Now anyone deemed “degenerate” violated the decency of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and could be arrested. The Nazi definition of “degenerate” was both ambiguous and changing. Hans Frank, the Minister of Justice in Bavaria and later Governor-General of occupied Poland, gave a speech in October of 1938 illustrating this ambiguity:

National Socialism regards degeneracy as an immensely important source of criminal activity... This state of being degenerate or egenerate, this different or alien quality, tends to be rooted in miscengenation between a decent representative of his race and an individual of inferior racial stock... The complete degenerate lacks all racial sensitivity and sees it as his positive duty to harm the community or a member thereof.”³⁴

The lack of clarity as to who was “degenerate” or an “asocial,” worked to the party’s advantage. The fact that the Nazi party never fully cemented its ideology made it so lethal because it could be shaped according to Hitler’s will.

³¹ Specifically, these changes were made to Clause 361/6 under the *Gesetz zur Abänderung strafrechtlicher Vorschriften*, see *Reichsgesetzblatt*, Section 1, May 29 1933. Also mentioned in Julia Roos, “Backlash against Prostitutes,” 82.

³² Gisela Bock, “Keine Arbeitskräfte in diesem Sinne: Prostituierte im Nazi-Staat,” in “*Wir sind Frauen wie andere auch!:*” *Prostituierte und ihre Kämpfe*, ed. Pieke Biermann (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1980), 83.

³³ Michaela Freund-Widder, *Frauen unter Kontrolle*.

³⁴ Quoted in Hans Peter Bleuel, *Strength Through Joy*, 209.

These early pronouncements made it sound as though sexual deviancy would not be tolerated and that Hitler would eradicate prostitution and perhaps even VD. Hitler's early actions had won him the support of the religious conservatives. Head of the Protestant West German Morality Association (*Westdeutscher Sittlichkeitsverein*), Adolf Sellmann, praised Hitler for his actions.

It was a great and wonderful day for us when our leader and Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler took charge of the government on January 30, 1933. At one blow, everything changed in Germany. All trash and filth disappeared from the public. Once again, the streets of our cities were clean. Prostitution, which previously had been able to spread in our big cities as well as in many smaller towns, was scared away...³⁵

Yet, Hitler neither authorized nor instituted a concerted propaganda initiative to support the idea of sexual purity. A campaign against promiscuity never existed.³⁶

Despite Hitler's strong rhetoric and early actions aimed at ridding Germany of prostitution, the Nazi party quickly fell back to a policy of regulation. Historian Annette Timm writes, "Early pronouncements against the scourge of prostitution, emanating from Adolf Hitler himself, misled anti-prostitution activists into assuming that the new regime would not tolerate extra-marital sexual activity in any form."³⁷ As early as the autumn of 1933 there was movement back toward policies of police regulation. In October 1933 Essen reintroduced police regulation in the form of confining prostitutes into certain areas.³⁸ The police authorities in Essen based their new laws on the emergency decree of February 28, 1933; soon after Hamburg and Bremen followed with the reintroduction of

³⁵ Quoted in Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*, 215.

³⁶ Timm, *The Politics of Fertility*, 162.

³⁷ "Die Prostitutionsfrage," *AGfV Mitteilungen* no. 3 (February 14, 1934): 6; "Die Prostitutionsfrage," *AGfV Mitteilungen* no. 3 (February 14, 1934): 1-9; "Stellungnahme zur Prostitutionsfrage," *Christliche AGfV Mitteilungen* no. 21 (September 1, 1937): 1-3, quoted in Timm, *The Politics of Fertility*, 426.

³⁸ Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*, 216.

police regulation.³⁹ The Inner Mission, a Lutheran welfare organization, filed a petition in the fall 1933 arguing that a move toward regulation would endanger the goals of the National Socialist state and put the racial purity or moral well-being of Germans at risk.⁴⁰ Many church organizations used Nazi rhetoric to make their point that a move toward regulation would not be welcomed and perceived this as the state sanctioning pre- and extra-marital sex.⁴¹ However, religious conservatives were ultimately unable to slow the renewed evolution of prostitution policy toward regulation.

Many changes in the political climate accompanied the policy shift to regulation. Following the return of the Saarland to Germany in 1935, Hitler quickly moved to repress many Catholic and Protestant associations and as a result their influence was quelled.⁴² Second, the demise of the women's movement coupled with the defeat of the idea that women and men would be equal under Nazism, propelled the Nazi regime to re-establish regulationism.⁴³ The third and perhaps most important political shift was the appointment of Heinrich Himmler as the chief of the German Police in June 1936. The police had gained power since the Nazi takeover and unlike the religious conservatives, the police believed regulation to be the most successful means of managing prostitution. Himmler fervently believed in regulated brothels, his promotion expanded both his and the police's influence and greatly impacted the shaping of prostitution policy.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Roos, "Backlash against Prostitutes' Rights," 84.

⁴¹ Timm, *The Politics of Fertility*, 178.

⁴² In March 1935 mass arrests of members of the Lutheran Confessing Church took place due to their stance opposing a Reich church under the control of the state.

⁴³ See Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*; on the Weimar women's movement see Julia Sneeringer, *Winning Women's Votes: Propaganda and Politics in Weimar Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

Regulating Prostitution: State-Sponsored Brothels in Nazi Germany

Annette Timm's work on fertility politics in Germany argues that we should not take the Nazi rhetoric and policies as simply contradictory policies, but rather look at the underlying consistency: the Nazis, at every point of their governance, harnessed sexuality to fit their needs. The nature of Nazi Prostitution policy, despite its massive changes, proves that what did remain consistent was the importance of sexuality to the Reich. After the takeover of power in January 1933, it was important to garner support and to establish the government as a purifying protector of German, and largely bourgeois, ideals. Once power was consolidated, prostitution was seen not as a scourge, but as an "opportunity." Prostitution in Nazi Germany was not abolished, but quite the opposite; it was controlled and encouraged by the state.⁴⁴ In fact, the regime decided that brothels were *necessary* for the protection of the public health.⁴⁵

One potent reason for the move toward policies of regulated prostitution was the perceived needs of the military. As Hitler moved Germany toward a state of war preparation, the *Wehrmacht* deemed brothels to be a crucial part of controlling the spread of VD among the soldiers. In February 1936 the Supreme Command of the *Wehrmacht* declared brothels an "urgent necessity."⁴⁶ The reintroduction of regulation is another example proving that the Nazis were not uniformly hostile to sex, but as Dagmar Herzog argues, Nazism fundamentally

perpetuated and intensified certain aspects of the sexually liberalizing tendencies underway since the early twentieth century, even as it sought to harness such

⁴⁴ Prostitution was never allowed in buildings or homes where children lived. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, 167.

⁴⁵ Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereafter BA) R55/1221. Bl. 123-124.

⁴⁶ BA R36/1827; Annette F. Timm, "The Ambivalent Outsider: Prostitution, Promiscuity, and VD Control in Nazi Berlin," in *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*, eds. Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Christa Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 12.

liberalizations—and the growing popular preoccupation with sex—to a savagely racist, elitist, and homophobic agenda. This was the distinct innovation of Nazi sexual politics. The goal was not so much to suppress sexuality. Rather the aim was to reinvent it as the privilege of nondisabled, heterosexual “Aryans”...⁴⁷

Prostitution was another tool the Nazis utilized to their benefit while simultaneously espousing their worldview that resulted in arresting women for the act of prostitution.

The Nazi government had three primary motivations behind opening military brothels. First, World War I had taught the German military that soldiers looked for sex wherever they were stationed. To impede the spread of VD, medically regulated brothels were opened. Military brothels were considered the best weapon available for fighting VD outbreaks among the troops. Second, as the German army invaded and conquered other countries, their “*Untermensch*” (“subhuman”) populations fell under German control. These so-called inferior races—including Poles, Russians, Roma, and Sinti—were a threat to the “purity” of German blood if “racial mixing” occurred. Fears ran high that soldiers would resort to having sexual relations with “inferiors,” and these dalliances would result in racial mixing, a clear impediment to the growth of the “master race.”⁴⁸ To combat this potential problem, regulated brothels were understood as a necessity in order to avoid “race defilement.” Lastly, military brothels were established as a result of Himmler’s belief that male homosexuality was contagious and would spread if sex with a female was not readily available.⁴⁹ The military, as an all-male institution, allowed fewer occasions for men to engage in sex with a woman: opening brothels, according to

⁴⁷ Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 5.

⁴⁸ Anordnung A33/40 der NSDAP, Institute für Zeitgeschichte, Mikrofilm MA127/1, ohne pag. [n. 115], quoted in Franz W. Seidler, *Prostitution, Homosexualität, Selbstverstümmelung: Probleme der deutschen Sanitätsführung, 1939-1945* (Neckargemünd: Kur Vowinkel, 1977), 180.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of male prostitution and the relationship between providing women and curtailing homosexual behavior among men, see Richard Trexler, *Sex and Conquest : Gendered Violence, Political Order and the European Conquest of the Americas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999): 128-134.

Himmler, would offer “healthy” sexual outlets to men and thus stop the “spread” of homosexuality.

Military brothels were not a Nazi invention; this practice had long been used by Germany as well as many other nations including the United States, Great Britain, and France.⁵⁰ In Susan Brownmiller’s groundbreaking study on rape, she discusses the historical tradition of offering sex to soldiers as a reward after battle. Brownmiller states that prostitution as an institution has been “practically built in to the conduct of war,” by providing soldiers easy access to prostitutes.⁵¹ During World War I, German physicians recommended to the state that soldiers practice sexual abstinence during the war in an effort to avoid the crippling effects of venereal disease.⁵² Rather than following the advice of the physicians, the German army set up medically supervised brothels throughout the occupied territories. The brothels were considered so necessary they were made mobile and set up behind troop movements.⁵³ Germany already had a tradition of

⁵⁰ Susan Brownmiller, *Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976); During WWI military brothels were opened in Great Britain in effort to “secure the health of men.” Quoted in Susan R. Grayzel, “The Enemy Within: The Problem of British Women’s Sexuality During the First World War” in *Women and War in the Twentieth Century: Enlisted with or without Consent*, ed. Nicole Ann Dombrowski (Garland Publishing: New York, 1999), 72. Historian Linda Grant De Pauw writes that among British and American soldiers during World War I it was expected “company commanders were responsible for providing their soldiers with safe sex.” Linda Grant De Pauw, *Battle Cries and Lullabies: Women in War from Prehistory to the Present* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 220.

⁵¹ Susan Brownmiller, *Against our Will*, 36 n. See also the literature on the Japanese use of “comfort women” during WWII, George Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995); Toshiyuki, Tanaka, *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War II* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996); Toshiyuki, Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution During World War II and the US Occupation*, ed. Mark Selden, *Asia's Transformations*. (London: Routledge, 2002); Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II*. trans. Suzanne O'Brien. Carol Gluck, *Asia Perspectives: History, Society, and Culture*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

⁵² In fact the physicians viewed sexual abstinence as another “sacrifice” the soldiers should be prepared to make claiming that, “The war requires great personal sacrifice from all.” Magnus Hirschfeld, “War Brothels” in *Morals in Wartime*, ed. Victor Robinson (New York, Publishers Foundation, 1943), 122.

⁵³ W. Frischauer, “The Brothel Brigade,” *Sunday Times*, Color Supplement, April 30, 1972; Magnus Hirschfeld and Andreas Gaspar, eds., *Sittengeschichte des Ersten Weltkrieges*, 2nd ed. (Hanau am Main, K. Schustek, 1964), 231; Wendy Jo Gertjeanssen, “Victims, Heroes, Survivors: Sexual Violence on the

using supervised brothels before the German Military Command decreed the brothels as crucial necessities on February 27, 1936.⁵⁴ The Nazi regime followed the precedent set during World War I, and instead of recommending abstinence for soldiers the brothels were made racially and medically “safe.”

The beginning of the war served as the catalyst that definitively changed Nazi prostitution and venereal disease policies. The Third Reich aimed to avoid the catastrophes of World War I. During World War I the German army had been crippled by two million cases of either syphilis or gonorrhea.⁵⁵ Nazi leaders quickly opened military brothels to staunch the spread of venereal diseases. In only the few short years between Hitler’s ascension to power in 1933 and the invasion of Poland in 1939, prostitutes went from being considered a “plague” to a “necessity.” At least 569 military brothels existed throughout the Reich in which approximately 50,000 women worked.⁵⁶ Brothels opened in the occupied war zones, in France, the Netherlands, Italy, and in the east in Russia, Poland, Ukraine, Latvia, and elsewhere.

On September 9, 1939, *SS-Obergruppenführer* Reinhard Heydrich issued an order regulating prostitution in the *Wehrmacht* occupied areas. He ordered the supervision of prostitutes “to protect men in the Wehrmacht and the civilian population against the dangers that came from prostitution, especially with regards to health.”⁵⁷ This decree made street prostitution illegal and called for the opening of regulated brothels, “where special houses do not exist for prostitutes the police must open them in the appropriate

Eastern Front During World War II,” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2004), 156-157.

⁵⁴ BA R36/1827. See also Annette Timm, “The Ambivalent Outsider,” 195.

⁵⁵ Franz Seidler, *Prostitution*, 126-7.

⁵⁶ Gertjejanssen, “Victims, Heroes, Survivors,” 169; Seidler, *Prostitution*, 145.

⁵⁷ BA R22/970. The order was given on September 9, 1939. Also cited in Julia Roos, “Backlash against Prostitutes’ Rights,” 88.

neighborhoods.”⁵⁸ This order was extended to include all of the territory of the Reich on March 16, 1940. Open prostitution, that is street prostitution or in non-state sanctioned brothels, was now forbidden and those women who violated the new regulations were arrested and taken into “preventative detention” (*Vorbeugungshaft*).

The decree of September 18, 1939 further extended the supervision of prostitutes to include women “suspected” of prostitution. Women suspected of promiscuity (*häufig wechselnder Geschlechtsverkehr, hwG*) were subjected to mandatory medical treatment. If the women resisted, they could be arrested for “asocial” behavior and interned in a concentration camp.⁵⁹ It was still illegal to have brothels or *Kasernierung*, yet despite its illegality, the practice was to open regulated brothels. It was not until November 1940 that Clause 17 of the 1927 legislation was formally repealed and it was made absolutely clear that the only legal form of prostitution was in a brothel.⁶⁰

The Nazi policy shift toward regulation did not go unnoticed by the German public and accordingly segments of the German population protested. Welfare agencies, including the Group for the Protection of Endangered Girls in the Association of Female Welfare Workers and the Working Group for Promoting the Health of the *Volk* argued that the move toward regulated brothels and forced registration of prostitutes actually harmed the fight against VD. These groups contended, as many had in earlier periods, that prostitutes hid and shunned medical treatment precisely because of the registration process. Additionally, it was argued that state sponsorship brothels implied sex was now risk-free and that this ignored the moral repercussions that followed from the state

⁵⁸ Der Reichesminister des Innern, Pol. S-Kr 3 Nr. 2217/39 vom 9.9.1939, Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv H 20/840; vgl. Anlage S [n. 1], quoted in Seidler, *Prostitution*, 135.

⁵⁹ On the use of “preventative custody” in arresting “asocials” see Wolfgang Ayaß, “Asoziale” im *Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1995).

⁶⁰ Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*, 282n40.

sanctioning extra- and pre-marital sex. The Group for the Protection of Endangered Girls in the Association of Female Welfare Workers voiced these concerns among others:

The National Socialist state, which has given itself the duty to protect and support the family, whose youth should be trained in self-control and ethical responsibility for the next generation, would endanger its own educational goals through the toleration, even legalization, of particular places for extramarital sexual intercourse. When the police themselves confine women to certain streets to perform acts of prostitution, when they regulate, and, for instance provide individuals who wish to engage in prostitution with a particular instructional pamphlet or even identification for which they have to pay, they are granting a concession to prostitution.⁶¹

This letter of protest criticized the Nazi regime for fundamentally failing to alter prostitution policy and for ignoring the moral ramifications that a state-sponsored regulated prostitution caused.

Not only welfare groups were concerned with the policy shift toward state-run brothels. When the military selected a house in Würzburg as the site for a military brothel, the local neighborhood protested heavily. Peter Langguth, a neighborhood resident, voiced his dismay in a letter written to the Nazi Welfare Organization for War Victims:

In the charterhouse [*Kartuase*] there are eight families living together and among the eight families four young sons have already been lost, sons who sacrificed their lives at the altar of their homeland. Three other [young sons] have been horribly wounded, and other houses also have men fighting on the front...Now, of all things, a “pleasure house” is to be opened here...⁶²

This man, as the author of the letter, spoke on behalf of the neighborhood. He was in sheer disbelief that Hitler would open a brothel in a neighborhood where so many young men were nobly serving their country. He concludes with the following:

⁶¹ Fachgruppe Gefährdetenfürsorge in der Fachschaft der Wohlfahrtspflegerinnen, July 12, 1934 in ADW, CA Gf/St 4, quoted in Annette F. Timm, “Sex with a Purpose: Prostitution, Venereal Disease and Militarized Masculinity in the Third Reich,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, nos. 1/2 (2002): 241.

⁶² BA NS19/1598, 2. Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS. The word *Freudenhausen* is often used as a euphemism for brothels, its translation means “pleasure-house.”

We gladly give each son, with good conscience and joy, to the future of our Fatherland... We would regard it, however, as a defiling of German family honor and to our sons, if the "pleasure house" is opened.⁶³

Peter Langguth's letter is indicative of the population's uneasiness with the new prostitution policy; state-sanctioned military brothels were likened to condoning a practice long considered a moral taboo. The Catholic Bishop of Würzburg supported the protests, writing, "The preservation of the people's *moral* health is equally important and necessary as the preservation of its *physical* health..."⁶⁴ Yet, Himmler proceeded to open the Würzburg brothel on August 16, 1942.⁶⁵ Prostitutes that had been labeled depraved social outsiders were now being employed by the same state that had promised to return Germany to its moral roots.

The Nazi leadership was less concerned with questions of morality, than with the sexual health and blood purity of the German people and certainly of the German soldiers. Medically supervised brothels opened for the use of the soldiers beginning in 1939, every *Wehrmacht* soldier was required to be "sanitized" after extra-marital sex.⁶⁶ These measures were undertaken so that men could enjoy "healthy" heterosexual sex while fighting for their country. The purity of the German *Volk* depended not only on the eradication of venereal disease, but also upon "blood purity," and the establishment of military brothels was meant to keep the German soldiers from having sexual relations

⁶³ BA NS19/1598, 2. Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS.

⁶⁴ Bishop's letter of November 22, 1940, in BayHStA, M-Inn/72645, quoted in Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*, 223.

⁶⁵ BA NS19/1598, 2. In fact, Himmler was not at all swayed by the moral arguments of the church. He thought the church was too conservative on its stance about pre- and extra-marital sex. His Lebensborn program was another state-sponsored program that flew in the face of the morality of the church by encouraging unwed mothers to have racially "valuable" children for the good of the Reich.

⁶⁶ Wendy Jo Gertjeanssen, "Victims, Heroes, Survivors," 130.

with non-Germans.⁶⁷ The 1935 Nuremberg Laws outlawed sexual relationships between Germans and Jews and between Germans and foreigners. The brothel was compelled, like all other Nazi institutions, to comply with these laws; therefore, the women made available to the soldiers were also German. Furthermore, in April 1939, Himmler made clear in his order (*Befehl über die völkische Selbstachtung*) that any connection with members of non-German populations was forbidden for members of the SS and police. According to the law, it was a violation against the purity of German blood for sexual relations to occur between German men and women of another “racial” population. Those men who broke this law were threatened with demotion and discharge from their SS or police posts.⁶⁸

On July 17, 1942, Himmler ordered brothels open for the use of the *Waffen-SS* and German police forces in Poland and in January 1943, a brothel opened in France for the same purpose.⁶⁹ These brothels monitored the activities of the prostitutes and subjected the women to medical examinations and inoculations. Himmler reasoned, “[in the brothel] it is possible to safely meet with a girl without the risk of bringing children into the world, that the men will become sick, or that men will come into social relationships with the Polish people.”⁷⁰ Historian Alain Corbin has referred to the WWII-era brothels as “prophylactic brothels.”⁷¹ These new institutions provided sex for soldiers in a medically supervised environment containing medical examination rooms. Additionally, in order to keep the brothels sterile, it was necessary to provide modern

⁶⁷ BA R55/1221, 122. Oberbürgermeister der Reichshauptstadt Berlin, “HGA to Oberregierungsrat Dr. Gußmann,” Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda, September 6, 1944.

⁶⁸ SS-Hauptamt ZK Az. II/a vom 19.4.1939, in: Die SS- und Polizeigerichtsbarkeit, Ein Leitfadens, hrsg. vom Hauptamt SS-Gericht, Juli 1944, S.26 [n. 118], quoted in Seidler, *Prostitution*, 180-181.

⁶⁹ On military prostitution in German occupied France, see Insa Meinen, *Wehrmacht und Prostitution während des Zweiten Weltkriegs im besetzten Frankreich* (Bremen: Temmen, 2002).

⁷⁰ BA NS 19/1913. Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS.

⁷¹ On the introduction of the “prophylactic brothel” see Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 331-370.

bathrooms complete with hot water for bathing after seeing customers. The highest echelons of Nazi power, including both Hitler and Himmler, took the spread of venereal disease very seriously and implemented the death penalty for foreigners infecting a German with VD.⁷² Himmler later demanded all members of the SS to avoid contracting sexually transmitted diseases as part of their duty to Germany.⁷³ Condom use was mandatory and SS men were required by law to carry condoms when off duty.⁷⁴ However, despite these rules and precautions, venereal disease did spread throughout both the military and civilian populations.⁷⁵

The military brothels were also opened with a very specific agenda: to stop the “spread” of homosexuality.⁷⁶ In 1937 Himmler’s speech to SS commanders declared (female) prostitution as necessary to combat homosexuality.⁷⁷ First, Himmler believed that homosexuality was largely situational. He believed through the regulation of prostitution homosexuality could be controlled, stating the state would be “as generous as we can possibly be, since one cannot on the one hand want to prevent that the whole male youth wanders off toward homosexuality and on the other hand leave them no way

⁷² This law was passed in February 1940, “Gesetze und Verordnungen. Verordnung über die Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten im Generalgouvernement. Vom 22.II.1940,” *Der öffentliche Gesundheitsdienst* 6 (1940/41): 127-128.

⁷³ BA NS 7/1084. Memo from Himmler to Russland Mitte, Berlin, September 9, 1943; Franz Seidler, *Prostitution*, 107.

⁷⁴ Seidler, *Prostitution*, 168.

⁷⁵ Wendy Jo Gertjeanssen, “Victims, Heroes, Survivors,” 121-153. In her dissertation, Gertjeanssen also discusses the fears of female “spies” having sexual relations with German men and therefore putting the security of Germany at risk, 164-168.

⁷⁶ Several historians have written on the spread of homosexuality and its perceived impact on masculinity, see Mosse, *Nationalism*, 166-167; Hans Peter Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany*; Andrew Hewitt, *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism & the Modernist Imaginary* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Andreas Huyssen, “Fortifying the Heart -- Totally: Ernst Jünger’s Armored Texts,” *New German Critique* 59, no. 2- 23 (Spring/Summer 1993): 3-23; Joerg Meve, “Homosexuelle Nazis”. *Ein Stereotyp in Politik und Literatur des Exils* (Hamburg: MaennerschwarmSkript, 1990); Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*; Plant, *Pink Triangle*; Wolfgang Roll, “Homosexual Inmates in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 31, no. 4 (1996); Seidler, *Prostitution*.

⁷⁷ Himmler, Bad Tölz Speech, 58, [n. 69], quoted in Mosse, *Nationalism*, 168.

out.”⁷⁸ Himmler not only thought regular access to heterosexual sex would stop the spread of homosexual practice, but also put confidence in it as able to “cure” the homosexual of their “deviancy.”⁷⁹

Himmler and other Nazi leaders also believed virility was linked to military might and, in most cases, sterilized men were considered unfit to be soldiers. Perhaps Himmler perhaps with this idea in mind, used the brothels as sexual laboratories to collect sperm for analysis. In 1939, Himmler wrote a confidential memo asking the prostitutes to collect the ejaculated sperm from soldiers for later analysis.⁸⁰ It is probable that Himmler sought definitive scientific proof that as the “master race” of German men was more virile and physically superior than other men.⁸¹ Details on these experiments are not readily found due to the secrecy pledges all parties were required to sign.⁸² Nevertheless, these experiments were undoubtedly tied to the pseudo-biology of building the “master race” and serve as another example of the state harnessing sexuality for its own ends.

In addition to the military brothels, brothels for foreign workers opened to deter sexual relations between Germans and non-German. These brothels played an important role in maintaining Nazi racial policies. After the campaign in the East slowed, the German High Military Command relaxed its prohibition of foreign workers in Germany

⁷⁸ Heinrich Himmler, *Geheimreden 1933 bis 1945 und andere Ansprachen*, ed. Bradley F. Smith and Agnes F. Peterson (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1974), 93-105 as quoted in Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 12.

⁷⁹ On Himmler’s ideas about “curing” homosexuality, see Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, 166-167; Andrew Hewitt, *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism and the Modernist Imaginary* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996); Andreas Huyssen, “Fortifying the Heart -- Totally: Ernst Jünger's Armored Texts,” Joerg Meve, “Homosexuelle Nazis”. *Ein Stereotyp in Politik und Literatur des Exils* (Hamburg: MännerschwarmSkript, 1990); Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*; Richard Plant, *Pink Triangle: the Nazi War Against Homosexuals* (New York: H. Holt, 1986); Wolfgang Röhl, “Homosexual Inmates in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 31, no. 4 (1996); Seidler, *Prostitution*.

⁸⁰ Seidler, *Prostitution*, 135; Gertjeanssen, “Victims, Heroes, Survivors,” 162.

⁸¹ Annette F. Timm, “Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Militarized Masculinity” in Dagmar Herzog, *Sexuality and German Fascism*, 254.

⁸² Hans Peter Bleuel, *Strength Through Joy*, 227.

and forced Polish workers to move west and work in the Reich.⁸³ The influx of foreign workers raised concerns about sexual relations occurring between Germans and non-Germans; again the state-regulated brothel became a crucial component in upholding Nazi racial policies.⁸⁴ By mid-1940 there were about 700,000 conscripted Poles working in Germany. As the war continued these numbers kept rising and peaked at 7.8 million foreign workers in the summer of 1944.⁸⁵ In an effort to stem the incidents of contact between Germans and foreigners, in December 1940 Hitler ordered brothels for foreign workers to open and to be run by the police.⁸⁶ In November 1941 there were sixty brothels for foreign forced laborers and within these brothels approximately 600 women working.⁸⁷ The brothels provided “racially appropriate” sexual outlets for men as a bulwark against the “*Untermenschen*” seeking relations with Germans. Himmler wrote, “If we don’t build brothels, millions of foreigners will be set loose on German girls and women. I have to build a brothel to avoid even greater problems.”⁸⁸ Martin Bormann, in his capacity as secretary to Hitler, followed Himmler and decreed all brothels had to follow the racial purity laws and “that in areas with an elevated foreign-worker populations, there must be brothels built.”⁸⁹ The brothels had to be staffed by non-German women in order to uphold racial policies and German men were not allowed to

⁸³ Ulrich Herbert, “Labour and Extermination: Economic Interest and the Primacy of Weltanschauung in National Socialism,” *Past and Present*, no. 138 (Feb., 1993): 144-195, 165.

⁸⁴ On relationships between Germans and foreigners see Patricia Szobar, “Telling Sexual Stories in the Nazi Courts of Law: Race Defilement in Germany, 1933 to 1945,” in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, 131-163; and Birthe Kundrus in the same volume, “Forbidden Company: Romantic Relationships between Germans and Foreigners, 1939 to 1945,” 201-222.

⁸⁵ Ulrich Herbert, “Labour and Extermination,” 149.

⁸⁶ Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 117-118; Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler’s Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 130-131.

⁸⁷ Gertje Janssen, 223.

⁸⁸ BA NS 19/3400, Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS.

⁸⁹ BA NS 51/265, Kanzlei des Führers der NSDAP.

enter.⁹⁰ Brothels were the answer to the problems posed by the expansion of Germany into foreign territories. In the brothel, sex was medically supervised and occurred only between people of the same race to keep Nazi blood “pure.” The state-sponsored “prophylactic” brothel was the Nazi answer to slowing the spread of venereal disease and putting an end to race “defilement.” Sex had a purpose and that was to maintain the morale and “health” of German men as well as protecting German women for their role as producers of racially valuable German babies.

Prisoners’ Brothels in the Concentration Camps

In the spring of 1941, *SS Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler returned from a visit to the I.G. Farben plant outside of Oświęcim, Poland, excited by the success he had witnessed in raising labor productivity through the implementation of an incentive program. The program included sex in a brothel as a reward for diligent labor. I.G. Farben had worked an agreement out with Commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss, allowing Auschwitz III (Monowitz) prisoners to work in the I.G. Farben Buna Rubber plant.⁹¹ Höss and the I.G. Farben representatives realized prisoners were working less efficiently than “normal” workers and sought to remedy the problem by offering labor incentives. Prisoners working in Auschwitz III were underfed, exhausted, and brutally treated, thus explaining the low production levels.⁹² However, instead of remedying the working conditions, an incentive program was laid out. In a weekly brief, I.G. Farben summarized the new policies:

⁹⁰ Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender*, 225.

⁹¹ I.G. Farben’s plant at Auschwitz was one of three private industries employing camp laborers prior to 1941. The other two private industries were Volkswagen and Steyr-Daimler-Putsch. See Michael Thad Allen, *The Business of Genocide: The SS, Slave Labor, and the Concentration Camps* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 167-171.

⁹² On conditions in Buna, see Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*.

With the camp commandant, we have already had many discussions about the implementation of an incentive system with the goal of increasing the labor production of the prisoners. It has been agreed that prisoners when reaching certain quotas will receive benefits in the form of food rations, the potential of earning a release, or visits to the brothel.⁹³

Himmler saw the potential of this incentive system if applied to the existing and readily available camp workforce.

Coinciding with Himmler's trip to the I.G. Farben plant was his inspection of the Mauthausen concentration camp with *SS Gruppenführer* Oswald Pohl on May 31, 1941.⁹⁴ The inspection was motivated by an interest in the labor productivity of Mauthausen's quarry; Mauthausen was part of the SS-owned German Earth and Stone works (*Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke*; DESt) using prisoner labor to extract granite for the Reich's building projects. Pohl, as head of the *SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamtes* (SS Economic and Administrative Main Office), was in charge of overseeing the economic activities of the camps and had an interest in raising camp productivity. On October 8, 1941, four months following the visit to Mauthausen and its sub-camp, Gusen, Himmler ordered a brothel established in Mauthausen.⁹⁵ The brothel opened for business on June 11, 1942.⁹⁶

In an effort to keep the German civilian and military population free of VD and to protect their blood "purity," medically safe state-sponsored brothels opened throughout the Reich and its occupied territories. The rationale behind the reintroduction of regulation and the establishment of the brothels was the protection of Germans from

⁹³ Archiwum Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau (hereafter, APMA) APMA D-Au III/4/2, Nr. inw. 151234. *Wochenblatt der IG Farben* Nr. 54, June 1-6, 1942.

⁹⁴ Hans Maršálek, *Die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Mauthausen: Dokumentation*, 2nd ed. (Vienna: Österr. Lagergemeinschaft Mauthausen, 1980), 117.

⁹⁵ Robert Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 112.

⁹⁶ Archiv Der KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen (hereafter, AGM) AGM K 2/1. *Mauthausen Bordell Buch Block*, 3.

disease and miscegenation but regulation, with regards to prostitution in the concentration camps, held another purpose: economic productivity. This was the main motivation behind Himmler's decision to open camp brothels, but, as this dissertation argues, the brothels in actuality functioned in ways that deviated from their purpose as economic incentives. The brothels were opened in ten concentration camps and both staffed and patronized by camp inmates; yet, officially both Nazi racial and VD policies were still upheld in the brothels. Despite the brothel workers and clients being camp prisoners, they still were tested for VD. Why was Himmler concerned with camp prisoners contracting VD? Furthermore, why did prisoners need "appropriate" sexual outlets or labor incentives in a camp system where all labor was compulsory?

Himmler's primary motivation for opening camp brothels was economic. When the first concentration camps opened in 1933, unemployment remained high in Germany. For this reason, labor for camp prisoners was used as a punishment and not for productive reasons. Germans were intolerant of prisoners doing jobs that could be given to unemployed civilians. Additionally, economic policy played a large role in the formation of Hitler's "Thousand Year Reich" and the regime's goals could not be achieved without the coordination of economic policies with Nazi ideology. A specific tenet of Nazi ideology was to value "productivism," the process of achieving cultural purity through production.⁹⁷ Productivism was not simply about economics and manufacturing, but about defining these processes as *German*. Therefore, concentration camp prisoners, as unfit for society, originally could not be "productive" but only labor as punishment. As a

⁹⁷ Thad Allen, *The Business of Genocide*, 34; see also Götz Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial Warfare, and the Nazi Welfare State* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007); Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, *Architects of Annihilation: Auschwitz and the Logic of Destruction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003)

result, labor in the camps was futile; for example, prisoners filled carts of sand only to dump them back out and begin again.⁹⁸ Early on labor in the camps was not economically relevant, but rather served to further punish and demoralize prisoners.⁹⁹ According to Theodor Eicke, Inspector of the Concentration Camps, labor was a means of policing prisoners; prisoners were kept busy so that they had little time to organize themselves, or to revolt against their SS oppressors. To emphasize labor's role as punishment and not as an economic tool, Eicke decreed the following: "prisoners, without exception, are obligated to carry out physical labor. Status, profession, and background will not be taken into account."¹⁰⁰ If prisoner labor was initially used to benefit the Third Reich economically, it would have logically followed that camp prisoners would have been assigned labor tasks according to their training in effort to maximize efficiency, yet this was not the case. Historian Falk Pingel concluded "Political objectives, not the maximization of profit," were the "main driving force behind the economic activities of the SS."¹⁰¹

Labor continued to be a method of dehumanization and punishment for camp inmates until several factors changed in Germany. First, unemployment rates fell, which accordingly changed the German public's understanding of the employment of camp prisoners. Second, not until Hitler and his architect, Albert Speer's grand building plans for Berlin and Germany were ready did the use of concentration camp labor become relevant. As part of the Four Year Plan, Speer's building initiatives called for massive amounts of brick and natural building materials. As a result, the Flossenbürg,

⁹⁸ Thad Allen, *The Business of Genocide*, 45.

⁹⁹ Ulrich Herbert, "Labour and Extermination," 158.

¹⁰⁰ Thad Allen, *The Business of Genocide*, 43.

¹⁰¹ Falk Pingel, "Häftlinge unter SS-Herrschaft: Widerstand, Selbstbehauptung und Vernichtung im Konzentrationslager (Hamburg, 1978) quoted in Herbert, "Labour and Extermination," 154.

Buchenwald, Mauthausen, and Neuengamme camps were established for their proximity to limestone, granite, and marble quarries. It was understood that the camp inmates would serve as forced laborers mining these resources.¹⁰² The mining necessary for the Reich's building projects led to the founding of the SS-owned *Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke* (DEST, German Earth and Stone Works) to manage the mining operations in several concentration camps.

The expansion of the camp system also saw a high influx of new prisoners arrested as "asocial" or "work-shy" which added to the camp populations and necessitated more labor possibilities. By 1937 the SS was considering using camp labor for large-scale industry and correspondingly Oswald Pohl's Head Office for Economy and Administration (*Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamtes*) absorbed the Inspectorate of the Concentration Camps in 1938. Once the Head Office for Economy and Administration took control of the economic activities in the concentration camps, there were problems. As labor in the camps had primarily been a form of punishment, the SS guards had been trained to police and terrorize the camp inmates, not to manage productivity. Conflicts arose between Pohl's economic objectives and Eicke's camp policies. As a result labor remained generally unproductive largely due to the SS guards and Kapos remaining in control of work battalions.¹⁰³ Additionally, the successful invasion of Poland put millions of Poles under Nazi rule and the institution of a policy of compulsory labor for foreigners remedied some of Germany's labor shortages.¹⁰⁴

It was not until the slowed progress of the campaign in the Soviet Union in the fall of 1941 that the Reich sought long-term solutions to the labor shortages. Hitler had

¹⁰² Thad Allen, *The Business of Genocide*, 66.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 117.

¹⁰⁴ Herbert, "Labour and Extermination," 153.

counted on the over three million Soviet POWs to constitute the majority of the labor force necessary to clear the way for German settlements in the East. However, the inhumane treatment of the Soviet POWs led to such high mortality rates that this plan was no longer feasible. By the end of 1941, over 1.4 million soldiers had died.¹⁰⁵ In September 1941 there were 2.6 million vacant labor positions¹⁰⁶ and labor began to factor heavily in all decisions.¹⁰⁷ The “loss” of Soviet workers led Hitler and Himmler to consider the mobilization of concentration camp workers. Following the Wannsee Conference, Himmler advocated mobilizing camp labor and on January 25, 1942, gave the following order to the Inspector of the Concentration Camps Richard Glücks:

As we cannot count on Russian P.O.W.s in the near future, I shall send a large number of Jewish men and women who are being emigrated from Germany to the camps. Prepare to admit 100,000 Jewish men and up to 50,000 Jewish women to the concentration camps over the next four weeks. Large industrial contracts will be offered to the concentration camps in the coming weeks.¹⁰⁸

At this point selections designating prisoners as either “fit” or “unfit” were made in the camps, and under Operation 14 f 13 those designated “unfit” were exterminated.¹⁰⁹ For prisoners chosen as “fit” for labor, the labor itself served as a form of natural attrition that would ultimately result in their death.¹¹⁰

On February 1, 1942 then Head Office for Economy and Administration (*Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamtes*) centralized and consolidated the economic and administrative functions of the SS, and the agency’s head, Oswald Pohl, was given

¹⁰⁵ Thad Allen, *The Business of Genocide*, 166.

¹⁰⁶ Herbert, “Labour and Extermination,” 165.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 168. Labor policy also called into question the objectives of making the Reich *judenfrei* and the systematic deportations to the east began in October 1941.

¹⁰⁸ BA NS 19/20. Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS

¹⁰⁹ Thad Allen, *The Business of Genocide*, 123-127.

¹¹⁰ Roughly 90 percent of all Jews arriving in the east were immediately put to death, see Martin Broszat, “Nationalsozialistische Konzentrationslager, 1933-1945” in *Anatomie des SS-Staates*, ed. Hans Buckheim et al. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Walter, 1965), 125.

control of coordinating concentration camp labor. As Germany moved into a state of “total war,” Pohl stressed the new importance of camp labor by “cleaning house.” He dismissed one third of camp commandants replacing them with new camp leadership more open to cooperating with the economic goals of the camp.¹¹¹ In May 1941, the German Equipment Works (*Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke* (DAW)) took control of the workshops in the concentration camps. Labor as punishment did not smoothly transition into economically viable labor. Concerning this transition, Pohl announced, “necessary measures that demand a gradual transformation of concentration camps from their earlier, one-sided political form of organization into one which allows them to fulfill their economic tasks.”¹¹² Yet, despite the economic mobilization of the labor camps, they remained deadly institutions and inefficient labor pools. For example, in 1942 camp armaments production accounted for .002% of total production and a private firm needed to use only 17% of the labor force necessary in the Buchenwald camp to complete the same amount of production.¹¹³ In his memoir, Rudolf Höss, explains the contradictions inherent in the pull and push Nazi economic and racial policy:

The concentration camps were a bone of contention between the Reich Security Head Office and the Economic-Administration Head Office. The Reich Security Head Office delivered prisoners with the object of destroying them. It was a matter of indifference to them whether this objective was realized straight away by execution or by way of the gas-chambers, or rather more slowly through diseases brought about by the unwarrantable conditions in the concentration camps, which were deliberately not put right. The Economic-Administration Head Office wanted the prisoners preserved for the armaments industry...thousands of prisoners died at their work, since virtually all the basic necessities of life for such masses of prisoners were lacking.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Thad Allen, *The Business of Genocide*, 178.

¹¹² Herbert, “Labour and Extermination,” 173.

¹¹³ Albert Speer, *Der Sklavenstaat: Meine Auseinandersetzungen mit der SS* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1981), 61-62.

¹¹⁴ Rudolf Höss, *Commandant of Auschwitz: The Autobiography of Rudolf Höss* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 161.

Camp prisoners were considered a renewable resource and to this point, camp conditions were not significantly improved. As the need for laborers increased, the Nazi regime responded by incarcerating more prisoners rather than changing the living and working conditions in the camp that could reduce mortality rates.¹¹⁵ Violence and forced labor went hand-in-hand.¹¹⁶ The Nazi government's political and ideological *Weltanschauung* still took precedence over the economic needs despite Himmler and Pohl's rhetoric claiming both the efficiency and importance of camp labor. It was in the midst of fighting a war of attrition and the resulting economic needs of the state that inspired Himmler's decision to institute an incentive program in the camps to boost labor production.

Himmler and Pohl were particularly interested in the labor productivity of camps providing labor for the SS-owned *Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke* (DESt) and *Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke* (DAW) and sought to implement, similar to I.G. Farben, an incentive program. In a letter to Oswald Pohl, Himmler specifically dictated to Pohl what he envisioned the "incentive system" to be:

In the Buchenwald Kz, I have also gathered that there is no brothel. I am asking you to devote yourself to the question of an "incentive system" for the prisoners...I envision that the first step is a bonus allotment of cigarettes...the second step is a wage of 10-20 Reichspfennigen a day...the third step is the possibility in each camp that a man once or twice a week may visit the brothel.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Herbert, "Labour and Extermination," 182.

¹¹⁶ Michael Thad Allen, "Flexible Production in Ravensbrück Concentration Camp," *Past and Present*, no. 165 (November, 1999): 182-217, 213.

¹¹⁷ Helmut Heber, *Reichsführer!...Briefe an und von Himmler* (Stuttgart, 1968), 196, quoted in Robert Sommer, "Der Sonderbau," 43.

According to Himmler, sex, along with other smaller bonuses, should result in a major increase in productivity.¹¹⁸ On May 15, 1943, Oswald Pohl put Himmler's request in to action by releasing the "Regulation for granting benefits to prisoners," otherwise known as the *Prämien-Vorschrift*. The *Prämien-Vorschrift* tied the camp commandants to the companies employing camp laborers. The contract began as follows:

When the concentration camps were first erected after the seizure of power they had only one task: to take into custody all people posing danger to the security of the people and state...In wartime it is necessary to convert them [concentration camps] for operations in conjunction with the war effort in which they can have a decisive influence on the outcome of the war.¹¹⁹

Pohl stressed the point that prisoner labor was crucial to Germany's war effort and certain victory.¹²⁰ He stated, "prisoners excelling through diligence, prudence, good behavior and especially good performances, will receive benefits."¹²¹ At the inception of the incentive program, Himmler and Eicke planned on offering only a certain portion of the camp population incentives: the *Prominenten* and members of the camp "aristocracy." A later chapter more fully discusses these men; however, for the purposes of this chapter it is important to note that at the program's inception, incentives were only meant for *Reichsdeutsche* (ethnic german) prisoners. Pohl's initiative listed the following benefits:

1. Improved imprisonment conditions (*Hafterleichterung*)
2. Extra Rations (*Verpflegungszulagen*)
3. Cash bonuses (*Geldprämien*)
4. Purchase of tobacco (*Tabakwarenbezug*)
5. Visits to the brothel (*Bordellbesuch*)¹²²

¹¹⁸ BA NS19/2065 Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS. March 23 1942.

¹¹⁹ Archiv Der Mahn-Und Gedenkstätte Buchenwald (hereafter AMGB) AMGB 31-2-15, *Prämien Vorschrift* 15.05.1943.

¹²⁰ BA NS 3/426 SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt, "Dienstvorschrift für die Gewährung von Vergünstigungen an Häftling;" AMGB 31-2-15.

¹²¹ Archiv Der Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (hereafter, AGN) AGN Kz-Sys 1.4.4.2/1084; BA NS 3/426 SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt; AMGB 31-2-15.

¹²² AMGB 31-2-15.

The *Hafterleichterung* privilege gave prisoners the bonus of exchanging four (instead of two) letters monthly, and access, with the consent of the *Lagerkommandant*, to a haircut.¹²³ Hair often denoted status within the camp and a prisoner allowed a “short and military” haircut would be placed higher in the hierarchy of prisoners.¹²⁴ An individual allowed to grow their hair and receive a “normal” haircut would differentiate himself from the masses of prisoners with shorn heads providing a visual cue to the SS that this prisoner had been given a special status.

The second benefit, *Verpflegungszulagen*, allowed extra food rations for those distinguishing themselves through outstanding work. The food rations included vegetables or fruit, which were huge bonuses. The usual camp fare included a watery soup, and a small piece of bread twice daily. According to Eugen Kogon’s study of the concentration camp, many prisoners lost 20-25 kilograms (44-55 pounds) within the first two or three months of imprisonment.¹²⁵ The third bonus prisoners could earn, *Geldprämien*, was a voucher program devised to benefit both the prisoners and the SS.

All prisoners in the workforce should have the ability to earn vouchers...Increased efficiency will be rewarded. The amount of the reward is dependent on the achieved output, and in a single case may be RM -50, RM 1, RM 2, RM 3, or RM 4, and in a few exceptional cases the maximum amount to be rewarded per week is RM 10.¹²⁶

Each group of laborers was given a quota to be reached in a certain amount of time and the faster the quota was met, the larger the voucher given. Vouchers only carried a worth within the concentration camp and could be used to purchase goods at the camp *Kantine*. Prisoners had “savings accounts” into which the money was deposited; yet, prisoners

¹²³ AGN Kz-Sys 1.4.4.2/1084; BA NS 3/426 426 SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt.

¹²⁴ BA NS 3/426 426 SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt.

¹²⁵ Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, 139.

¹²⁶ BA NS 3/426 SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt.

were not allowed to withdraw the money. The funds could only be used in voucher form at the SS-owned *Kantine*. Directly following the reward of earning vouchers was the fourth privilege granting prisoners the ability to buy, using vouchers, tobacco from the *Kantine*. The greater the amount of the quota was surpassed, the greater the amount of tobacco given. In the camp, cigarettes served as currency on the black market. The ability to procure more cigarettes allowed a prisoner to then barter for other goods, such as clothing, food, utensils etc.

The last reward was the opportunity to visit the camp brothel. This privilege was restricted to “prisoners with outstanding achievements.”¹²⁷ To clarify, these privileges were initially only granted to *Reichsdeutsche* men—the so-called “*Prominenten*.”¹²⁸ The prisoners granted this privilege applied to the *Lagerkommandanten* for permission to visit the brothel. The Prisoners receiving permission underwent a medical examination checking for venereal disease. Initially, each prisoner had to pay 2 *Reichmarks*, via voucher, for the opportunity.¹²⁹ The prisoners, in the majority of case, initiated this process themselves. The reasons motivating men to patronize the brothel range from simply wanting contact with women, to forging relationships with the women working in the brothel. Among the men patronizing the brothel were also homosexual men forced to have heterosexual sex as part of their re-education. The motivations behind the decision

¹²⁷ BA NS 3/426 SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt.

¹²⁸ As the war continued and the need for laborers increased other male prisoners could also earn the privilege to visit the brothel. For example, in Mauthausen Spanish prisoners were granted brothel visits. However, in all of the camps these privileges were never extended to either Russian POWs or Jewish prisoners. Later chapters will discuss the evolution of this policy in greater detail as well as discuss which prisoners were “*Prominenten*.”

¹²⁹ AGN KZ-Sys-1.4.4.2/1084. In 1944 the incentive system was revised and Oswald Pohl later lowered the price for admittance to 1 Reichsmark as well as adding other privileges such as attending a movie or sporting event in the camp.

to enter the brothel were as varied as the prisoners' camp experiences and are discussed in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

All official correspondence regarding the brothel touts its functionality as a reward for prisoners surpassing their labor quotas; however, the brothel also operated as a "sexual laboratory." The Nazi government was vexed by homosexuality; yet, it did not garner the same amount of attention from Hitler that the "Jewish Question" or the VD plague of "degeneracy" did. However, for Himmler, it was an obsession. No other Nazi leader spoke, nor wrote, as obsessively on the subject as Himmler. According to Himmler's diaries and annotated book lists, he had been concerned with homosexuality since his teenage years.¹³⁰ Himmler was a member of *Wandervogel*, an organization based upon the ideals of the *Männerbund*, that encouraged close bonds between men as the basis for masculinity. Through his membership in *Wandervogel*, Himmler became acquainted with the work of Hans Blüher. Blüher, a founding member of the group and a right-wing proponent of the *Männerbund* ideology, wrote, *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft*. This text argued that sublimated homosexual feelings were an important component in bonding groups together. Himmler was uncomfortable with Blüher's assertions as evidenced in his writing.

The man [Blüher] has certainly penetrated colossally deep into the male erotic, and has grasped it psychologically and philosophically. Still he uses too much vague philosophy in order for it to convince me, even though much of it is wrapped up in learned language. That there must be male societies is clear. If one can call them erotic, I doubt. In any case, the pure physical homosexuality is an error of degenerate individualism that is contrary to nature.¹³¹

¹³⁰ On Himmler's youth, see Bradley F. Smith, *Heinrich Himmler: A Nazi in the Making, 1900-1926* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1971).

¹³¹ Smith, *Heinrich Himmler*, 16.

Historian Geoffrey Giles contends Himmler's early uneasiness with homosexuality and his confusion regarding its roots foreshadowed a later dilemma the Nazis were not able to resolve. Giles writes, "individuals in an organization that places such a high premium on male bonding were bound to stray into homoeroticism on occasion, even if it was an embarrassment to call it that."¹³² Himmler's diary entries, speeches, and other materials make it apparent he was unable to reach a conclusion about the genesis of homosexuality but worried that Blüher's findings could be accurate: that is, there was an erotic nature present in male bonding.¹³³

One reason for Himmler's vexation with male homosexuality was largely due to the problem homosexuality posed to Germany's reproductive health. He believed homosexual men were committing a grievous injustice by not producing children and neglecting their duty to raise the national birthrate.¹³⁴ In a speech given to SS group leaders on February 18, 1937, Himmler stated, "If there are between one and two million homosexuals in Germany, that means that between 7-8-10% of the population of men are homosexuals. If this plague remains, it will break the German *Volk*."¹³⁵ Himmler was particularly troubled by his and other's inability to determine whether or not homosexuality was a result of nature or nurture. Himmler's fear was homosexuality spreading and adversely affecting the growth of the German population. He voiced his concerns to his personal physician, Dr. Felix Kersten:

It's because we mean to get rid of homosexuality root and branch. They're [sic] a danger to the national health. Just think how many children will never be born

¹³² Geoffrey J. Giles, "Same-Sex Incidents in Himmler's SS and Police" in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, 261.

¹³³ Blüher first published his theories in two volumes, the first was published in 1917 and the second in 1919. Hans Blüher, *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft* (Klett-Cotta, 1988)

¹³⁴ Lesbians were not a concern in this regard because they still could carry a child if demanded.

¹³⁵ Himmler, *Geheimreden 1933 bis 1945*, 93.

because of this...when a man in the Security Service, the SS or in the Government has homosexual tendencies, then he abandons the normal order of things for the perverted world of the homosexuals. Such a man always drags ten others after him, otherwise he can't survive. We can't permit such a danger to the country; the homosexuals must be entirely eliminated.¹³⁶

Himmler wanted a surefire cure for homosexuality although, unlike the “Jewish question,” Himmler was not totally convinced that homosexuality was genetically determined and thus a racial issue. Himmler's policies toward homosexuals were more flexible and highly differentiated. For example, in some cases, Nazi officials and physicians ordered the castration of homosexuals. This “cure” was largely unsuccessful because although it removed the means of having homosexual sex, it did not eliminate the desire.¹³⁷ Other policies included the incarceration of homosexuals in concentration camps and designated a “pink triangle.”

Particularly troubling to Himmler was his discovery of homosexuals within his elite SS. The presence of homosexuals among the racial elite of Germany resulted in Himmler becoming more compelled by the “nurture” argument. The SS was a racial elite. Men seeking acceptance into the corps underwent stringent “racial” examinations and had to provide proof of their German ancestry, Himmler was left wondering if homosexuality was indeed situational and “learned.” This was a dangerous evolution of thought because if homosexuality was a learned behavior, it could be “cured” or unlearned. The propagandist SS paper, *Das Schwarze Korps*, maintained many homosexuals had been seduced into their homosexuality. The paper opined that normal

¹³⁶ Felix Kersten, *The Kersten Memoirs 1940-1945*, rev. ed. trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon and James Oliver (New York: Howard Fertig, 1994), 57.

¹³⁷ Geoffrey J. Giles, “‘The Most Unkindest Cut of All:’ Castration, Homosexuality and Nazi Justice,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27, no. 1 (1992): 41-61.

men were susceptible to seduction in their youth and with the correct treatment, and not by castration, these men could be set right, that is made heterosexual, again.¹³⁸

Himmler loathed the belief that psychoanalysis could cure homosexuality, arguing with Dr. Kersten, “You’re not going to tell me that psychiatrists can cure homosexuality. They’re a trade union for pulling people’s souls to pieces, headed by Freud, their Jewish honorary president.” It did, however, provide a convenient theory.¹³⁹ If in fact homosexuality could be corrected and was not a genetic or hereditary condition, then cases of homosexuality found among “Aryans” were acquired and in no way a genetic flaw among the “master race.” This theory made the case of Röhm and other SS members found to be homosexuals less damaging to the Nazi racial ideology. Homosexuality, as a result, was considered a social disease that was indeed contagious but not endemic to the German people.

Himmler’s theories as to how homosexuality spread and its possible cure were directly tied to the establishment of brothels in the concentration camps. Himmler believed that all men, even “Aryan” Germans, could be contaminated by homosexuality. The existence of homosexuals among prominent Nazis and SS men had provided him with irrefutable proof. He worried that an atmosphere where men were primarily with other men, such as the military, the Hitler Youth, and the concentration camps, would breed homosexuality. As further proof of his theory, Himmler reported that among the SS there was a new case of homosexuality monthly.¹⁴⁰ This fear was so potent that the

¹³⁸ Harry Oosterhuis, “Medicine, Male Bonding and Homosexuality in Nazi Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no. 2 (1997): 187-205, 192.

¹³⁹ Kersten, *The Kersten Memoirs*, 58.

¹⁴⁰ Speech to group leaders on February 18, 1937. Himmler, *Geheimreden 1933 bis 1945*, 97.

Wehrmacht leadership made the following statement with regard to the treatment of homosexuality:

The danger of homosexuality is especially acute when healthy, youthful, and virile men live together in close physical and emotional comradeship, and have no opportunity to have sexual relations or friendships with women. This holds for boarding schools, youth camps, and monasteries as well as barracks and other military facilities.¹⁴¹

The supposed spread of homosexuality was a major motivation behind Himmler's decision to open both military and concentration camp brothels. Ironically, the very ethos of the supremacy of male bonding upon which the National Socialists founded their government and many of its organizations, also inspired fear they were bringing upon themselves a plague of homosexuality. To combat this plague, Himmler not only tolerated, but also encouraged, prostitution.

Himmler's quest to "cure" homosexuality in part led to the incarceration of homosexuals in the concentration camps. In a speech given in 1937, Himmler mentioned an old Germanic custom of drowning homosexuals in a bog and remarked that it was unfortunately no longer a possibility.¹⁴² What was possible, however, was to arrest men under the newly revised Paragraph 175 that provided the legal basis for the persecution of homosexuals. It is estimated that 100,000 men were arrested; approximately 50,000 men incarcerated in prisons, and between 5,000 and 15,000 male homosexuals were imprisoned in the camp system.¹⁴³ Although it is not in the scope of this dissertation to

¹⁴¹ Oosterhuis, "Medicine, Male Bonding and Homosexuality," 196.

¹⁴² Speech to group leaders on February 18, 1937. Himmler, *Geheimreden 1933 bis 1945*, 97.

¹⁴³ On the persecution of homosexuals under the Third Reich, see Günter Grau; Claudia Schoppmann, and Patrick Camiller, *Hidden Holocaust?: Gay and Lesbian Persecution in Germany, 1933-45*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Cassell, 1995); Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle*; Heinz Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle: The True Life and Death Story of Homosexuals in the Nazi Death Camps*, trans. David Fernbach (Boston, Mass.: Alyson Publications, 1980); Rüdiger Lautmann, Erhard Vismar, and Jack Nusan Porter, *Sexual Politics in the Third Reich: The Persecution of the Homosexuals During the Holocaust* (Newton, Mass.: Spencer Press, 1997); Wolfgang Röll, "Homosexual Inmates in the Buchenwald Concentration

analyze at length the persecution of homosexuals under National Socialism, it is pertinent to point out that the incarceration of homosexuals was done under the guise of “re-education.” Methods of “re-educating” and “curing” homosexuality included beatings, heavy labor, and with the establishment of camp brothels, forced sexual interaction.¹⁴⁴ In Sachsenhausen, male homosexual prisoners were kept away from other prisoners and confined to their own block and labor battalion. These men were given the incredibly arduous task of working in the clay pit of the brickworks factory. According to Rudolf Höss, this “hard work” was supposed to make them “normal again.”¹⁴⁵ Homosexual men had a higher mortality rate than the other “minority” victim groups as a result of their “re-education.” In Buchenwald, the mortality rate for homosexual prisoners was 50% with 12% of all deaths occurring in the first week of imprisonment.¹⁴⁶ This statistic suggests many deaths were a consequence of severe treatment that included beatings. Starvation and extermination through labor resulted in the remainder of the deaths.

Medical experimentation constituted another aspect of “curing” homosexuality. In Buchenwald, SS Dr. Carl Vaernet carried out hormone experiments on male homosexual inmates. Dr. Vaernet’s work had dealt with the use of artificial gland implants, using mice as his research subjects. However, Vaernet was able to test his theory that homosexuality was a result of a male hormone deficiency in humans at

Camp”; Geoffrey J. Giles, “Legislating Homophobia in the Third Reich: The Radicalization of Prosecution against Homosexuality by the Legal Profession,” *German History* 23, no. 3 (2005): 239-254; Burkhard Jellonnek, *Homosexuelle unter dem Hakenkreuz: die Verfolgung von Homosexuellen im Dritten Reich* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1990).

¹⁴⁴ Günter Grau, “Die Verfolgung und ‘Ausmerzungen’ Homosexueller zwischen 1933 und 1945: Folgen des rassehygienischen Konzepts der Reproduktionssicherung,” in *Medizin unterm Hakenkreuz*, ed. Achim Thom and Genadij I. Caregovodcev (Berlin: Verlag Volk und Gesundheit, 1989), 91-110; KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme, ed., *Beiträge zur Geschichte der national-sozialistischen Verfolgung in Norddeutschland*, vol. 5, *Verfolgung Homosexueller im Nationalsozialismus* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1999).

¹⁴⁵ Höss, *Commandant of Auschwitz*, 95.

¹⁴⁶ Röhl, “Homosexual Inmates in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp,” 15.

Buchenwald. For this purpose, Himmler gave the order to “treat Vaernet generously” and he was given a laboratory and unfettered access to Buchenwald inmates. Vaernet’s experiments implanted a capsule releasing testosterone into the male subject, and he believed this could turn a homosexual into a heterosexual.¹⁴⁷ Dr. Vaernet bragged of his success, writing, “his [the patient’s] entire erotic mentality has been changed,” the patient no longer considered men as sexual partners and was dreaming of women.¹⁴⁸ Himmler was pleased with Vaernet’s research, but due to an outbreak of yellow fever in Buchenwald, the experiments stopped and Vaernet moved on to the Neuengamme camp.¹⁴⁹

Forced heterosexual sex, according to Himmler, could successfully “re-educate” homosexuals.¹⁵⁰ Himmler and other Nazi officials, including Theodor Eicke and Rudolf Höss, were convinced that homosexuals constantly had sex on their minds—this was part of their “deviancy.” Höss remarked in his autobiography, “Whenever they found an opportunity they would fall into one another’s arms. Even when physically in a very bad way, they would continue to indulge in their vice.”¹⁵¹ As part of the “re-education” process, Himmler began forcing gay men to go to the camp brothels. Heinz Heger, a student in Vienna, was arrested as a homosexual in 1939 and sent to Sachsenhausen. Heger’s “treatment program” included weekly sex with a woman in the brothel; he writes the following:

¹⁴⁷ Röhl, “Homosexual Inmates in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp,” 24; Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wipperman, *The Racial State: Germany, 1933-1945* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 195.

¹⁴⁸ BA NS4 Bu/50 Konzentrationslager, Dr. Vaernet to Himmler, October 30, 1944.

¹⁴⁹ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 178.

¹⁵⁰ Christa Schikorra, “Prostitution weiblicher Häftlinge als Zwangsarbeit,” 116; Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 26.

¹⁵¹ Hoess, *Commandant of Auschwitz*, 96.

We were obliged to show up there [the brothel] once a week, in order to “learn” the joys of the other sex... What pleasure was I supposed to get, when the poor girl lifted her legs and called, “Hurry up, then, hurry up!” so that she could be finished as soon as possible with a situation that was certainly just as painful for her? On top of which, I knew that some SS man would be spying on me through the hole.¹⁵²

Not only had the Nazi officials misunderstood homosexuality, but also in Heinz Heger’s case, their belief that forcing heterosexual relations as a cure backfired. Heger wrote that after being forced to have sexual intercourse with women in such a terrifying atmosphere, he became more convinced that he would never be with a woman again.¹⁵³

In 1944, Himmler sought out a method to evaluate whether or not the concentration camps were “curing” homosexuals. To this end, he devised “renunciation” tests to take place in the Ravensbrück camp. Himmler ordered that homosexuals be put in labor battalions with “whores” and that these women should “inconspicuously” approach the men and attempt to sexually excite them. If the men were interested, they were allowed sex with the women as part of their “treatment.”¹⁵⁴ What happened to the men who did not respond favorably to the advances of the women is not documented. However, it is logical to assume, based on the treatment of homosexuals in the camps, these men were probably beaten, and if they survived, returned to regular labor battalions. Due to a lack of records, it is impossible to ascertain whether or not Himmler regarded his “experiments” on homosexuality a success, but what is absolutely clear is that Himmler’s policies functionalized a basic human act, sex, and appropriated it for the benefit of the state. Sex and sexuality were functionalized in an effort to “re-educate” homosexual prisoners.

¹⁵² Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, 100.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Hoess, *Commandant of Auschwitz*, 96.

Concentration Camp Brothels

It has been the goal of this chapter to discuss the evolution of Nazi prostitution policy and to clarify the motives behind the seemingly abrupt or contradictory policy shifts. Despite the early moves Hitler undertook that appeared to be leading Germany down the path of abolishing prostitution, Nazi Germany expanded its regulatory system of prostitution to include opening brothels in concentration camps. Corresponding to Himmler and Pohl's desire to increase labor production in the camps, the first wave of brothel openings occurred in camps providing labor for the SS-owned *Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke* (DEST), and later for the *Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke* (DAW) workshops.¹⁵⁵ Common to all eight main-camps (Mauthausen, Dachau, Flossenbürg, Neuengamme, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Mittelbau-Dora, and Auschwitz I) is the fact that all were labor camps and not extermination centers. Mortality rates were high in these camps, but the majority of prisoners died due to the policy of *Vernichtung durch Arbeit*, (destruction through labor) and not due to gassing. Beginning in 1942 the Nazi government considered prisoners a labor source. Yet, Himmler and Pohl perceived camp prisoners as a renewable resource and did not improve camp conditions. Writing a history of the concentration camp brothels is laden with difficulties, the least of which is accounting for the vast differences among the camps. Each camp had a specific history, camp demographic, environmental factors, among other particular characteristics that serve as caveats in generalizing, or even hypothesizing, about "brothels" in the camps. In some areas of research it is more applicable to speak of commonalities, such as the schedule of operation, or the layout of the brothel buildings. However, this study of the camp

¹⁵⁵ Paul B. Jaskot, *The Architecture of Oppression: The SS, Forced Labor and the Nazi Monumental Building Economy* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

brothels demands that before subsequent chapters discuss these routines, who the women were, who the men were, and the motivations behind “volunteering” to work and visit the brothel, the individual camp and brothel histories must be delineated. This section provides the brief background of each camp in order to place the operation of the brothel into context, and when available, also provides the demographic and statistical information pertaining to both the brothel workers and visitors.

I. Mauthausen

On March 12, 1938 German troops marched into independent Austria; the following day it was incorporated into the German Reich. Shortly following this annexation (*Anschluss*), SS Generals Oswald Pohl and Theodor Eicke initiated plans to open a concentration camp in Austria. Mauthausen, named for the town in which it lay, was located approximately 13 miles from the town of Linz on the banks of the Danube River near the Vienna stone quarry.¹⁵⁶ The SS, in accordance with the goals of the *Deutsche Erd- und Steinwerke* (DEST), intended to use prisoner labor to extract granite from the Vienna quarry for use in the Reich’s building projects. In August 1938, the first group of prisoners, mainly professional criminals (*Berufsverbrecher*) and asocials (*Asozial*), arrived from Dachau to build the camp at Mauthausen. By the end of 1938 approximately 1000 prisoners populated the camp and included very few Jews and zero women. The population of Mauthausen rose steadily until the outbreak of war and from then on, skyrocketed. In January 1941, SS General Reinhard Heydrich, the chief of the

¹⁵⁶ On the history of the Mauthausen Concentration Camp see David Wingeate Pike, *Spaniards in the Holocaust: Mauthausen, the Horror on the Danube* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Andreas Baumgartner, *Die vergessenen Frauen von Mauthausen: Die weiblichen Häftlinge des Konzentrationslagers Mauthausen und ihre Geschichte* (Vienna: Verlag Österreich, 1997); Gordon J. Horwitz, *In the shadow of death: Living Outside the Gates of Mauthausen* (New York: Free Press, 1990); Christian Bernadec, *The 186 Steps*, trans. S. and L. Van Vliet White (Geneva: Ferni Publishing House, 1978); Hans Maršálek, *Die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Mauthausen*, 1980.

Reich Main Office for Security (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, RSHA), designated Mauthausen a category III work camp. This designation meant prisoners incarcerated at Mauthausen were not considered worthy of reform and were subjected to the harshest living and working conditions. In 1943 the life expectancy of a camp inmate working in the quarries was six months.¹⁵⁷ In early May 1945, aware of the advance of the Allied forces, the SS abandoned the camp and left it under the control of Viennese firemen. On May 5, 1945 the US army liberated the camp. Nearly 200,000 prisoners passed through the Mauthausen camp system between August 1938 and May 1945 with at least 95,000 dying there.¹⁵⁸

Himmler's visit to Mauthausen on May 31, 1941 convinced him of the necessity of opening a brothel in the Mauthausen camp.¹⁵⁹ Himmler's October 8, 1941 order established the first prisoners' brothels in the concentration camp system in both Mauthausen and its sub-camp, Gusen.¹⁶⁰ The building itself, *Baracke I*, was located behind the camp gate across from the "Statistic" (*Häftlingsschreibstube*). The brothel was built with ten "work rooms" off of the right side of a central hallway, while off to the left were six rooms serving as the sleeping quarters for the women. The brothel bathrooms were equipped with modern baths and showers. In the entry area there was a doctor's exam room and an office for the administration of the brothel. Each of the brothel rooms included a barred window, a bed, a small table, a chair, and a sink. Peepholes were drilled into the doors from the hallway into the "work rooms."¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, "Mauthausen," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed September 13, 2009, <http://www.ushmm.org>.

¹⁵⁸ *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, "Mauthausen," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed October 21, 2009, <http://www.ushmm.org>.

¹⁵⁹ Hans Maršálek, *Die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Mauthausen*, 177.

¹⁶⁰ AGM Mauthausen, Tätigkeitsbericht Nr. 2 October 1, 1941.

¹⁶¹ AGM Blueprints for Baracke I; Wingeate Pike, *Spaniards in the Holocaust*, 72.

Ten women designated for work in the Mauthausen brothel arrived from Ravensbrück on June 1, 1942¹⁶² and the brothel opened for business on June 11, 1942.¹⁶³ “Prominent” prisoners, the majority of which were German or Austrian, were granted brothel privileges. *Die Prominenz*, or *Die Prominenten*, accounted for roughly 10% of the camp population and included the prisoner functionaries helping run the camp.¹⁶⁴ Mauthausen, as a category three camp, had a high number of professional criminals in its population and these “green triangles” often rose to the position of Kapo. Kapos were ranked above the “prominent prisoners” and given extra privileges including visits to the brothel.¹⁶⁵ Although initially the brothel was open only to prisoners of Germanic descent, or *Reichsdeutsche*, other nationalities including Czechs and Spaniards were later allowed entry.¹⁶⁶

The Mauthausen brothel was open for business for two hours daily. Before being allowed entry, prisoners had to undergo a process that included first applying at the *Häftlingsschreibstube* for permission, and obtaining a piece of paper officially called a *Bordellschein*. Once granted permission, the prisoner entered the brothel with an SS guard where he then waited in the appointed waiting room for the *Blockführer* to check his *Bordellschein* against his own list. The list included the prisoner’s name, nationality, and prisoner number. Once verified, the male prisoner had a medical exam, which included a physical exam of his penis for signs of venereal disease and a prophylactic injection. Post examination the prisoner received a card with the number of the room he

¹⁶² Hans Maršálek, *Die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Mauthausen*, 115.

¹⁶³ AGM K 2/1 Bordellbuch Block 3; Andreas Baumgartner, *Die vergessenen Frauen von Mauthausen*, 99-100.

¹⁶⁴ Wingeate Pike, *Spaniards in the Holocaust*, 16.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

could enter when it was his turn.¹⁶⁷ The brothel operated until March 1945 and when it closed the women moved to another work detail and re-designated “*Häftlings-Aufseherinnen*.”¹⁶⁸

II. Gusen

In March 1942 the SS Economic-Administration Main Office (*SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt-WVHA*) assumed control of the Inspectorate of Concentration Camps and the camp system. Following this reorganization, the SS established hundreds of sub-camps throughout the Greater German Reich. Approximately 50 sub-camps were established between 1940 and 1945 under the administration of Mauthausen. Gusen, established in 1940, was one of these sub-camps. Although designated a sub-camp, Gusen was very large and held nearly 71,000 prisoners of various nationalities between 1939 and 1945. The approximate number of fatalities in Gusen was 38,000.¹⁶⁹ Prisoners worked in the Gusen stone quarries transporting heavy stones by hand and, as in Mauthausen; the mortality rate was high due to the arduous conditions. The US Army liberated Gusen on May 5, 1945.

Himmler’s visit to the Mauthausen camp system on May 31, 1945 prompted him to establish brothels in both the main camp, Mauthausen, and in its sub-camp, Gusen.¹⁷⁰ In the fall of 1942 the Gusen brothel was opened in a large stone building located between the *Jourhaus* (the SS administrative building which served as the main gate to the camp and also housed the camp’s prison) and Block 1.¹⁷¹ The brothel, completed on

¹⁶⁷ Wingeate Pike, *Spaniards in the Holocaust*, 73.

¹⁶⁸ International Tracing Service of the Red Cross, Bad Arolsen, Germany (hereafter, ITS) Häftlingskarten Mauthausen.

¹⁶⁹ Origin and number of the Gusen prisoners, accessed October 23, 2009, http://en.gusenmemorial.at/db/admin/de/index_main.php?cbereich=1&cthema=10&carticle=67&fromlist=1

¹⁷⁰ Hans Maršálek, *Die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Mauthausen*, 177.

¹⁷¹ AGM Mauthausen Camp Map.

October 12, 1942, was in plain view of the *Appellplatz* and therefore the entire prisoner population of the camp.¹⁷² It is likely that the brothel opened for business shortly after its completion. The Gusen brothel employed ten women¹⁷³ and ceased to operate at the end of April 1945 signaled by the women re-designated as *Häftlings-Aufseherinnen*.¹⁷⁴

III. Flossenbürg

In the spring of 1938, SS Generals Pohl and Eicke decided it would be beneficial to establish the concentration camp Flossenbürg outside of Weiden, a Bavarian town near the Czechoslovakian border and nearby to a stone quarry. The first prisoners deported from Dachau arrived at Flossenbürg in May 1938 to build the camp.¹⁷⁵ Flossenbürg was opened as a detention center for male prisoners—primarily criminals, political enemies, and asocials—sentenced to work in the DESt owned granite quarry. The camp population swelled with an influx of asocial prisoners at the end of 1938 and the admittance of another 1,000 political prisoners in 1939.¹⁷⁶ After the German invasion of Poland and the Soviet Union, the prisoner demographics changed to include more Polish prisoners and Soviet Prisoners of War. In 1943, Messerschmitt began to use prisoner labor to build fighter planes in its armaments plant. Jewish prisoners from Hungary and Poland began to arrive at Flossenbürg in 1944 as the SS evacuated camps in the east. There were 53,000 prisoners in the Flossenbürg camp system in March 1945 prior to the April evacuation of the camp. Approximately 7,000 prisoners died during the SS led death

¹⁷² AGM Entry Tätigkeitsbericht 12.10.1942.

¹⁷³ AGM Tätigkeits Bericht 2, entry 28.04.1943. A log entry requesting that 10 mattresses and pillows be brought to the brothel suggests that it held 10 working women.

¹⁷⁴ ITS Häftlingskarten Mauthausen.

¹⁷⁵ On the Flossenbürg camp see Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel, *Flossenbürg: Das Konzentrationslager und seine Außenlager* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2007); Toni Siegert, *30000 Tote mahnen!: die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Flossenbürg und seiner 100 Aussenlager von 1938 bis 1945*, 3rd ed. (Weiden: Verlag der Taubald'schen Buchhandlung, 1987).

¹⁷⁶ *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, "Flossenbürg," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed October 27, 2009, <http://www.ushmm.org>.

march toward Dachau; in total, nearly 97,000 prisoners passed through Flossenbürg and 30,000 died there. The US Army liberated the Flossenbürg camp on April 23, 1945.

Construction on the Flossenbürg brothel began in August 1942 but quickly ceased due to supply shortages; the original plans called for a more expensive brick or masonry structure.¹⁷⁷ The brothel, a wood structure located in a secluded spot between the prison and electric fence, was not completed until July 1943.¹⁷⁸ The building had ten workrooms meant for the ten female forced laborers.¹⁷⁹ The first date the brothel operated was July 16, 1943 with ten women listed as working in the *Sonderbau*.¹⁸⁰ The brothel continued to operate until April 16, 1945 when the SS left Flossenbürg prior to the arrival of the Allied armies.

IV. Buchenwald

Located in central Germany and five miles outside of Weimar, Buchenwald opened in July 1937 as a detention and labor camp for male prisoners.¹⁸¹ The early detainees were mostly political prisoners; however, following *Kristallnacht* in November 1938 approximately 10,000 Jews were deported to Buchenwald. The prisoner population of the camp included political prisoners, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, criminals, and asocials. Medical experiments began to be carried out in 1941 on Buchenwald prisoners including Dr. Carl Vaernet's trials attempting to "cure" homosexuality and trials for vaccinations for cholera, typhus, and other epidemics. After

¹⁷⁷ BA NS 4 FI/185 Konzentrationslager, Vollzugsmeldung 25 March 1944

¹⁷⁸ BA NS 4 FI/185 Konzentrationslager, Vollzugsmeldung 25 March 1944; BA NS 4/FI 183 Konzentrationslager; Peter Heigl, "Zwangsprostitution im KZ-Lagerbordell Flossenbürg" *Geschichte Quer: Zeitschrift der bayerischen Geschichtswerkstätten* 6 (1998): 44.

¹⁷⁹ BA NS 4/39 Konzentrationslager.

¹⁸⁰ BA NS 4 FI/391 Konzentrationslager, 16.07.1943.

¹⁸¹ On the history of Buchenwald, see Paul Martin Neurath, Christian Fleck, and Nico Stehr, *The Society of Terror: Inside the Dachau and Buchenwald Concentration Camps* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005); David A. Hackett, *The Buchenwald Report* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

the outbreak of World War II, Buchenwald—the largest camp in Germany—became an important labor camp. Buchenwald had over 88 sub-camps that included munitions factories and construction projects.¹⁸²

Beginning in January 1945, Buchenwald began to receive survivors of the death marches that swelled the camp population to around 110,000 by February 1945. As the Allied forces drew closer, the SS began to evacuate Buchenwald taking 28,000 prisoners on a death march where a third of the prisoners died. On April 11, 1945 the US Army liberated Buchenwald. Between 1937 and 1945 over 250,000 prisoners passed through Buchenwald, the mortality statistics are unknown due in part to the failure of the SS to register large contingents of prisoners.

The Buchenwald brothel was built in a section known as the “little camp,” between an infirmary and movie theatre, where it could not be readily seen. The brothel was surrounded by a wooden fence and inside there was a living room (*Tagesraum* or *Aufenthaltsraum*) equipped with benches, chairs, tables, and a window; an office for the SS guard, and a doctor’s examination room. Framed pictures brightened the walls of the brothel, curtains were hung on the windows, and vases of fresh flowers were on the tabletops.¹⁸³ Each of the workrooms, or *Koberzimmer*, was furnished with a window, bed, table, washbasin, and two doors. One door, equipped with a peephole, led to the hallway and the other to the large sleeping area shared by the women.¹⁸⁴ The established

¹⁸² *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, “Buchenwald,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed November 23, 2009, <http://www.ushmm.org>.

¹⁸³ AMGB “Buchenwald Jahresende 1943” album; Buchenwald Archiv; also testimony of Anna X in the Neuengamme brothel speaks of the flowers and furnishings, AGN Anna X, Transcription, 23, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

¹⁸⁴ AMBG Rupprecht Podszun, “Sonderbau: Das Häftlingsbordell im Konzentrationslager Buchenwald,” 8; Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 53.

peephole had a diameter of 5cm and was outfitted with a glass pane.¹⁸⁵ The brothel also had central heating and hot water in the modern bathrooms, replete with bathtubs, bidets, washbasins, and toilets.¹⁸⁶

Forced sexual laborers arrived in Buchenwald July 2 and July 4, 1943.¹⁸⁷ The brothel most likely opened for business in the middle of the month.¹⁸⁸ The brothel operated until a few weeks prior to the camp's liberation on April 11, 1945. In the weeks following the closing of the brothel the building itself was used to house sick inmates and children from the children's camp.

V. Dachau

Shortly after the Nazi takeover of power the first concentration camp, Dachau, opened in March 1933.¹⁸⁹ Named for the town of Dachau, the camp was situated ten miles outside of Munich. The camp first held victims of Nazi persecution including political prisoners, communists, Social Democrats, and Trade Unionists and in its first year the prisoner population hovered around 5,000. Dachau's prisoner population later came to include asocials, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Jews. Between 1933 and 1945 approximately 188,000 prisoners passed through the Dachau concentration camp.¹⁹⁰ Dachau was the Nazi's flagship camp and served as both the prototype camp

¹⁸⁵ AGN 2.8/839/Kat 1, 44.

¹⁸⁶ AGN Anna X, Transcription, 14, "Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

¹⁸⁷ BA NS 4 Bu/41 Krankenpapiere; NS 4/Bu 41.

¹⁸⁸ NS 4 Bu/41.A receipt exists for July 15, 1943.

¹⁸⁹ On the Dachau concentration camps see Paul Berben, *Dachau, 1933-1945: The Official History* (London: Norfolk Press, 1975); Barbara Distel, *The Dachau Concentration Camp, 1933 to 1945: Text and Photo Documents from the Exhibition* ([Munich: Lipp, 2005); Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Paul Martin Neurath et al., *The Society of Terror*.

¹⁹⁰ *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, "Dachau," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed November 19, 2009, <http://www.ushmm.org>.

and as the site for SS guard training. The routines implemented in Dachau were instituted in the other camps in Germany and its occupied territories.

Beginning in 1938 prisoners at Dachau worked to maintain the camp including grueling labor tasks such as draining marshes, building roads, and working in the small camp industries. As the war years continued prisoners also became employed in the armaments industries in over 30 sub-camps. The camp's population swelled as the SS evacuated camps in the east and led prisoners on death marches westward. As the US Army drew closer, the SS evacuated the camp on death marches heading south. The US Army liberated the camp on April 29, 1945 finding over 30 railway cars of dead bodies. The death count in Dachau is unknown.

Located between the disinfection barrack and the camp's plant nursery, the Dachau brothel opened on April 18, 1944.¹⁹¹ Women from Ravensbrück, according to the entry books for Dachau (*Zugangsbucher*), were registered into the camp two days prior.¹⁹² Prisoners wishing to visit the brothel had to abide by a standardized procedure. The process included applying for permission, obtaining a brothel pass, and undergoing a physical exam. Once in the brothel the male prisoner's name and number were noted and they then waited for their turn to have fifteen minutes with the assigned woman. The brothel operated until December 1944.¹⁹³

VI. Sachsenhausen

Sachsenhausen, located north of Berlin in the suburb of Oranienburg, opened in the summer of 1936. Sachsenhausen was somewhat unique due to its unusual camp

¹⁹¹ Engelhardt, "Frauen im Konzentrationslager Dachau," 223.

¹⁹² USHMM RG-04.006 M Reel 5. Zugangsbuch Dachau.

¹⁹³ Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Dachauer Tagebücher: die Aufzeichnungen des Häftlings 24814* (Munich: Kindler, 1997), 418.

layout in the shape of a triangle and first incarcerated political prisoners and criminals. Following *Kristallnacht*, Jews arrived in Sachsenhausen mixing in with the camp population expanded to include homosexuals, Roma and Sinti, Soviet POWs, and asocials. Beginning in 1941 medical experimentation, including castrations and sterilization, occurred regularly. Prisoners deemed too weak or unfit for work were euthanized. Prisoners in Sachsenhausen were sentenced to hard labor in the DEST owned brick factory called *Klinkerwerk*. In 1941, *Klinkerwerk* was made into a sub-camp of Sachsenhausen; Sachsenhausen expanded to include more than 40 sub-camps, most providing workers for the armaments industry. There were more than 65,000 prisoners in the Sachsenhausen camp complex in January 1945. The SS led a death march of 33,000 prisoners from Sachsenhausen on April 21, 1945 just one day prior to the Soviet Army's liberation of the camp.

Construction on the brothel, or *Sonderbau*, began in the late spring of 1944 and concluded in July 1944.¹⁹⁴ The brothel was built with ten workrooms, a waiting room, and two sleeping quarters. The brothel was attached to the rear of the pathology building and built above the morgue.¹⁹⁵ The camp physician, Dr. Baumkötter, worked in the pathology building and was entrusted with overseeing the brothel.¹⁹⁶ The brothel opened for business on August 8, 1944 and allowed entry were the so-called "*Prominenten*," *Reichsdeutsche*, and Norwegian prisoners.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Archiv der Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen (hereafter, AGS) Bericht/Brief 10.1.62 No. V/10, Walter Klose, "Ehem. Häftling Walter Klose über Sonderbau (Bordell), Pathologie im Krankenhaus"; Odd Nansen, *From Day to Day*, trans. Katherine John (New York, Putnam's Sons, 1949), 187.

¹⁹⁵ BA NS 3/3774; AGS Bericht 12.02.1962 JD 1/31 Bl. 6-78, 71, Calic, Edouard "Denkschrift über die Vorgänge im KZ Sachsenhausen für das Schwurgericht Münster"; AGS D30 A 82A, 121-122.

¹⁹⁶ AGS JD 1/9, 58.

¹⁹⁷ Nansen, *From Day to Day*, 187.

VII. Neuengamme

The concentration camp Neuengamme was located outside of Hamburg on the site of an abandoned brick works factory. Neuengamme was originally opened in December 1938 as a sub-camp of Sachsenhausen, but in June of 1940 it was made its own camp. Neuengamme's first prisoners were transported from Sachsenhausen in December 1938 to build the camp facilities. By the end of 1940, there were over 3000 prisoners—the majority of which were German.¹⁹⁸ As the war progressed a large portion of the camp population were Soviet prisoners as well as Poles and other members of the occupied countries.

Prisoners in Neuengamme worked in the brickworks factory (owned by the DEST), a canal building project on the Elbe, and in camp construction projects. Sub-camps opened sending prisoners to work in various industries including munitions factories. Neuengamme had over 80 sub-camps in Northern Germany and over 20 in Hamburg.¹⁹⁹ In 1942 the SS began to systematically kill prisoners unable to work and began to carry out medical experiments on its prisoner population. Between 1938 and 1945, over 100,000 prisoners passed through Neuengamme and it is estimated that over 50,000 prisoners died in Neuengamme. In April 1945 a death march set out from Neuengamme toward the Baltic Sea involving nearly 9,000 prisoners. The SS murdered the remaining 3,000 prisoners in the camp prior to the arrival of the Allied forces arriving on May 4, 1945.

The prisoners' brothel at Neuengamme was built in early 1944 occupying a space between the infirmary and the industrial yard. Barbed wire surrounded the brothel and its

¹⁹⁸ Hermann Kaienburg, *Das Konzentrationslager Neuengamme 1938-1945* (Bonn: Dietz, 1997).

¹⁹⁹ *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, "Neuengamme," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed November 10, 2009, <http://www.ushmm.org>.

location placed in the shadow of a watchtower.²⁰⁰ The brothel was outfitted with modern amenities including sinks and bidets for washing with hot water.²⁰¹ On opening day, May 29, 1944, privileged prisoners—mainly *Reichsdeutsche*—were the first customers.²⁰² The men appealed for permission in advance, and, if granted, they entered the brothel through the watchtower to begin the “sanitizing” process. Men waited in the waiting room, without SS supervision, furnished with tables and chairs.²⁰³ *SS Rapportführer* Willi Dreimann oversaw the entire process.²⁰⁴

VIII. Mittelbau-Dora

Mittelbau-Dora, located at the southern foot of the Harz Mountains outside the town of Nordhausen, opened as a sub-camp of nearby Buchenwald on August 28, 1943. Best known for its role in V-2 rocket manufacturing, Mittelbau-Dora became its own camp in October 1944 and its complex grew to encompass over 40 sub-camps. As the Nazis faced Allied air raids on their industrial complexes the decision was made to create an underground industrial complex at Mittelbau-Dora.

Camp prisoners were employed by *Mittelwerk GmbH* to make retaliatory V-2 and V-1 ballistic missiles in the underground tunnels. Mittelbau-Dora’s tunnels made camp conditions especially horrific; prisoners lived and worked without adequate air, water, and light. These conditions coupled with the forced labor, disease, and insufficient

²⁰⁰ Map of Neuengamme, Camp archive, Visitors center; Hermann Kaienburg, *Vernichtung durch Arbeit: der Fall Neuengamme: die Wirtschaftsbestrebungen der SS und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Existenzbedingungen der KZ-Gefangenen* (Bonn: Dietz, 1990), 411.

²⁰¹ AGN 2.8/1638 “Abschrift eines Interviews mit einem Ehemaligen Häftling über das Lagerbordell in Neuengamme,” Herr N.N., 1.

²⁰² AGN Aussage von Ausloos, 33; AGN Anna X, Transcription, 18, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

²⁰³ AGN 2.8/1638 N.N.; AGN Anna X, Transcription, 13, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

²⁰⁴ AGN Anna X, Transcription, 13, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

nutrition, led to a higher mortality rate than in other camps.²⁰⁵ Barracks were not built until 1944 and prior to this, prisoners slept in makeshift tents or in the tunnels. As in all camps, sanitation facilities were inadequate and in the tunnels prisoners used oil barrels as toilets that soon overflowed. At the end of January 1944 there were almost 13,000 prisoners in Mittelbau-Dora of which 8-10,000 lived underground. The camp prisoners were predominately Soviet, Poles, French, and German, and all were male. Mittelbau-Dora received prisoners driven west skyrocketing the population of the camp to 21,000 prisoners in February 1945. On April 1, 1945 work halted and the evacuation of the camp followed shortly after; the US Army liberated the camp on April 11, 1945.

The first transport of women to Mittelbau-Dora arrived on February 18, 1944 and the brothel opened at the end of the month.²⁰⁶ The brothel was situated on a hill directly ahead of the roll call square in plain sight of all prisoners standing during the twice-daily roll call. The brothel was open all day and night to accommodate the around-the-clock work schedule for V-2 rocket manufacturing. The women, therefore, also worked around-the-clock. The testimony of a former prisoner living in the tunnels of Mittelbau-Dora recalls the brothel housing 16 women at a time²⁰⁷ and the women were confined to the brothel except for taking SS supervised walks.²⁰⁸ After the Allied bombing of Nordhausen, the women were evacuated to Bergen Belsen on April 5, 1945 under an SS guard. The evacuation stopped when the train tracks were destroyed and the women from the brothel took this opportunity to escape.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ Jean Michel, *Dora: The Nazi Concentration Camp Where Modern Space Technology Was Born and 30,000 Prisoners Died* (New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1980).

²⁰⁶ Archiv der Gedenkstätte Mittelbau-Dora (hereafter, AGMD) DMD D1b, Bd. 5, 113. Neuzugänge 18.02.1945.

²⁰⁷ AGMD DMD-EB/HD-32, 5.

²⁰⁸ AGMD DMD-EB/HD-32, 5.

²⁰⁹ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 160.

IX. Auschwitz

Auschwitz, the most notorious and well-known camp in the camp system, was actually a system consisting of three separate main camps: Auschwitz I (*Stammlager*), Auschwitz II (*Birkenau*), and Auschwitz III (*Monowitz*).²¹⁰ Additionally, the Auschwitz camp system included approximately 40 sub-camps in various industries including: farming and agriculture, armaments, coal mining, and granite quarries. The staggering estimates of how many prisoners passed through the Auschwitz camp system are over 1.1 million Jews and 200,000 other victims including Germans, Soviets, Poles, Roma and Sinti. Located roughly 40 miles west of Krakow in the town of Oświęcim, the Auschwitz main camp was established in an abandoned Polish military barracks in May 1940. Similar to other camps, Auschwitz I was a labor camp and its inhabitants were forced to work for SS-owned businesses. Medical experimentation, under Dr. Josef Mengele, was carried out on members of the camp population including children in addition to the daily struggles of malnutrition and disease.

Birkenau, the killing center of the camp complex, opened less than 2 miles away from Auschwitz I in October 1941 and was the largest camp in the Auschwitz complex. Jews from every occupied or German allied country in Europe arrived in Birkenau and underwent a “selection.” Those deemed unfit for labor were immediately killed in the gas chambers disguised as shower rooms. The introduction of Zyklon B in mid 1941 increased the efficiency of the camp’s gas chambers. To handle the influx of prisoners,

²¹⁰ On the history of the Auschwitz camp system, see Michael Berenbaum and Yisrael Gutman, eds. *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Waclaw Długoborski and Franciszek Piper, *Auschwitz, 1940-1945: Central Issues in the History of the Camp* (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2000); Hermann Langbein, *People in Auschwitz*; Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*; Laurence Rees, *Auschwitz: A New History* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

four complexes combining a disrobing area, gas chamber, and crematorium were built to handle the mass murder. In mid-January 1945 the Soviet Army approached the Auschwitz camp system and in haste the SS began to evacuate the camp. The SS led over 60,000 prisoners on a death march westward. On January 27, 1945 the Soviet Army liberated the Auschwitz camp complex. It is estimated that 1.3 million people were sent to Auschwitz and 1.1 million perished.

In 1943, plans were made to build a new building, “*Sonderbaracke B*,” to house the brothel in the Auschwitz Main camp.²¹¹ This building project would include a waiting room, an examination room, separate bathrooms for men and women, 16 “*Kabinette*,” and 8 sleeping rooms.²¹² However, due to high building costs the plan was discarded and instead a decision was made to convert an existing building, Block 24a, into the prisoner brothel.²¹³ Inside the infamous Auschwitz gate inscribed “*Arbeit macht frei*,” Block 24a was located directly on the left hand side. Also housed in the same building was the camp library, museum, and practice facilities for the prisoner camp orchestra. The brothel had a communal sleeping space for the women, a physician’s examination room, a waiting room, an administrative room, and a bathroom for sanitization. According to survivor Stephan Szymanski,²¹⁴ news of a brothel spread quickly:

We knew that construction had started. They were asking for electricians, plumbers, painters. And some suspicion was going on. And then some SS-men knew. Someone was doing business with them. So they were asking what they

²¹¹ Archiwum Państwowego Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau W Oświęcimiu (hereafter, APMO) Au Dp.-Z.Bau. 1016-1, Floor Plan for Sonderbaracke Kz Auschwitz.

²¹² APMO Au Dp.-Z.Bau. 1016-1, Floor Plan for Sonderbaracke Kz Auschwitz.

²¹³ USHMM RG-11.001M3 Reel 23. Kostenvoranschlag BW 93 in Bauantrag for building Sonderbaracke B 29.06.1943.

²¹⁴ Pseudonym.

were doing there. They would reply: “A Puff.” And so everyone in the camp knew about it. There were going to be girls. And then the women arrived eventually.²¹⁵

Unlike in the brothels in the other camps, the women did not come from the Ravensbrück camp but were “recruited” from Birkenau in September 1943. The surviving evidence makes it difficult to ascertain exactly when the brothel opened; however, there is a record from October 4, 1943 showing 21 women in Block 24a.²¹⁶ The brothel was still open and operating on January 10, 1945²¹⁷ but at some point was evacuated prior to the arrival of the Soviet Army on January 17, 1945.

X. Monowitz

Monowitz, also referred to as Buna, was established in October 1942 to hold the prisoners working at the I. G. Farben owned Buna rubber works.²¹⁸ The SS, until the Monowitz camp was established, sent prisoners daily from the Auschwitz main to the “Buna Detachment” to work in the factories. Prisoners working at the Buna factory had a greater chance of survival because they were considered important laborers and therefore less likely to be murdered *en masse*. A Buna prisoner orchestra was formed to provide music for both the SS and for their fellow prisoners while they were going to and from work.²¹⁹

In the summer of 1942, I.G. Farben implemented an incentive system that included a visit to the camp brothel as a reward for productive labor. By the end of the

²¹⁵ Interview with Stephan Szymanski, in Robert Sommer, *Die Lagerbordelle im KZ-System*, 375 n208.

²¹⁶ APMO Au Akta HI Rajsko 391/20a , Hygiene-Institut der Waffen-SS Rajsko.

²¹⁷ APMO Au Akta HI Rajsko 95, 62. 10.01.1945.

²¹⁸ See Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982); and Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*. Both worked at Buna.

²¹⁹ Guido Fackler, “The music is infernal: Music in Auschwitz” in *The Last Expression: Art and Expression*, David Mickenburg, ed. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2003).

summer of 1943, plans for the Monowitz brothel were underway.²²⁰ The building at Monowitz resembled the other brothels and included a hallway down the center with the “work rooms” off to each side. The Monowitz brothel was smaller than the Auschwitz brothel and only had room for ten women to working at a time. The brothel opened at the end of October 1943²²¹ with fanfare. The Buna prisoner orchestra played to greet the women and celebrate the brothel’s opening.²²² Similar to the brothel in the Mittelbau-Dora camp, the Monowitz brothel was open 24 hours a day three days a week, to accommodate the workers’ schedule at the rubber plant. The clientele were career criminals, *Reichsdeutsche* Kapos, and the factory foremen.²²³

Conclusion

Hitler’s path to power was marked by speeches criticizing and condemning the Weimar Republic’s stance on morality and, more specifically, on prostitution. Yet Hitler once power was consolidated, quickly returned to a policy of regulated prostitution managed by his right-hand man, Heinrich Himmler. Himmler’s scope of power was so broad as to allow him to establish a wider and more brutal form of regulation that included state-sponsored brothels to battle venereal disease and the specter of homosexuality for the military, foreign workers, and concentration camp prisoners. Prominent historians have categorized the Third Reich “sex hostile” and argued that Nazi policies were sexually repressive.²²⁴ This dissertation, while acknowledging Nazi

²²⁰ APMO Au Ośw./Minc/1942, 167.

²²¹ APMO Ośw./Leonhardt/1509, 2.

²²² APMO Au Ośw./Minc/1942, 167.

²²³ APMO Au D-AuIII-Monowitz/49/Nr. 151234, 8.

²²⁴ The argument that the Nazis were sexually repressive emerged in the 1960s, see Dagmar Herzog, “Pleasure, Sex, and Politics Belong Together”: Post-Holocaust Memory and the Sexual Revolution in West Germany,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2, (Winter, 1998): 393-444; also on sexuality in the Third Reich, see Herzog, “Hubris and Hypocrisy, Incitement and Disavowal: Sexuality and German Fascism,” in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, 1-21; Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*; see also Joachim S. Hohmann,

policies toward the *Untermenschen* as well as those Germans who did not fit into the *Volksgemeinschaft*, were sexually repressive, argues that there existed a great number of policies that exploited sexuality for the use of the state. The regulation of prostitution, especially the forced prostitution in the concentration camp brothels serves as a potent example of the state's ability to harness sexuality and manipulate it for the benefit of the Nazi state.

The camps chosen as appropriate locations for brothels were all important labor camps tied either to the DEST, or the DAW.²²⁵ The first camp brothel opened in the Mauthausen concentration camp in the summer of 1942,²²⁶ followed by openings in Gusen, Flossenbürg,²²⁷ Buchenwald,²²⁸ Auschwitz-Stammlager (Auschwitz I), and Auschwitz-Monowitz (Auschwitz III) in the summer of 1943; Brothels then opened in Neuengamme²²⁹ and Dachau²³⁰ in the spring of 1944; in the Sachsenhausen²³¹ camp in August 1944, and the last in Mittelbau-Dora²³² in February of 1945. The timeline for these brothel openings corresponds with the economic policy shift and the increasing needs of the war effort. Beginning in 1942, concentration camp labor was regarded as an important for the war effort and it was at this time that Pohl and Himmler implemented their incentive program aimed at increasing labor efficiency. Pohl's incentive program placed sex as the highest privilege a man could earn while in the camp, this hierarchy of

Sexualforschung und –aufklärung in der Weimarer Republik (Berlin: Foerster, 1985), 9; Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*; George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man*; Stefan Maiwald and Gerd Mischler, *Sexualität unter dem Hakenkreuz*; Udo Pini, *Liebeskult und Liebeskitsch - Erotik im Dritten Reich* (Munich: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1992).

²²⁵ Jaskot, "The Interest of the SS in the Monumental Building Economy," chap. 2 in *The Architecture of Oppression*.

²²⁶ Baumgartner, *Die Vergessenen Frauen von Mauthausen*, 99-100.

²²⁷ BA NS 4/FI 183 and NS 4/FI 185.

²²⁸ BA NS 4/Bu 41.

²²⁹ Kaienburg, *Vernichtung durch Arbeit*, 411.

²³⁰ Engelhardt, "Frauen im Konzentrationslager Dachau," 223.

²³¹ Nansen, *From Day to Day*, 187.

²³² AGMD DMD D1b, Bd. 5, 113.

privilege is telling in that it shows the Nazi value system placing sexual intercourse—it was a reward seemed more “rewarding” than either food or clothing. The presence of sex as a reward first indicates the important role Himmler and other members of the Nazi leadership attributed to sex and sexuality and its rank as the highest privilege further underlines this fact.

The locations and affiliations of the camps coupled with the incentive plan make a strong argument that the brothels were in fact primarily used to raise labor production. However, as I have argued earlier in this chapter, Himmler’s primary motive may have been labor production, but the brothel also had other unannounced functions. If simply labor incentive, then *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Arthur Liebehenschel, the Inspectorate of the concentration camps, would not have had reason to order the commandants of Sachsenhausen, Dachau, Neuengamme and Auschwitz, to build the *Sonderbau* in out of the way locations.²³³ Liebehenschel acted in accordance with Pohl’s instructions given on June 9, 1943, ordering the brothels’ locations be away from people “ogling.”²³⁴ This directive indicates that Pohl, and perhaps Himmler, did not want the brothel’s existence, nor its activities, widely known. Prostitution played a key part in Nazi policy, whether it was initially used to rally support by calling for its abolition, or later used to incentivize camp laborers to better provide for the war effort.

²³³ *Nuremberg War Crimes Trials*, Trial Name: NMT 04. Pohl Case - USA v. Oswald Pohl, et al., English Transcript: p. 159 (9 April 1947), NO-1242. Order on June 15, 1943.

²³⁴ BA NS3/426.

Map of Gusen Concentration Camp

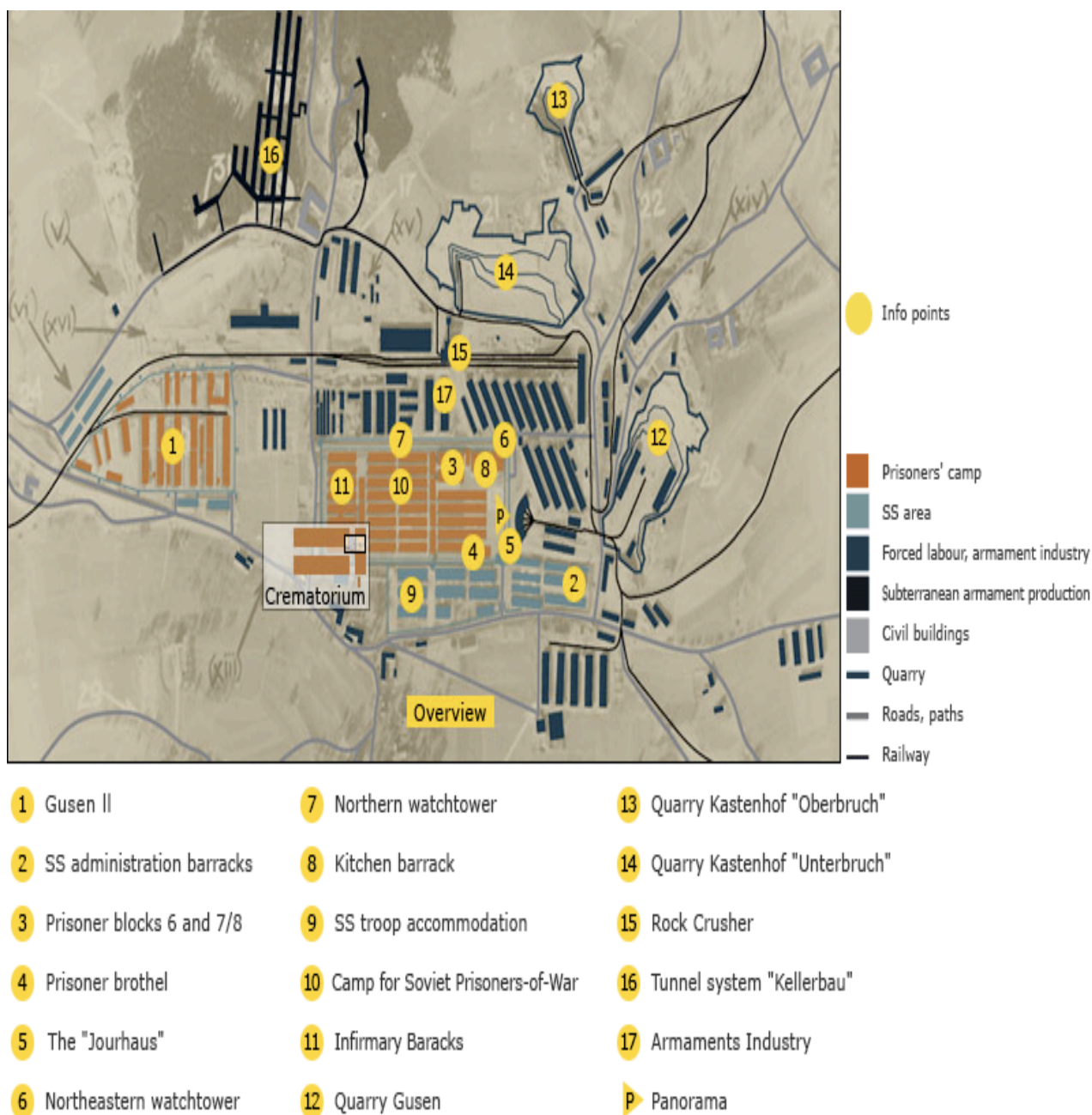


Figure 1 Map and Legend courtesy of Archiv der KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen.

Gusen Prisoner Brothel



Figure 2 Prisoner Brothel at Gusen. SS Photo courtesy of Museu d'Historia de Catalunya, Barcelona: Fons Amical de Mauthausen.

Buchenwald Prisoner Brothel, 1943²³⁵



Figure 3 Prisoner Brothel in Buchenwald, 1943. Photo courtesy of the Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation, Besançon.

²³⁵ Photo courtesy of Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation, Besançon

Brothel *Koberzimmer*



Figure 4 Photo courtesy of the Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation, Besançon.

Waiting Room, Buchenwald Brothel



Figure 5 Photo courtesy of the Archiv der Mahn-und Gedenkstätte Buchenwald.

Chapter Two

Soliciting “Cooperation:” Recruiting the Camp Brothel Workforce

“At that time I had not yet been taught the doctrine I was later to learn in the Lager: that man is bound to pursue his own ends by all possible means, while he who errs but once pays dearly.”

-Primo Levi¹

On October 7, 1942 a radio message was sent from the concentration camp Dachau to Berlin requesting the transport of four Roma and Sinti women from the Ravensbrück concentration camp to Dachau for the purpose of medical experimentation.² Dr. Sigmund Rascher, an SS doctor at Dachau and personal friend of Himmler, was conducting experiments on hypothermia and had requested more test subjects.³ Six days later, four German women, categorized as “asocial,” were transported to Dachau; among them was Ursula Krause. Krause immediately captured Dr. Rascher’s attention: he described her as exhibiting “flawless Nordic features,” including blond hair, blue eyes, and possessing a physique appropriate to a 21 year-old woman.⁴ Due to her appearance and potential “racial worth,” Rascher expressed severe misgivings about using Ursula

¹ Levi, *Survival In Auschwitz*, 13.

² Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde (hereafter, BA) NS 19/1950.

³ These are the infamous *Aufwärmversuchen* experiments carried out by Dr. Sigmund Rascher in the Dachau concentration camp. The experiments were meant to benefit the German Air Force by investigating how to treat pilots who had been hypothermic. The experiments carried out on the Dachau prisoners involved immersing them into a tank of ice water for periods of time up to three hours and then attempting to re-warm them. On the medical experiments, see Götz Aly, Peter Chroust, and Christian Pross, *Cleansing the Fatherland: Nazi Medicine and Racial Hygiene*, trans. Belinda Cooper (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Christian Bernadac, *Devil's Doctors: Medical Experiments on Human Subjects in the Concentration Camps* (Geneva: Ferni Publishing House, 1978).

⁴ Archiv der Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (hereafter, AGN) KZ-Sys. 2.2.1.6/ 1084; Archiv der Mahn-und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück (hereafter, AMGR) Bd. 26/416, 5.11.1942; Engelhardt, “Frauen im Konzentrationslager Dachau,” 222.

Krause as a medical “guinea pig.” Upon questioning her, Rascher learned Krause had “volunteered” to work as a prostitute in the Dachau camp brothel. She told him, “a half of a year in the brothel is better than half a year in Ravensbrück.”⁵ This response in conjunction with her Nordic appearance dismayed Rascher so greatly that he saw fit to write to Himmler voicing his objections.

Rascher, in his letter to Himmler, wrote, “It is counter to my racial beliefs that a woman who exhibits Nordic features—and with the correct work assignment could be led down the right path—is instead a “Brothel Girl” being surrendered to elements in the camp of far less racial worth.”⁶ Rascher was completely astonished that a German woman of obvious racial worth—meaning exhibiting Nordic features—could be conscripted into sexual labor. He wholeheartedly believed, based on Krause’s appearance, that her place in German society was reproducing racially “valuable” children. Rascher’s ideological outlook could not reconcile a woman like Krause working in a camp brothel engaging in sexual intercourse with the “lesser” elements in the concentration camp. Himmler responded that “according to her past life and attitude it was not possible for her to have a winning life.”⁷ Himmler was referencing the fact that Krause had been arrested as an “asocial” for acts of sexual deviancy that according to Nazi ideology rendered her worthless to the Reich in any manner except as a laborer in the camps. Krause had been deemed unfit for society and reform was not an option. This exchange between Himmler and Dr. Rascher is remarkable as it highlights two aspects of forced prostitution in the concentration camps: first, “Aryan” German women were

⁵ AGN KZ-Sys. 2.2.1.6/ 1084.

⁶ AGN KZ-Sys. 2.2.1.6/ 1084; Archiv Ravensbrück Bd. 26/416, 5.11.1942.

⁷ *Nuremberg War Crimes Trials*, Trial Name: NMT 04. Pohl Case - USA v. Oswald Pohl, et al., English Transcript: p. 159 (9 April 1947), NO-1242; Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 31.

working in the prisoner brothels and second, Himmler was paying close attention to his project.

When the doors to the first camp brothel in Mauthausen opened in June 1942, the women who worked as “prostitutes” were former female inmates of the Ravensbrück women’s concentration camp.⁸ Under Himmler’s orders, the SS had “recruited” female “volunteers” to engage in sexual labor in the newly opening prisoners’ brothels. The majority of the women who worked as sexual laborers came from the Ravensbrück camp; women were also “recruited” from the Birkenau women’s camp. The women were labeled “volunteers” and naturally this label raises the question of why one would “volunteer” for this type of labor. This chapter sketches a background of the Ravensbrück camp that increases our understanding of how many women came to the decision to “volunteer” for the brothel brigades. The concentration camps themselves were actors in this situation for the camp itself could influence the actions of prisoners. A n analysis of the environment that made “volunteering” for sexual work a viable means of survival is thus a crucial component in understanding the Nazi use of forced prostitution. Simply stating the women “volunteered” does not suffice, nor does the term “volunteer” have the same meaning in and out of the camp system. The experiences of these women cannot be understood apart from the context in which they lived, “volunteered,” and worked.

The problematic nature of the language used by the Nazis, including the term “volunteer,” has resulted in a legacy of misperception as to who these women really were. Furthermore, the use of the term “volunteer” grossly oversimplifies our understanding of how forced sexual labor in the concentration camps operated. This

⁸ Maršálek, *Die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Mauthausen*, 117.

chapter discusses the terminology and its troubling implications before moving on to an investigation of the particular type of prostitution employed by the Nazis in the ten camp brothels. Camp prisoners were by definition “unfree,” and the women working in the camp brothels cannot be classified as prostitutes in the normative sense of the word. The label “prostitute” simplifies the situation of the women in the brothels by disregarding all labor in the camps was in fact compulsory. This dissertation uses Christa Schikorra’s correct insistence that sexual labor should be considered another form of forced labor (*Zwangsarbeit*). Yet, both historically and at the time, many of the “volunteers” fellow prisoners viewed the women as cooperating accomplices and therefore complicit in their own persecution. I argue “choice” under Nazism was circumscribed not only narrowly, but that in many cases taking “rational” action often translated into a degree of “cooperation.” Prisoners, in order to survive, often had to consent to the Nazi machine. As the example of Ursula Krause infers, the decision to “volunteer” for the brothel was at times a decision to put into action a personalized survival strategy. This chapter contextualizes that this decision as akin to the multitude of survival strategies other camp prisoners utilized.

The SS guards created much of the camp environment and their methods of “recruiting” are exceptionally important when considering the motivations behind a woman’s decision to “volunteer” for sexual labor. The SS, under Himmler’s command, aimed their recruiting tactics at certain strata of the prisoner population hoping to coax them into “volunteering” for work in the brothel. However, in the end, to fill the needed quotas of women, fewer could be considered “volunteers” as the SS simply chose women to round out the ranks. Moreover, the criteria used to select women varied and was based

on an undisclosed measure of beauty. A close look at both the women who were chosen, and those disregarded by the SS further supports my argument that the brothels were not simply functioning as a straightforward labor incentives.

Reordering Space and Time

Three realities of life in the Ravensbrück camp strongly swayed decisions made by prisoners: the lack of space in the camp, the uncertainty of their future, and the daily fight against the filth of the camp. Although not unique to Ravensbrück, these three conditions and the effect they had on the prisoners' daily lives must be taken into account when considering why women "volunteered" for brothel duty. The concentration camps were built in a manner ordering both space and time; the camps themselves were structures of domination and oppression exerting control over the prisoners they contained. Normative notions of space and time were fundamentally altered once inside the camp's barbed wire and this alteration demanded prisoners renegotiate their reality in order to survive.⁹

Physical space in the camp was ordered to impact all aspects of prisoners' lives. The concentration camp drew its power from its ability to pressure prisoners' actions even when prisoners were not under direct surveillance. In contradiction to Inspector of the Concentration Camps Theodor Eicke's preference for minimizing opportunities for prisoners to congregate, the very nature and design of the camp grouped prisoners en masse at various times throughout the day and night.¹⁰ However, the overcrowded conditions of the camps created prisons within the camp that made congregation among

⁹ Giorgio Agamben's work has been instrumental in informing my understanding and analysis of camp life. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Eicke worried that prisoners congregating together would recognize their strength in numbers and stage acts of resistance.

prisoners another form of torture. A prime example of this is the barracks. These quarters were normally built with dimensions 26 feet by 40 feet and the sidewalls contained two or three tiers of beds.¹¹ The steady influx of prisoners following the outbreak of war led to extreme overcrowding in the barracks. The bunks, merely 30 inches wide and equipped with only a straw “mattress” and thin blanket, were the sleeping quarters for two or three prisoners at a time.¹² The freedom to move ceased to exist during the hours prisoners were relegated to their barracks. Primo Levi, a survivor of Auschwitz, offers an especially vivid portrayal of the overcrowding:

I do not know who my neighbour is; I am not even sure that it is always the same person because I have never seen his face except for a few seconds amidst the uproar of the reveille, so that I know his back and feet much better than his face. He does not work in my Kommando and only comes into the bunk at curfew time; he wraps himself in the blanket, pushes me aside with a blow from his bony hips, turns his back on me and at once begins to snore. Back against back, I struggle to regain a reasonable area of the straw mattress: with the base of my neck I exercise a progressive pressure against his back; then I turn around and try to push with my knees; I take hold of his ankles and try to place them a little further over so as not to have his feet next to my face. But it is all in vain: he is much heavier than me and seems turned to stone in his sleep. So I adapt myself to lay like this, forced into immobility, half-lying on the wooden edge.¹³

Severe overcrowding resulted in a new form of confinement: prisons made of bodies.

Sleep increasingly provided no respite from the torturous conditions of the camp. Olga Lengyel, another Auschwitz survivor, was assigned to barrack 27 and refers to the bunks as “cages” where twenty women slept in a cramped small space measuring 12 feet by 5 feet. Lengyel writes, “Some had to spend the entire night squatting in awkward positions. Inside a *koia* [cage], the slightest movement was an extremely complicated matter which required the participation, or at least the cooperation, of all the others who

¹¹ Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, 66.

¹² Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, 48.

¹³ Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 58-9.

lay there.”¹⁴ Even when prisoners were not under the watchful gaze of the SS, their misery was made certain by the camp’s structure, layout, and severe overcrowding

Prisoners had to adjust to the lack of physical space and privacy in effort to survive. Privacy was unheard of for most camp prisoners; the lack of space made finding a few moments alone, in one’s own space, nearly impossible. Nowhere was this predicament more evident than with regard to bodily functions. In the moments before roll call prisoners fought one another to find space to wash and use the toilets. Private toilets did not exist in most camps as toilets were built without doors, or, in the most crowded camps, trenches served as the toilets. Immediately upon entering camp the individual had to adjust to the fact that they could no longer carry out their daily bathroom rituals on their own schedule, nor in privacy.¹⁵ Prisoners, to survive, had to quickly accept and adapt to the lack of privacy. Dutch prisoner F.B. Bakels recounted the adjustment:

The fact that you were not alone when you went to the toilet was an agonizing experience...Outside working hours, it was always occupied by four, eight or ten me, their pants down, often two to a bowl.¹⁶

Prisoners were confronted with a radical shift in their understanding of space and privacy within the first hours of their camp life. Neither space, nor privacy, existed in the concentration camp without either access to power or prominence among the prisoner hierarchy. Survival hinged on a prisoner’s ability to adapt to these losses as well as one’s capacity to “organize” access to space and privacy.

¹⁴ Olga Lengyel, *Five Chimneys: The Story of Auschwitz* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1983), 35.

¹⁵ It is this reason, among others, that Bruno Bettelheim’s work refers to the camps as “infantilizing” and he argues prisoners became obsessed with excretory functions. See Bruno Bettelheim, *Surviving, and Other Essays* (New York: Knopf, 1979). For a counter argument see Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

¹⁶ Floris B. Bakels, *Nacht und Nebel: Der Bericht eines holländischen Christen aus deutschen Gefängnissen und Konzentrationslagern* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982), 213.

The concentration camp not only necessitated a renegotiation of prisoners' concepts of space and privacy, but also, and even perhaps more disorienting, it demanded a renegotiation of time to what was now known as "camp time." Unlike prison sentences, concentration camp inmates had absolutely no idea of the length of their detention. The duration of a prisoner's stay was incalculable. One's sentence depended upon their ability to adapt to their new surroundings, the whims of the SS officers, the ever-evolving Nazi policies, and after 1941, the status of the war. All of these factors were indeterminable.¹⁷ Rudolf Hoess, commandant of Auschwitz, remarked he had discussed the torment of "camp time" with many prisoners; he stated:

All were unanimous that they could put up with all the inconveniences of camp life, such as the arbitrary powers of the SS-men or of the prisoners' leaders, the harsh camp discipline, the years of living as a member of a crowd, and the monotony of the daily routine; but the uncertainty of the duration of their confinement was something with which they could never come to terms.¹⁸

Although Hoess is naturally a problematic source, especially in discussing how prisoners adapted to the "inconveniences of camp life," his point is still well taken and corroborated by a number of prisoners: the uncertainty of the future was perhaps the most terrifying aspect of their camp experience.¹⁹ For the camp to be a place of absolute power and domination, the camp's atmosphere had to constantly remind prisoners that their future was uncertain. SS guards understood that true terror is achieved by never allowing prisoners to know what to expect, or what the next day would bring.

¹⁷ "The most diabolical cruelty was a psychological one. The SS tried to break the spirit of inmates by refusing to disclose the length of their "preventive detention," the euphemism for arbitrary imprisonment. This policy engendered what the Deputy Commandant happily called 'a sort of prison psychosis.' The guards next sought to dehumanize their charges by a regime of unbridled savagery." Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 2000).

¹⁸ Hoess, *Commandant of Auschwitz*, 71.

¹⁹ Margarete Buber writes, "One of the worst features of German concentration camps was that no term was fixed for release. That "not knowing how long" was one of our worst tortures." Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Under Two Dictators: Prisoner of Stalin and Hitler*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald Dodd (New York: Mead & Company, 1949), 212.

Sociologist Wolfgang Sofsky argues that “absolute power is not bent on achieving blind obedience or discipline, but desires to generate a universe of total uncertainty, one in which submissiveness is no shield against even worse outcomes.”²⁰ As Primo Levi writes in *Survival in Auschwitz*, following the rules did not mean surviving, in fact it was quite the opposite, those who followed the rules and submitted to the total domination of the camp became among the “drowned.”²¹ The creation of an environment where nothing is certain and where even adaptation and obedience does not guarantee survival is a key component in beginning to comprehend how the primacy of the present played an important role in influencing the prisoners’ decision-making strategies.

Upon entering the camps, the prisoners were immediately confronted with the unknown. About the jarring entry into the camp system, Primo Levi has written, “the world into which one was precipitated was terrible, yes, but also indecipherable: it did not conform to any model.”²² Once inside the camp gate there was no adjustment period, nor formal orientation. Individuals needed to quickly begin reorienting themselves to their new and horrific reality. Ravensbrück inmate Wanda Póltawska describes the shift in her perception of time in her memoir. She writes, “the long days went by, indistinguishable one from another, stupefying in their bleak hopelessness...Nothing but waiting, endless waiting.”²³

Adjusting oneself to “camp time” meant understanding the future was ultimately irrelevant, what was important was to day-to-day survival. The SS guards fostered this

²⁰ Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, 17.

²¹ Levi, “The Drowned and the Saved,” chap. 9 in *Survival in Auschwitz*.

²² Primo Levi, *The Drowned and Saved* (New York: Summit Books, 1988), 38; also see Charlotte Delbo’s poem, “Arrival, Departures” eloquently echoes this sentiment of the unknown when she writes, “They do not know there is no arriving in this station. They expect the worst—not the unthinkable.” Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 4.

²³ Wanda Póltawska, *And I am Afraid of my Dreams* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), 39.

horrific atmosphere by randomly beating and punishing prisoners—even those “obeying.” The camp system was designed to make certain prisoners had little hope to believe their situations would improve. Also, by altering routine, such as the length of the roll call, the guards effectively reinforced the fact that absolutely nothing could be depended on, nor was anything beyond their control. Prisoners experienced an agonizing form of liminality; they could either adopt a “wait and see” attitude where they relinquished all control, or try to “seize the day.” “Seizing the day” meant putting thoughts of the future to the side and concentrating on their immediate present.²⁴ It is the argument of this dissertation that in this time and place, evidence suggests that when individuals cannot count on the existence of a future, they become more willing to “seize the day.” The desire to survive led many prisoners to take actions that would have been inconceivable to them prior to their entry into the concentration camp universe.

Lawrence Langer has described individuals acting in response to the situation, rather than based on “character,” as the formation of the “impromptu self.”²⁵ One example of an action of the “impromptu self” includes a prisoner’s decision to take a fellow prisoner’s boots after theirs were no longer wearable. Outside the camp the individual may have never entertained the notion of “stealing,” but in the camp, it was a decision based upon a will to survive. The “impromptu self” detached itself from its familiar value system and adapted to what was necessary for survival in the camp. Primo Levi offers a further explanation of the “impromptu self.” He writes, “here in the Lager there are no criminals nor madmen...no madmen because we are wholly devoid of free will, as our every action

²⁴ Nearly all Holocaust memoirs touch upon this phenomenon that Levi describes as the difference between the “drowned” and the “saved.”

²⁵ Lawrence Langer, “Redefining Heroic Behavior: The Impromptu Self and the Holocaust Experience” in *Lessons and Legacies: The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World* ed. Peter Hayes (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 232.

is, in time and place, the only conceivable one.”²⁶ This dissertation takes Lawrence Langer’s concept of the “impromptu self” and applies it to the decision making process employed by women working in the camp brothels. As historian Richard Evans wrote, “the nature of the moral choices people had to make can only be accurately judged by taking into account the full complexities of the situations in which they found themselves,”²⁷ and understanding how women became known as “volunteers” for sexual labor necessitates an analysis of these complexities.

Once a prisoner believed their future was uncertain and uncontrollable, the present and its opportunities carried more weight. Prisoners had to more seriously consider what could be done to aid their survival at that moment. “In the space of a few weeks or months,” Primo Levi wrote, “the deprivations to which they were subjected to led them to a condition of pure survival, a daily struggle against hunger, cold, fatigue, and blows in which the room for choices (especially moral choices) was reduced to zero.”²⁸ The mentality of prisoners in the camps can be considered a “foxhole” mentality where they may have acted out of character in order to increase their chance of survival.

The concentration camps, in part due to overcrowding, were teeming with disease and filth. Historian Terrence Des Pres argues camp prisoners in these conditions lived in a state of “excremental assault.” Des Pres uses this term to convey that prisoners in the camp were systematically forced to live in a filthy environment. The filthy conditions, according to Des Pres, were not accidental but a means to guaranteeing the degradation of prisoners. A prisoner’s physical death alone did not suffice, the SS desired to “crush

²⁶ Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 98.

²⁷ Richard J. Evans, *In Hitler’s Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 120.

²⁸ Levi, *Drowned and the Saved*, 50.

the spirit, to obliterate that active inward principle whose strength depends on its freedom...to seek out and destroy all resistance, all spiritual autonomy, all sign of dignity in those held captive.”²⁹ Des Pres quotes a female survivor to exemplify his theory; this woman was not allowed to go to the bathroom during the day, and recounts, “if anyone of us, tormented by her stomach, would try to go to a nearby ditch, the guards would release their dogs. Humiliated, goaded, the women did not leave their places—they waded in their own excrement.”³⁰ By forcing prisoners to live in such deplorable conditions, the SS reduced prisoners to their base instincts. By creating conditions that made prisoners appear “sub-human” or “other,” it reinforced the SS ideology that they were superior race. Stripped prisoners of their dignity and their humanity made them an easier target for murder—these people were different and unworthy of life.

The SS looked upon the foul conditions of the camp and saw the prisoners living in their own excrement, acting as “animals,” and then used this context to reinforce their beliefs that the camp prisoners were *Untermenschen* and could be treated accordingly. The concentration camp aimed at the dehumanization of prisoners to create a mass of prisoners, nearly indistinguishable from one another, and established an environment where the SS guards believed they were not guarding fellow humans. Physical death was quick and over in a moment, and, not the sole aim of the concentration camp. The processes of dehumanization moved more slowly, but in the end was no less deadly.

According to Des Pres, prisoners forced to live each day in deplorable conditions, suffered a “befoulment of the body” which led to the “befoulment of the soul.”³¹ Many decisions in the camp were based upon physical appearances: the selections for the gas

²⁹ Des Pres, *The Survivor*, 60.

³⁰ Ibid., 57.

³¹ Ibid., 64.

chambers, for work battalions, for the brothels. In order to survive, prisoners needed to remain physically human—they needed to look like their captors, or at the very least remind the captors that they were human. Those who did not, and exhibited frailness, physical defects, or ailments, were at risk for immediate death. Conditions that befouled the body, such as the inability to bathe or take care of basic bodily functions, actually resulted in death. Primo Levi succinctly describes this battle to remain human:

So we must certainly wash our faces without soap in dirty water and dry ourselves on our jackets. We must polish our shoes, not because the regulation states it, but for dignity and propriety. We must walk erect, without dragging our feet, not in homage to Prussian discipline but to remain alive, not to begin to die.³²

I argue that the impetus behind many women's decision to work in the brothels was in fact to escape the filth of the camp. The brothel offered the women reprieve from the excremental assault of the camp and gave them an opportunity to reassert their individuality and femininity. Both opportunities fundamentally improved a woman's chance of surviving.

Daily Life in Ravensbrück

The following section endeavors to provide a general depiction of life in Ravensbrück between 1942-1945. It was within this three-year time span Himmler opened the brothels and needed to form a female sexual work force. The camp, and its conditions, played an active role in influencing the prisoners' daily decisions, including "volunteering" for work in the brothel. In a short period of time, Ravensbrück became severely over-crowded and plagued with disease. The camp was, most simply put, a torturous environment. It was this period of over-crowding and disease that coincided with Himmler's 1942 decision to open prisoners' brothels. Consequently, the atmosphere

³² Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 41.

and conditions of the Ravensbrück camp must be taken into consideration both when discussing the “recruitment” of women and contextualizing the women’s decision to “volunteer” for brothel duty.

The women working in the camp brothels, the Auschwitz brothel being the exception, were female inmates from the Ravensbrück concentration camp.³³ Opened in May 1939, Ravensbrück was a camp exclusively for women located approximately 90 kilometers north of Berlin. It was the last large concentration camp built before the Nazi invasion of Poland; approximately 130,000 women passed through its gates between 1939-1945. The camp’s intended purpose was to incarcerate female “enemies” of the Reich for their utilization as a labor force for the expanding armament industry. The population of the camp was extremely diversified; incarcerated in the camp were: Jews, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Roma and Sinti, and ultimately prisoners from all over Europe including Great Britain, France, and Greece.

On May 18, 1939, the first transport of 867 women arrived in Ravensbrück. The camp was built to incarcerate three to four thousand women and in its early years, although still a deadly environment, overcrowding was not an issue.³⁴ However, as the war waged on and the Final Solution was put into action, transports increased drastically and over 10,000 women were living in the camp by the end of 1942. In the single month

³³ AGMR Bd. 17/55, 6. The female camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau served as the recruiting pool for the Auschwitz brothel. This decision was most likely based on the fact that the Auschwitz camp system had a large female camp to draw from whereas the other camps with brothels did not. On the Auschwitz brothel, see Robert Sommer, “Die Häftlingsbordelle im KZ-Komplex Auschwitz-Birkenau. Sexzwangsarbeit im Spannungsfeld der NS- “Rassenpolitik” und der Bekämpfung von Geschlechtskrankheiten,” in *Nationalsozialistische Lager: Neue Beiträge zur NS-Verfolgungs- und Vernichtungspolitik und zur Gedenkstättenpädagogik*, ed. Akim Jah, Christoph Kopke, Alexander Korb, and Alexa Stiller (Münster: Klemm & Oelschläger, 2006).

³⁴ Rochelle G. Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 12; Jack G. Morrison, *Ravensbrück*, 17.

of November 1944, over 7,000 new prisoners entered the camp,³⁵ causing the camp's population to swell to approximately 45,000 by the beginning of 1945.³⁶ Statistics available for September 1944 reveal there were roughly 1,100 women living in each barrack constructed to house only 250 women. Over 500 women used a bathroom equipped with only three toilets.³⁷ To deal with the rapid expansion of the population, the SS assembled temporary tents to "house" prisoners.³⁸ Those women living in the tents did not have access to bathrooms and had to use ditches dug outside. To further complicate matters, the inhabitants of the tent were unable to leave the tent except during the twice-daily roll call.³⁹ These prisoners were not assigned to labor commandos and spent their entire camp existence within the makeshift tent. The conditions in the tent led to a daily death rate of thirty to forty deaths.⁴⁰

Plagues of lice and vermin accompanied the rapid expansion of the camp population and with this pestilence came diseases. The SS called on the Block Elders (*Blockälteste*) to perform regular lice checks in an attempt to cope with the infestation. Nanda Herbermann, a political prisoner and Block Elder of the "prostitution block," was in charge of the lice checks for over 400 women living in her barrack. She wrote,

From morning until late into the evening, I stood behind the stool, fine-tooth comb in hand, taking up one head after another, one body after another, and searching them for these disgusting animals. Everything had to be registered exactly, so that no inmate could elude this lice control. Some of them were just

³⁵ Morrison, *Ravensbrück*, 277.

³⁶ Germaine Tillion, *Ravensbrück*, trans. Gerald Satterwhite (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1975), 244.

³⁷ Hubert Fischer, "Ärztliche Versorgung, Sanitäre Verhältnisse und Humanversuche im Frauenkonzentrationslager Ravensbrück," *Gesnerus* 45 (1988): 58.

³⁸ Bernhard Strebel, "Ravensbrück-das zentrale Frauenkonzentrationslager," in *Die nationsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Entwicklung und Struktur*, ed. Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth, and Christopher Dieckmann (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 1998): 225-227.

³⁹ Morrison, *Ravensbrück*, 279.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 281. The majority of women living in the tent were Jewish women; however, this example speaks to the overcrowded nature of the camp and its inadequate facilities.

crawling with it... Whenever I found hair lice, I had to send the inmate in question to the sick bay for treatment and shaving.⁴¹

The SS demanded the Block Elders keep record books accounting for each louse found on each prisoner. These records were used to send prisoners to the Revier, or infirmary, for treatment and could have an adverse effect of their ability to survive.⁴² The overcrowded conditions placed a heavy burden on the camp's infrastructure. As a result, the water sources turned foul and caused an increase in diseases, such as typhus and dysentery, to spread quickly throughout the camp. Ravensbrück, in the three years since its opening became a bastion of disease and filth with a steadily rising mortality rate.⁴³

Ravensbrück was a labor camp practicing the Nazi policy of "extermination through labor" (*Vernichtung durch Arbeit*). The female prisoners worked, on average, 10-11 hour shifts in the Siemens munitions factories, the SS-owned textile factories within the camps, or in crews that kept the camp functioning. Working in the fields and gardens surrounding the camp were considered "good" jobs because of the increased opportunities for "organizing" more food. A prisoner's assignation to a labor commando greatly affected and determined their health and ability to survive the camp. For example, women in the construction crew endured extremely heavy labor including punitive tasks such as digging sand and moving it from one area of the camp to another,⁴⁴

⁴¹ Nanda Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss: Inmate #6582 in Ravensbrück Concentration Camp For Women*, ed. Hester Baer and Elizabeth Roberts Baer, trans. Hester Baer (Detroit Wayne State University Press, 2000), 178.

⁴² "Delousing Journal" on display at the International Tracing Service Archive, Bad Arolsen, Germany, June 2008. Also, Primo Levi's account, *Survival in Auschwitz*, details the positives and negatives of spending time in the infirmary. A major negative was that to enter the infirmary one had to give up their shoes and eating utensils and then upon their release work to procure these necessities again. This was a dire price to pay for women sent to the infirmary for the presence of lice, a condition they could not help nor improve. Levi, "Ka-Be 42-55," chap. 4 in *Survival in Auschwitz*.

⁴³ It is estimated between 100,000 and 117,000 women died at Ravensbrück between 1939 and 1945.

⁴⁴ Póltawska, *And I Am Afraid of My Dreams*, 44.

carting coal, and unloading barges filled with bricks, bare-handed.⁴⁵ These tasks were so physically demanding, they hastened a prisoner's physical demise. Women given arduous labor assignments did not receive job appropriate clothing, or heartier rations. Whereas women working in the gardens, although still subjected to hard labor, were able to procure more food for themselves or to trade for other useful materials. However, no matter whether a work assignment was considered difficult or relatively easy, all prisoners were susceptible to the tempers of their overseers and corporal punishment.⁴⁶

Ravensbrück prisoners, in addition to the omnipresent threat of corporal punishment, also feared selections for medical experimentation. Following the death of Reinhard Heydrich in 1942, medical experiments began on the Polish inmates of Ravensbrück. Both Himmler and Hitler were frustrated by the failure of modern medicine to save Heydrich after being fatally wounded by a Czech partisan attack. In an effort to avoid such frustration in the future, Himmler ordered experiments on the Polish "guinea pigs," or "rabbits" (*lapins*). These specific experiments involved wounding the women's calves and then injecting bacteria into the open wound. The "purpose" of these experiments was be able to better treat soldiers wounded by shrapnel.⁴⁷ A second series of experiments removed portions of muscle and bone from women's calves to evaluate the regenerative capabilities of the human body. The goal was to find a means in which camp inmates could be used in order to grow new body parts for wounded German

⁴⁵ Buber-Neumann, *Under Two Dictators*, 249.

⁴⁶ Many memoirs discuss the outbursts and tirades of the Kapos or SS Aufseherinnen. For example, see Póltawska, *And I Am Afraid of My Dreams*; Buber-Neumann, *Under Two Dictators*; Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss*; Fania Fénelon, *Playing for Time*, trans. Judith Landry (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997); Gisella Perl, *I was a Doctor in Auschwitz* (New York: Arno Press, 1979); Liana Millu, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, trans. Lynne Sharon Schwartz, 1st English ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991).

⁴⁷ On the "guinea pigs" or "lapins" of Ravensbrück see Póltawska, *Am I Afraid of my Dreams*; William Hitzig, *The Ravensbrueck lapins* (New York: s.n., 1958); and on medical experiments see Christian Bernadac, *Devil's Doctors*; Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

soldiers. Although the majority of medical experiments at Ravensbrück used Polish women as “guinea pigs,” all prisoners feared they too could be selected for experimentation. Like all other aspects of camp life, if selected, the women were left without any recourse—this “work” was also compulsory.

Ravensbrück prisoners lived under a constant threat of torture and punishment. Even the most seemingly minor infractions, for example incorrectly making one’s bed, resulted in a variety of punishments. One such punishment for incorrect bed making was drenching the offending women with cold water and forcing them outside in the midst of the low winter temperatures.⁴⁸ Prisoners committing more serious offenses, such as stealing, were sent to the Punishment Block (*Strafblock*) where under the supervision of the most brutal SS guards, they performed the hardest labor. Conditions in the *Strafblock* were considered among the worst in the camp. The prisoners relegated to this block were criminals, asocials, and women accused of engaging in homosexuality while in the camp and had some of the lowest survival rates in the camp.⁴⁹ In Ravensbrück the most grievous offenses, such as work sabotage, resulted in prisoners being sent to the camp prison known as the “Bunker.” Prisoners in the “Bunker” did not work and were instead locked in solitary cells without daylight or food for days at a time.⁵⁰ In short, fear of spending time in the *Strafblock* or “Bunker” certainly influenced the actions of many Ravensbrück prisoners.

When the “natural” deaths resulting from the over-crowded conditions, arduous labor, typhus and tuberculosis epidemics, and medical experimentation continued to rise

⁴⁸ See Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück*, 14-16; Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss*, 145.

⁴⁹ Morrison, *Ravensbrück*, 229.

⁵⁰ Erika Buchmann, *Frauen von Ravensbrück*, ed. Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Berlin: Kongress-Verlag, 1961), 21-22.

in the camp, the SS sought a more efficient means of managing the decomposing bodies. In 1943, a crematorium opened in the camp to dispose of the increasing number of bodies. By the end of 1945, the number of corpses needing cremation was so great the town of Fürstenberg's crematorium combined with Ravensbrück's own two-oven crematorium could not keep up with the volume. To further deal with the amount of corpses, the SS quickly disposed of the bodies in mass graves on the perimeter of the camp. Prisoner Hilde Boy-Brandt estimates that at the end of 1944 there were at least thirty to forty daily deaths.⁵¹ Furthermore, in November 1944 a gas chamber was built outside of the camp, near the crematorium, and quickly put to use. The Commandant of Ravensbrück, *SS Hauptsturmführer* Fritz Suhren, claimed 1500 women were gassed;⁵² yet, this is low when compared to prisoner estimates accounting for anywhere between 4500 and 6000 women gassed.⁵³ The gas chamber and the "shooting gallery" were positioned outside of the camp walls in an effort to keep the killings a secret; however, the prisoner population was well aware of the presence of these means of murder. This was the reality of daily life in Ravensbrück when Himmler embarked on his mission in spring 1941 to staff the concentration camp brothels with "volunteers" from the camp.

SS Practices of Soliciting Cooperation

Before embarking on an analysis of how under Himmler's orders the SS sought to draft a band of women to work as prostitutes in the camp's brothels, I must first address the language used by the SS as well as its implications. The terms this dissertation uses, relating to "volunteering" (*die Freiwillige* and *sich freiwillig melden*) and "recruitment" (*rekrutieren*, *die Anwerbung* and *sich erhalten*), are the terms and language utilized by the

⁵¹ AGMR Bd. 15/17, Hilde Boy-Brandt, 12.

⁵² Tillion, *Ravensbrück*, 158.

⁵³ AGMR Bd. 15/17, Hilde Boy-Brandt, 12.

Nazi organization. Both terms are fraught with problems in this context; therefore, in this dissertation, they are used with quotations.⁵⁴ The normative usage of the term “volunteer” connotes someone who freely offers to take part in a task or activity without being subjected to coercion. Our concept of free will did not exist in the concentration camp. Similarly, the use of the word “recruit” implies the SS were advertising and enlisting women for the brothel brigade without the power to conscript. By using the term “recruit,” there is the intended implication that the SS were only able to request “volunteers” and thus individuals were at liberty to decline the request. These terms, “volunteer” and “recruit,” are misleading; similarly to other words bastardized by Nazism, they are meant to camouflage or euphemize the true actions of the regime.⁵⁵ The employment of the term “volunteer” does not accurately depict the position of these women. This term ignores their lack of free agency in the camps and its use has resulted in the stigmatization, both contemporary and historically, of these women.

Labeling the women as “volunteers” suggested complicity on their part and played a role in their stigmatization by both fellow prisoners and the ensuing historical record. The SS euphemisms convey the impression women were not forced into sexual labor, when, in actuality, the SS had the power to make sexual labor, and any other form

⁵⁴ Primo Levi perhaps explains the inefficiencies of existing language to convey life in the concentration camps, he writes, “Just as our hunger is not the feeling of missing a meal, so our way of being cold has need of a new word. We say ‘hunger’, we say ‘tiredness’, ‘fear’, ‘pain’, we say ‘winter’ and they are different things. They are free words, created by free men who lived in comfort and suffering in their homes. If the Lagers had lasted longer, a new harsh language would have been born . . .” Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 123.

⁵⁵ Shaul Esh, “Words and Their Meanings: Twenty-Five Examples of Nazi Idiom,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 5 (1963): 133-167. On the language of Nazism, see also Henry Friedlander, “The Manipulation of Language,” in *The Holocaust: Ideology, Bureaucracy, and Genocide*, ed. Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton (Millwood: Kraus International, 1980), 103-113; Victor Klemperer, *The language of the Third Reich: LTI, Lingua Tertii Imperii: a philologist's notebook* (London; New Brunswick, N.J.: Athlone Press, 2000).

of labor, compulsory.⁵⁶ Traudi Schneider, a female guard trained in Ravensbrück and later a guard in Birkenau, provides an example of this power. Schneider recounted to her daughter how one day she encountered a former “comrade” who had begun working for the Resistance. Her act of treason led to her subsequent arrest by the Gestapo and her imprisonment in Birkenau. The arrested woman, when she encountered Schneider, her former colleague, spat in Schneider’s face. Upon hearing this story Schneider’s daughter asks, “Did you have her executed?” Her mother responded immediately, “I put her in the selection for the brothel.”⁵⁷ In the camps, SS guards held the power to humiliate, beat, torture, and kill prisoners. Schneider’s assignation of her former colleague to the brothel labor battalion was another means of torture and humiliation without getting her hands dirty.

This dissertation builds upon the new historiography that regards the camp “prostitutes” as forced laborers and provides evidence that proves these women have been incorrectly categorized as “volunteers.”⁵⁸ Until the recent work of Christa Paul, Christl Wichert, Christa Schikorra, and Robert Sommer, the Nazi “official transcript” asserting these women were “volunteers,” has been taken as fact. This dissertation pushes past the Nazi rhetoric to explore both how these women became known as

⁵⁶ Additionally, the practice of soliciting “volunteers” enabled many of the SS guards to transfer feelings of guilt, or notions of wrongdoing, onto the prisoners since they were seemingly “volunteering” and “choosing” their fate. Although difficult, if not impossible to prove, it is my belief that the process of soliciting “volunteers” was a coping method employed by the perpetrators to alleviate guilt or doubt associated with their actions. The best study of the possible motivations behind the actions of the perpetrators is Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2003).

⁵⁷ Helga Schneider, *Let Me Go* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 77.

⁵⁸ Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*; Wickert, “Tabu Lagerbordell”; Schikorra, “Prostitution weiblicher Häftlinge als Zwangsarbeit”; Halbmayr, “Sexzwangsarbeit in NS-Konzentrationslagern”; Engelhardt, “Frauen im Konzentrationslager Dachau;” Sommer, “Der Sonderbau”; Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*.

“volunteers” and how this categorization led to the women being doubly victimized.⁵⁹

Through a careful reading of sources it becomes apparent that firstly the women were not simply “volunteers,” nor were they all former sex-workers; but moreover, “volunteering” for work in the brothel, was a means of surviving the camp during what Holocaust historians refer to as the “peak killing years.” Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz* most eloquently challenges those who have not lived in the camps to the following,

We would now like to invite the reader to contemplate the possible meaning in the Lager of the words 'good,' and 'evil,' 'just,' and 'unjust'; let each one judge, on the basis of the picture we have outlined and of the examples given above, how much of our ordinary moral world could survive on this side of the barbed wire.⁶⁰

Forced prostitution, in this context, is perhaps the most extreme manifestation of forced labor women experienced under National Socialism. These women were denied control over their final reserve of autonomy: their own body. These women did not “own” their ability to give or receive sexual pleasure through the act of sexual intercourse.⁶¹ The Nazi government offered sex as a labor incentive and forced female inmates to provide the sexual rewards; in short, women provided sex in accordance with the demands, economic and otherwise, of the state. This one-way relationship rendered women powerless to regulate the supply of sex and effectively left them out of the entire equation.

If women can even be considered “volunteers” in this context, it is important to make clear for what they believed they were volunteering. It was made clear the women

⁵⁹ The concept of an “official transcript” is from James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

⁶⁰ Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 86.

⁶¹ Gisela Bock, among others, has argued that women were denied access to birth control, abortions and in general were denied reproductive autonomy and therefore were forced laborers, see Gisela Bock, “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State,” in *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion A. Kaplan (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 271-96.

would be engaging in sexual labor, but in return they would receive reprieve from the camp conditions, better rations, payment for their labor, and most importantly, their release from camp.⁶² Oswald Pohl, the head of the SS Economic and Main Administrative Office (*SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamtes*, WVHA) determined on May 15, 1943, a visit to the brothel cost 2 *Reichsmarks*. The privileged prisoner's payment was transferred from his account in the following manner: 1.50 RM paid into the SS account, 0.45 *pfennige* paid to the prostitutes, and the remaining 0.05 *pfennige* paid to the overseer of the brothel.⁶³ Sometime in February 1942, according to the Buchenwald documents, Pohl revised the pricing scheme and lowered the cost of a visit to 1 *Reichsmark*. This price decrease also changed the way the money was allotted: the woman now received 90 *pfennige* per 1RM with the remaining 10 *pfennige* going into a separate SS account.⁶⁴ However, as discussed in subsequent chapters, the women did not receive their payment in either payment schematic. Pohl most likely instituted this price decrease for the purpose of increasing brothel patronage. Pohl's regulations mandated money "paid" to the eligible prisoners could only be withdrawn from prisoner accounts in the form of a camp voucher redeemable only within the camp. This scheme allowed the SS to make money by depositing the Reichsmarks from the employer, such as Siemens, I.G. Farben etc., into their coffers and only allowing vouchers to be withdrawn by the prisoner.⁶⁵ The SS benefited from both the increased labor production and from the payments from the outside industries. Unlike a normative prostitution

⁶² Archiv der Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen (hereafter, AGS) Jd, 4/13 Bl. 6-9, 6.

⁶³ BA NS 3/426, Dienstvorschrift für die Gewährung von Vergünstigungen an Häftlinge v. 15.5.1943.

⁶⁴ AMGB "Einnahme im Bordelle am 21.2.1944 and 22.2.1944"; BA NS 4/41.

⁶⁵ BA NS 3/426, 2. "Prämienverordnung."

paradigm where a woman exchanges sex for payment, the women in the camp brothels supplied sex but were never paid.

The institution of a payment scheme also was a means of substantiating the Nazi categorization of these women as “prostitutes.” If one only takes into account the Nazi documents, especially the “official” receipts and bookkeeping, these women were *paid* concentration camp laborers; however, prisoner testimonies attest not a single woman ever received their payment.⁶⁶ It is for this reason, I use the term “prostitutes” in quotations to clarify that these women were not “prostitutes” in the normative sense.⁶⁷ As a Sachsenhausen prisoner remarked, “The prisoners, which this questionable institution [the brothel] took advantage of, were to be paid money but instead it just flowed into the hands of the SS.”⁶⁸ Despite the SS’s careful accounting—accounts were kept tallying the amount of business the brothel conducted—there is no evidence proving women ever received any payments. The payment ruse was pervasive, convincing the women in the brothels they had access to their money. Correspondence from several women requesting

⁶⁶ The Häftlingskarten for prisoners show detailed account keeping of the money deposited into the accounts but not a single surviving woman of the brothels received any of the money. Maren Niemeyer and Caroline von der Tann, *Das große Schweigen* (ARD Documentary Film, November 9, 1995).

⁶⁷ The historiography of the last several decades has primarily viewed prostitution as a labor exchange resulting from economic inequalities.⁶⁷ Alain Corbin’s important book, *Women for Hire*, makes the argument that prostitution changed its form as the demands of the clients were influenced by economics. Corbin affords women themselves little agency in their move to engage in prostitution, focusing more on the conditions leading men to hire prostitutes. Luise White’s work moves in the opposite direction by discussing prostitution in Nairobi purely as a form of labor in which women are active agents making a rational economic choice to sell sex as their form of wage labor. See Alain Corbin, *Women For Hire*; Mary Gibson, *Prostitution and the State in Italy, 1860-1915* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986); Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Nancy Reagan ““A True Woman Can Take Care of Herself”: The Debate over Prostitution in Hanover, 1906” *Central European History* (1991) vol. 24 issue 4; Regina Schulte, *Sperrbezirke. Tugendhaftigkeit und Prostitution in der bürgerlichen Welt* (Frankfurt, 1984); Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). Historians of homosexuality have also examined the merging of sexuality and economic utility, see Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1989); Bert Hansen, “The Historical Construction of Homosexuality,” *Radical History Review* 20 (Spring/Summer 1979): 67-73; and Mary MacIntosh, “The Homosexual Role,” *Social Problems* 16 no. 2 (Fall 1968): 182-92.

⁶⁸ AGS JD 1/8 BI 74-80. 77.

their earnings be sent to their parents or other family members, further proves the women believed they were being compensated for their labor and able to use the money to support their families.⁶⁹ It is highly doubtful the SS fulfilled these requests and there are no records indicating these requested account withdrawals were made.

The Nazi government created a reward system to spur an increase in labor production relying heavily on women to provide sexual rewards. The Nazi categorization of these women as “volunteers” has oversimplified the process by which these women came to work in the brothels. The majority of the women did “choose” to work in the brothel, but this “choice” must be placed in context. The next section places the so-called decision to “volunteer” in the context of their reality in either the Ravensbrück or Birkenau camps.

It was a frequent SS practice to solicit “volunteers” for various work details and transports in the concentration camps. Inmates quickly learned that camp life was often marked by the SS presenting pseudo-choices, based on generic and vague information (such as a need for laborers in the “east”), in order to fill transports and labor battalions. Once inside the camp the SS could, at any moment, conscript prisoners for any transport or work detail. Isolated, prisoners realized their future was now an unknown and the only certainty was the exact moment they were experiencing. Prisoners could not control their fate beyond the choices they made in the immediate present.⁷⁰ Since the practice of soliciting “volunteers” was routine, it is, therefore, presumable the inmates in

⁶⁹ International Tracing Service of the Red Cross, Bad Arolsen, Germany (hereafter, ITS) Häftlingskarten Buchenwald and Dachau.

⁷⁰ This psychological phenomenon is also known as the “tyranny of the present” and was common to soldiers in combat. See J. Glenn Grey, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), Paul Corner, “Italian Fascism: Whatever Happened to Dictatorship?” *The Journal of Modern History* 74 (June 2002): 325-51.

Ravensbrück were not taken by surprise when the SS began recruiting for the *Sonderbau*, or brothel.

The SS solicited cooperation from prisoners by appealing for “volunteers.” This practice allowed the SS to shift, to an extent, their burden on to the prisoners who “chose” their fate. Perhaps the elaborate charade that was concocted with regard to the gas chambers best exemplifies this phenomenon. The SS compelled the *Sonderkommando*, under the threat of their certain death, to tell newcomers they were entering a bathhouse. The purpose of this charade was not, as Zygmunt Baumann points out, to lessen the agony of the victims, but rather to encourage the prisoners to enter the “bath house” on their own and without coercion.⁷¹ The SS could, therefore, relieve themselves of the burden of guilt by believing the prisoners acted on their own accord. The SS routinely sought “volunteers,” and by labeling them as such, they placed the onus of guilt onto the prisoners themselves. Himmler and the SS used the camps as a receptacle of violence and it was structured in a manner guaranteeing oppression. The perpetrators alone possessed the power to decide which “choices” would be made available to prisoners. Only within this carefully controlled atmosphere could the prisoners then set their own course and make decisions based upon their limited options. Life in the camp was not simply a Manichean struggle between “good” and “evil.” Most prisoners, in order to survive, had to make decisions that cannot, nor should be reduced to simplistic terms. In the camps prisoners were often more limited to choosing between “greater and lesser evil.”⁷² For some women, the brothel was certainly a “lesser evil.”

⁷¹ Zygmunt Baumann, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), 130.

⁷² Ibid.

“Volunteering” for any task or transport was accompanied by risk; however, when “opportunities” did arise, prisoners needed to assess the likelihood of the opportunity bettering their situation. Prisoners in Ravensbrück were often eager to “volunteer” for jobs holding the promise of taking them beyond the camp’s boundaries. Prisoners, if not classified as a flight risk, could volunteer for these jobs carrying possible opportunities for procuring extra food, clothing, or even escape. The bettering of their life conditions was often worth the risk of toiling under a cruel Kapo, or braving harsh weather. Liana Millu’s decision to “volunteer” for the kitchen squad (*Esskolonne*) exemplifies the worth of taking such a risk. In Birkenau, an especially cruel Kapo commanded the kitchen squad. Additionally, the labor itself was difficult and involved lifting heavy soup pots and their delivery across camp. Yet, this job was still considered a favorable position. Liana volunteered for this position, despite her weak physical condition, because she would be able to forage for extra rations. Although her physical frailty often caused her to spill the soup that in turn led to a beating by the Kapo, it was still an enviable position because she was able to better nourish herself.⁷³

The Nazis engineered an environment, the concentration camp, where taking rational action in order to survive meant cooperating, to a degree, with the oppressors.⁷⁴ The better jobs in the camp were those associated with running the camp and taking these positions meant working with, and for, the enemy. These roles, referred to as “Prisoner Functionary” roles, gave prisoners an elevated status providing certain benefits including better rations and clothing. For example, Erika Buchmann and Nanda Herbermann were both Block Elders (*Blockälteste*) in Ravensbrück and this position meant they were

⁷³ See Millu, “Scheiss Egal” in *Smoke Over Birkenau*, 143-176.

⁷⁴ Baumann, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 135.

privileged prisoners and consequently treated better. However, in order to reap the rewards of their privileged status, their job was upholding and enforcing the SS imposed rules. Included among their duties were denouncing women for stealing and turning in women infested with lice: both of these offenses directly affected the woman's chance of survival. If a woman was sent to the infirmary she was susceptible to medical experimentation or the possibility of a transport east, and women caught stealing were sentenced to time in the Bunker.

The camp system created a context of circumstances where adapting to one's new reality often necessitated doing the bidding of the Nazi's. Prisoners stayed alive by helping run the camps.⁷⁵ The women who "volunteered" for brothel work must be situated in this same context: "volunteering" was a common act and part of survival strategies. Moreover, it is important to point out the act of "volunteering" was not the same as consenting. The women were prisoners and thus "unfree" and this small degree of "cooperation" was necessary for their survival and should not be understood as "consent." The National Socialists, and especially the camp SS guards, succeeding in creating "public transcripts" indicating the women chose to work as prostitutes and thereby were not further victimized by engaging in sexual labor. These categories and labels propagate the common misperceptions and hinder our academic understanding of an under-examined facet of camp life and means of survival. Naturally, as a scholar, the sources, in this case the official Nazi documents, need to be probed and often deconstructed to arrive at a more profound understanding of how forced prostitution functioned in the camp system. The public transcript, according to James Scott,

⁷⁵ See Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, especially his chapter "The Drowned and the Saved." Levi's memoir is considered a classic Holocaust memoir because of its searing and insightful analyses of "life" in Auschwitz including processes of adaptation and survival.

“conspires in misrepresentation.”⁷⁶ As Scott argues, the larger the power disparity between the dominating and subordinate classes, the public transcript takes on a “stereotyped or ritualistic cast.”⁷⁷ The Nazi transcript inadequately explicates how forced prostitution operated in the camps, nor does it convey the severely unbalanced power relations in effect. The camp brothels, and more specifically the classification of the women as “volunteers,” speaks to the fact that often both the contemporary and historical understanding of the time has been driven by the hegemonic discourse. This chapter, while drawing on a diverse array of evidence, proves that not only were these women unfairly labeled “volunteers,” but in reality only a few were prostitutes (in the traditional sense) continuing to engage in their trade.

Recruiting in Ravensbrück

Himmler’s initial plan was to recruit former sex-workers imprisoned in Ravensbrück to perform the sexual labor in the camp brothels.⁷⁸ Himmler’s rationale behind using “professional” women was as follows: first, he believed the brothel would run more efficiently if the women were “experienced;” second, by using women considered “fallen” or “professional,” he hoped men in the camps would visit the brothel without misgivings; and third, by using former prostitutes there would be no question as to whether or not the individuals could be reformed into “good” Germans.⁷⁹ Yet, even women incarcerated as unworthy for inclusion in the *Volksgemeinschaft*, still could be used to benefit the Reich. The targeted women were classified as asocials (*Asozial*); this broad category covered a number of societal ills such as prostitution, alcoholism, and

⁷⁶ Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance*, 2.

⁷⁷ Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance*, 3.

⁷⁸ Schikorra, “Zwangsarbeit,” 112-114; Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 30-44.

⁷⁹ Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Dachauer Tagebücher: Die Aufzeichnungen des Häftlings 24814* (Munich: Kindler, 1997), 294.

being work-shy (*Arbeitscheu*). The Nazis did not clearly define what asocial meant, and by keeping its definition vague they were able to use the term as a catchall for any behavior deemed unacceptable.⁸⁰ Nicholas Wachsmann argues that the very power of the term *Asozial* was its inability to be defined.⁸¹ Furthermore, the flexibility of the categorization made it possible to arrest and incarcerate women merely suspected of promiscuity or immorality. Penalties were plentiful for sexually promiscuous women under National Socialism—although, as the previous chapter outlined, regulated prostitution was state policy. Women deviating from the prescribed Nazi ideal of Aryan femininity could be institutionalized, imprisoned, or deported to concentration camps. Prior to the incarceration of women classified as “asocial,” these women were at risk of being candidates for forced sterilization.⁸² Nazi policy treated prostitution in a seemingly contradictory manner; however what remained constant was the Nazi use of the figure of the prostitute for the state’s gain, whether she was a scourge or a necessity. The state declared prostitutes to be “social outsiders” and enemies of the “national community” while simultaneously using prostitutes as sexual outlets for the state-sponsored brothels.⁸³ As policy shifted to the regulation of prostitution and radicalized to include its institution in the camps, policies against social and racial outsiders also became increasingly more extreme.

The SS, under Himmler’s orders, offered certain incentives in the process of “recruiting” women to “volunteer” for the brothel work detail. Included among the

⁸⁰ On the treatment of asocials, see Gunter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust?*; Jeremy Noakes, “Social Outcasts in the Third Reich,” in *Life in the Third Reich*, ed. Richard Bessel (Oxford and New York, 1987), 83-96.

⁸¹ Nikolaus Wachsmann “‘Annihilation through Labor:’ The Killing of State Prisoners in the Third Reich” *The Journal of Modern History*, 71, no. 3. (Sept., 1999): 624-659, 641.

⁸² Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus*.

⁸³ Prostitutes were considered either social or biological “outsiders” depending on whether or not their deviancy was considered genetic. On the categorization of “outsiders” see Gellately and Stolfus, *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*; and Noakes, “Social Outcasts in the Third Reich.”

incentives was the promise after three to six months of labor in the brothel the women would be released from camp custody.⁸⁴ According to Ravensbrück physician, Dr. Schiedlausky, “the first women sent to Mauthausen were promised that after half of a year in the brothel as prostitutes they would be released.”⁸⁵ To further entice the women, they promised the women would be exempt from extra labor, would receive better food rations and civilian clothing, and would live in a specially built barrack. The special barracks, or *Sonderbauten*, had private bathrooms complete with toilets and baths equipped with hot water.⁸⁶ According to Himmler’s plan, the SS targeted “asocial” women who were living among some of the worst conditions in Ravensbrück. When a woman in the Neuengamme brothel was asked why she “volunteered,” she replied, “In Ravensbrück, I would have broken down after a short while. That was perfectly clear [to me]. So I volunteered.”⁸⁷ The women were told they would be paid for their labor and have access to their accounts. For some women, this was an opportunity to ease the burdens of their families at home. One woman repeatedly requested in October, November, and December of 1943, a portion of her earnings go to her “impoverished parents.”⁸⁸ Another woman, Auguste E., was divorced with two children and requested her earnings be sent to her children.⁸⁹ These requests highlight two important facts about the brothel: first, the women believed they would earn a wage for working in the brothel

⁸⁴ AGS Jd, 4/13 Bl. 6-9, 6.

⁸⁵ Institut für Zeitgeschichte München (hereafter, IFZ) NO 2332, 4. March 4, 1947; Peter Heigl, “Zwangsprostitution im KZ-Lagerbordell Flossenbürg,” *Geschichte Quer* 6, (1998): 4.

⁸⁶ AGN Anna X, Transcription, 4, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

⁸⁷ AGN Herr Z, Transcription, 3, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

⁸⁸ ITS Häftlingskarten Buchenwald Häftlingskarte, Christel M.

⁸⁹ ITS Häftlingskarten Buchenwald Häftlingskarte Auguste E.

(no other labor brigades afforded this opportunity) and second they would have the opportunity to financially help their families.

To staff the first camp brothel in Mauthausen, the SS initially looked to the so-called “prostitute block” for volunteers. The women in Ravensbrück’s Block II were classified as “asocial” and living among some of the poorest conditions in the camp. Overcrowded conditions resulted in women sleeping on the floor or grouped together in the small bunks. These conditions increasingly led to more incidents of fighting and stealing among the block’s inhabitants in order to “get ahead.”⁹⁰ The deplorable conditions in Block II, as well as in Ravensbrück in general, made it a prime recruiting pool in which the SS could dangle their incentives. Nanda Herbermann, the Block Elder of Block II, wrote in her memoir:

I have to report that approximately every three months, eight to ten inmates, primarily from my block, were requisitioned for the bordello of the Mauthausen Concentration Camp for Men, as well as for other camps for men. The prostitutes were chosen by the commandant, the inspector and the chief overseer, and could also volunteer themselves of their own free will...After the stipulated time, these inmates came back and new ones were chosen.⁹¹

Herbermann echoes the SS by using the same term, “volunteer,” and as a consequence she immediately stigmatized the women. Her statement is notable not only because it shows the acceptance of the Nazi transcript from the very start of the camp brothel program, but also because she indicates brothel selections were an ongoing practice. The continuous nature of “recruiting” leads us to believe the brothels had to be re-staffed, because either the women were being released, or at least not returning to Ravensbrück. Although Herbermann does not hypothesize as to where these women went, or if they were in fact released, her recollections indicate the women did not return to her block in

⁹⁰ Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss*, 128.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

Ravensbrück. However, as this dissertation later discusses in detail, the majority of the women working in the brothels remained there until they ceased to operate. Thus, it is not likely repeated selections were made for the Mauthausen brothel as Herbermann recalls.

As more brothels opened in the camps, more women were needed for sexual labor and thus recruiting efforts were magnified. To fill the brothels, the SS broadened their recruiting pool while still concentrating on areas of the camp where the conditions were especially harsh—the punishment block (*Strafblock*) and the women living in the Ravensbrück tent. The SS calculated these women would be more eager to improve their situation in the camp and ergo would “volunteer.” The women in the punishment block were often “career criminals” wearing the green triangle insignia and by 1942 had already experienced high levels of brutalization in various prisons prior to their camp incarceration. The work assigned to the *Strafblock* prisoners was the most labor-intensive and usually under the command of an especially cruel Kapo.⁹² The punishment block, separated from the rest of the camp by a barbed wire fence, was known throughout camp as the deadliest barrack. As a result of the brutal labor assignments combined with decreased rations, the women in this barrack had a very high mortality rate.⁹³ According to Herbermann, it was “a concentration camp within the concentration camp, with constant food deprivation, the hardest labor, and an overabundance of daily mistreatments.”⁹⁴ Erika Buchmann, a political prisoner and Block Elder in Ravensbrück wrote, “in no other blocks, nor in any other work commando did as many prisoners die as

⁹² AMGR Bd. 17/55, 6; AMGR Bd. 29/540.

⁹³ AMGR Erika Buchmann, Archiv Ravensbrück, Band 1 bis 47, Band 14.

⁹⁴ Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss*, 132.

those in the *Strafblock*.⁹⁵ It was the deadly *Strafblock* to which the SS turned their recruiting efforts after exhausting the possibilities of the “asocial” block. “Volunteering” for anything offered was simply one way of getting out of the notoriously inhumane punishment block and when presented with the “opportunity” to work in the camp brothels and earn a wage, have better rations, and also live in a private barrack, approximately 100 women from the *Strafblock* “volunteered.”⁹⁶ For women still “volunteering” it is possible, depending on the time of their decision, that they knew they would not be released from camp custody after working in the brothel. However, “volunteering” still did offer immeasurable other advantages to their survival and certainly may have been the impetus behind the decision to “volunteer.” The SS, in effort to staff the brothels, had a pointed plan of attack targeting likely candidates for sexual labor; yet, not all women were accepted as “volunteers.”

The SS, under Himmler’s orders, aimed its recruitment efforts at segments of the prisoner population with the most to gain by volunteering for the brothel; however, with a closer look at the recruitment process, it also becomes apparent not just any “willing” females would suffice. The SS wanted a certain female aesthetic: women still possessing a womanly figure and considered “attractive.” Ultimately, the formula used to “accept” women “volunteering” meant the majority of the women were young (under the age of twenty-five), of good weight, and still possessing their hair.⁹⁷ Among the women were “Aryan” Germans, but also women of other nationalities. Dr. Schiedlausky, the

⁹⁵ Buchmann, *Frauen von Ravensbrück*, 20.

⁹⁶ Ibid. It is important to note the SS did not accept all women who “volunteered” to work in the camp brothels. As this chapter discusses, the SS had a “type” in mind while selecting women to work as forced sexual laborers.

⁹⁷ AGN Anna X, Transcription, 5ff, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03 Archiv Neuengamme; AGS JD 5/3 Bl. 135-138, 138.

Ravensbrück physician, summarized the qualifications as follows: the women must be “of age, with passable good looks, and have earlier experience in matters of fornication,” and also free of venereal disease.⁹⁸ If, as Himmler intended, the brothels were only functioning as labor incentives, then why did it matter how the women looked? Did Himmler and the SS believe by offering “attractive” females it would further encourage diligent labor? Or was it because the brothels operated in other ways than the Nazi transcript indicates? The archival sources for the Buchenwald, Dachau, and Mauthausen brothels provide proof that the SS did select women based on a measure of beauty, and furthermore, an analysis of the archival sources strongly suggests the women needed to be “attractive” because the brothel served as a point of interest for the SS guards, and also a place for re-educating homosexual prisoners.

The Buchenwald, Dachau, and Mauthausen brothel records indicate the age restriction Schiedlausky mentions was generally enforced. The average ages of the women in the Buchenwald, Dachau, and Mauthausen brothels were twenty-six, twenty-two, and twenty-seven years of age respectively.⁹⁹ Survivor Kristina R. corroborates the statistical information describing the brothel selection as follows:

They threw us out of the barracks. It was in the evening and they gave us orders to undress completely... There were approximately three benches and about four SS men stood there, officers,... high-level officers. And we had to [walk] in front of them naked, only a hand's breadth away... marching one after another. And a lot of young girls were chosen...¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Schiedlausky Nürnberg-Prozess, cited in Ino Arndt, “Das Frauenkonzentrationslager Ravensbrück,” in *Studien zur Geschichte der Konzentrationslager*, ed., Institut für Zeitgeschichte (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1970), 113.

⁹⁹ “Liste der im Sonderbau befindlichen weiblichen Häftlinge 1943” Bu 505:250, 235-236 in conjunction with ITS Häftlingskarten Buchenwald, Mauthausen and Dachau.

¹⁰⁰ AGN Kristina R., Transcription, 18, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

In addition to valuing youth, the SS also took physical beauty, especially the presence of hair, as an important criterion while selecting the women for the camp brothels. Women with shorn heads were not eligible to work in the brothel, and during roll call in Ravensbrück a Block Elder announced, “Women with nice hair, step forward, you are wanted for the brothel!”¹⁰¹

It is significant that the SS went through the trouble of selecting “pretty” girls considering these women worked not in the SS brothels, but in the prisoner brothels. The SS emphasis on selecting young and attractive girls further points to the fact the SS themselves enjoyed, or took some pleasure in the selection process and that the brothels were not simply “labor incentives.” The thoroughness and manner in which these selections were made, suggest the men gained a perverse satisfaction in being purveyors of sex in the camps. Margarethe W., a woman in the Buchenwald brothel, tells of a conversation between Dr. Schiedlausky and another SS man about her, she overheard Dr. Schiedlausky remark, “You want to take this skeleton with you?” and the other SS guard answering, “We’ll fatten her up, she’s well-built!”¹⁰² The medical records for another prisoner conscripted into service in the Buchenwald brothel list her weight as roughly 132 lbs. and her height 5’2;” these statistics would have meant she still possessed what could be considered a “womanly figure” and thus the SS considered her a prime candidate.¹⁰³ For reasons unknown, this particular prisoner had not yet lost severe

¹⁰¹ AGN Nada V., Transcription, 5, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

¹⁰² AGN Margot W., Transcription, 2f, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03; Reinhild Kassig and Christa Paul, “Bordelle in deutschen Konzentrationslagern” *Krampfader: Kasseler Frauenzeitung* 1 (1991), 28.

¹⁰³ ITS Häftlingskarten Buchenwald Häftlingskarte Eugenie C., Revierkarte.

amounts of weight and therefore she would have appealed to the SS guards selecting the women.

Yet still another example of the value the SS placed on “beauty” is substantiated by Brunhilde S.’s account of her selection. Brunhilde S. volunteered when she was twenty-three years old and an SS officer informed her that before she was fit to work in the brothel the pimples on her skin needed to clear up.¹⁰⁴ She remained in the Ravensbrück infirmary for several weeks while her skin cleared before her transport to the Sachsenhausen brothel. When a bald and toothless Polish woman “volunteered,” saying “take me, I’m better than all those with hair,” her request was flatly denied.¹⁰⁵ If the same men had been selecting women for all of the Reich’s brothels it would be understandable that time would be taken to select “attractive” women—as many of the women were working in brothels for the *Wehrmacht* and SS; however, this was not the case yet the practice of choosing women based on beauty continued even for the camp prisoners’ brothels.¹⁰⁶

If the SS were under order to select women with certain physical attributes, or if they decided to do so upon their own initiative, cannot be determined based on the available evidence. However, the combination and analysis of prisoners’ testimonies and

¹⁰⁴ AGS JD 4/13, 6-9 Brunhilde Spiegel, “Zeugenaussage in der Voruntersuchung gegen Höhn u.A.”

¹⁰⁵ AGN Nada V., Transcription, 5, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03; Incidentally, the Buchenwald brothel was said to have a large percentage of blondes and “very few brunettes.” Adam Bonet, interview by Susan Rosenblum, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Bayside, Fl, USA, February 6, 2001, Interview Code 51420, Tape 3, Segment 66.

¹⁰⁶ An article in *Spiegel* from 1965 stated the Germans simply picked the good-looking women out of the lines in front of the employment offices to work in the *Wehrmacht* brothels. Andreas Gaspar, E.F. Ziehlke, and H. Rothweiler, *Sittengeschichte der Zweiten Weltkriege: die tausend Jahre von 1933 – 1945*, 2nd ed. (Hanau: Müller & Kiepenheuer, 1970), 341-342; Numerous prisoners also have remarked the women in the brothel were “attractive,” see Harry Kahn, interview by Audrey Heimler, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, West Hartford, CT, USA, April 22, 1998, Interview Code 40965, Tape 5, Segment 124.

the physical descriptions of the women included in their prisoner files prove there was a concerted effort to select “attractive” women to work in the brothels. Yet, as with most aspects of Nazi policy, there were contradictions and exceptions. Most glaringly among the contradictions was the presence of non-German women working in the brothels.

Despite claims that only German women would be employed in order to uphold the laws against race defilement (*Rassenschande*); Poles, French, Russians, Hungarians, Czechs, and Gypsies worked in the brothels.¹⁰⁷ Each prisoner “processed” into a concentration camp had a prisoner card, *Häftlingskarte*, which listed (among other facts) their name, place of birth, religion, race, arrest record, and physical attributes.¹⁰⁸ Noted on these cards are specifics such as tattoos or scars, condition of teeth, shape of nose, eyes, and mouth. An analysis of the prisoner cards for the women in the Buchenwald, Dachau, and Mauthausen brothels show the majority of women selected had the following physical characteristics: medium height, medium build, blonde or brunette hair, and nearly full sets of teeth. Also, the women possessed few scars or tattoos, nor were any of them described as having anything other than “medium” sized facial features.¹⁰⁹ These physical attributes further suggest women were not chosen randomly in order to fill quotas, but that they conformed to the “idea” of what a sex laborer should look like.

Subsequent to the selections, “voluntary” or forced, the women were ushered into the Ravensbrück infirmary. In the infirmary medical records pertaining to their gynecological health were begun and they were screened for venereal disease.¹¹⁰ After “volunteering,” Eugenie C., a forced laborer in the Buchenwald brothel, gave her medical

¹⁰⁷ ITS Häftlingskarten Buchenwald, Flossenbürg, Mauthausen, and Dachau; Schiedlausky Nürnberger Prozeß, cited in Ino Arndt, “Das Frauenkonzentrationslager Ravensbrück,” 113.

¹⁰⁸ Prisoners admitted into the death camps were not processed in the same manner.

¹⁰⁹ ITS Häftlingskarten Buchenwald, Mauthausen and Dachau.

¹¹⁰ ITS Häftlingskarten Ravensbrück,

history as it related to her sexual or gynecological health. Her record notes her menses began at the age of 14; she had successfully birthed one child at the age of 17; and, was without any “female problems.”¹¹¹ Additionally, she was given a Citrochol test screening her for venereal disease.¹¹² The medical screenings made certain women with venereal diseases would not work in the brothels.

After women passed their medical screening, they found their situation immediately improved. The women received a day’s ration of bread and a piece of sausage to begin their physical rehabilitation¹¹³ while also replacing their uniforms with civilian clothing that included bras and cotton underpants.¹¹⁴ Between the time of selection and their eventual transport to the brothel, the women were exempt from all work details. They were encouraged to lie in the sun to improve their pallor and refresh their looks.¹¹⁵ The SS must have enacted these measures to improve, or maintain, the physical appearance of the women. Why physical appearance remained so important is in itself significant.

Appearances played a large and hitherto unexamined role in the selection of women for the prisoners’ brothels. The part “beauty” played is pivotal due to its implications. First, the SS selected “pretty” girls because it increased their enjoyment during the selection process, but second, it also increased their pleasure in monitoring sex in the brothel. Since each brothel “bedroom” was equipped with a spy-hole, it was the guards’ duty to be voyeurs. It logically follows that the men would better perform their

¹¹¹ ITS Häftlingskarten Buchenwald Häftlingskarte Eugenie C., Revierkarte.

¹¹² ITS Häftlingskarten Buchenwald Häftlingskarte Eugenie C., Revierkarte.

¹¹³ AGN Margot W., Transcription, 2f, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

¹¹⁴ ITS Effektenkarten Buchenwald, Flossenbürg, Mauthausen, and Dachau; Interview by Christa Paul with Frau W. August 8-26, 1990 cited in Reinhild Kassing and Christa Paul, “Bordelle in deutschen Konzentrationslagern,” 28.

¹¹⁵ Buchmann, *Frauen von Ravensbrück*, 85; Schikorra, “Prostitution weiblicher KZ-Häftlinge,” 114.

duty if they could enjoy the show.¹¹⁶ Selecting attractive women was in the self-interest of the SS guards. Third, I posit that since the male prisoners eligible to visit the brothel were Germans, the guards may have taken special care to make sure the women in the brothel possessed some of the characteristics of ideal German beauty in order to entice the men and make the brothel profitable. Naturally, standards of beauty vary; however, in the camp system the women who retained some weight and their hair were considered more attractive and womanly. Male prisoners, according to a survivor of Auschwitz, were “repelled by bony bodies and hollow cheeks.”¹¹⁷ When a member of the US Armed Forces liberated Buchenwald, he asked a minor SS guard about the women in the camp. The SS guard replied, “Well, they either worked, or they were beautiful of good-looking...we put them into one of the houses.”¹¹⁸ In survivor testimonies discussing the brothel, beauty or physical appearance is often mentioned. Survivors in various camps remarked that the women in the brothels were “good looking,”¹¹⁹ “a lot of blondes,”¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Many memoirs discuss the physical sexual exploitation female prisoners felt while being processed into the camp and being forced to disrobe and walk naked. Although both men and women were forced to disrobe, it is important to note that female prisoners undressed in front of male SS guards, a different experience than male prisoners undressing in front of male SS guards. Women were totally exposed in these circumstances and surrounded by men. It was common for the SS to jeer and humiliate both the men and the women as they were paraded naked before them. Gisella Perl’s memoir describes the sexual excitement the SS guards showed when she and other women were sent through the sauna at Auschwitz, “The first room into which we stepped was filled with young SS men. Their eyes shown with expectation, their ape-like movements betrayed and unhealthy, abnormal sexual excitement.” Gisella Perl, *I was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, 43. On sexual abuse of Jewish women in Auschwitz, see Na’ama Shik, “Sexual Abuse of Jewish Women in Auschwitz-Birkenau,” in *Brutality and Desire*, 221-246.

¹¹⁷ Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, 197.

¹¹⁸ Harry Kahn, interview by Audrey Heimler, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, West Hartford, CT, USA, April 22, 1998, Interview Code 40965, Tape 5, Segment 124.

¹¹⁹ Samuel Gottlieb, interview by David Brotsky, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, South Fallsburg, NY, USA, August 18, 1995, Interview Code 05632, Tape 5, Segment 123.

¹²⁰ Adam Bonet, interview by Susan Rosenblum, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Bayside, FL, USA, February 6, 2001, Interview Code 51420, Tape 3, Segment 66.

and “relatively young,”¹²¹ further proving the SS “recruited” with an emphasis on the physical appearance of the women.

The priority the SS placed on the physical attributes of the women working in the brothels urges the historian to delve beyond the Nazi “official transcript” stating the brothels were labor incentives. The attention paid to “recruiting” attractive women strongly suggests the brothel also functioned in an unannounced manner. If the brothels were simple reward centers, it is unlikely such time and effort would have gone into not only selecting the women, but also readying them for their duty. Perhaps most telling is the SS effort to re-sexualize women who had, as part of their initiation into the camp universe, been de-sexualized. The dehumanizing process necessitated an immediate adaptation in order to survive, and part of the dehumanization process was the de-sexualization of both male and female prisoners. For the majority of prisoners, entry and “processing” into the camp meant that heads were shaved and body hair shorn. Clothing that had previously indicated individuality, or gender, was removed and replaced by ill-fitting uniforms. The starvation that followed wreaked havoc on the body and further eliminated the physical signs of a female body. By prioritizing the selection of “attractive” women for the brothels, demonstrated a will to use women who had not been entirely de-sexualized, because their femininity and sexuality was now deemed necessary for the needs of the Reich.

Conclusion

Ravensbrück as a camp, according to Wolfgang Sofsky, was “laboratory of violence.” In this “laboratory” the perpetrators were encouraged to act without inhibition

¹²¹ Michael Schwartz, interview by John Kent, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, San Diego, CA, USA, April 30, 1998, Interview Code 1458, Tape 3, Segment 25.

in an environment where the mores and norms of the outside world ceased to hold power.¹²² In the camps prisoners too had to renegotiate their new reality and quickly adapt to the structure of the camp. This renegotiation of reality necessitated an understanding that the future was no longer in their control and with this adaptation prisoners needed to more heavily wait their decisions to benefit them as opportunities arose. The primacy of the present combined with the will to live strongly influenced the decisions prisoners made and it was in this atmosphere that Himmler “recruited” female prisoners to work as prostitutes in his prisoners’ brothels. The so-called “volunteers” in many instances made a decision to enact a survival strategy including work in the brothel to escape their situation in Ravensbrück. The promise of early release in an atmosphere of uncertainty would have served as a sure motivation for “volunteering.” In a prisoner’s quest to remain alive, the betterment of their living conditions would have also incentivized the women as this was an immediate improvement. The brothel offered an opportunity to not only escape the “excremental assault” of the camps, but also the possibility of earning a wage and bettering one’s condition so that survival was possible.

¹²² Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, 23.

Chapter Three

Life in the Brothel

Margarethe W. was born in 1918 in Gustrow, a town in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and was deported to Ravensbrück on December 15, 1939 for her relationship with a restaurant owner who was “half-Jew.” In the summer of 1943, Margarethe W. was selected to work in the Buchenwald brothel by Dr. Gerhard Schiedlausky and Ravensbrück camp commandant Max Koegel. Upon arriving in Buchenwald she described the following:

After a long journey, I saw a large gate and a great, long camp road, just like at Ravensbrück. Aha, just as I thought, another concentration camp... There was an extra block, a barrack, just like the barracks everywhere. The truck stopped. Doors opened, prisoners out. The block was enclosed by a great wooden wall about seven feet high all the way around. Between the block and the wooden wall was a distance of about six feet. That’s where we were put... The two female guards then told us: we were now in a prisoner brothel, we would be well-cared for, we would be given proper food and drink, and as long as we submitted then nothing would happen to us...¹

This is the experience of one woman entering her labor assignment in the Dachau brothel.

Although the majority of women working in the brothels were selected from the Ravensbrück camp, the stories behind their imprisonment and the paths their incarceration took after Ravensbrück are as diverse as they are numerous. The names of 168 women forced to work in the prisoner brothels are known; however, for the majority of the women, little else is known beyond their name. Ten different brothels opened in the following eight main camps and two sub-camps: Mauthausen, Gusen, Dachau,

¹ Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 52-54.

Buchenwald, Neuengamme, Sachsenhausen, Flossenbürg, Mittelbau-Dora, Auschwitz I, and Auschwitz III (Monowitz). Each camp had its own history, its own prisoner population, and its own leadership. How then, do we begin to get at the experience of the women working in the ten brothels when nearly all circumstances and environments vary? This chapter acknowledges the caveats inherent in drawing an overall picture of a system encompassing different camps with varying conditions and prisoner populations, but still provides a general depiction of how the brothels operated while concurrently conveying the variety of the women's experiences.

Ravensbrück was the recruiting location for eight of the camp brothels and thus a majority of the women working in the brothels had a shared experience of incarceration in that camp.² The SS promised many incentives to entice women to "volunteer" for work in the brothel and although not all of the promises were kept, some advantages did materialize. These advantages that accompanied life in the brothel certainly improved the lives of many of the female workers. However, after the women left Ravensbrück, they headed to different camps with varying "perks," atmospheres, leadership, and male customers. Yet, common to all of the brothels was the fact that routine governed daily life. Although the brothel may have provided a quasi-shelter for some women away from some of the horrors of camp life, their lives still remained highly regimented and under the SS's omnipresent gaze. For these reasons, it is possible to make some general assertions about how prisoners lived daily life in the brothel. The chapter investigates how the brothels operated both intentionally and unintentionally giving a thick description of how life was lived in the brothel. In theory, the brothels were built as

² A notable exception is that the majority of women working in the Auschwitz I and Monowitz brothels were from the women's camp in Birkenau (Auschwitz II) and these women had not necessarily been imprisoned in Ravensbrück.

“panopticons.” The SS built the brothels in a manner allowing the SS to control and monitor the sexual acts occurring. Both the frequency and method of the SS’s observation of the brothel plays an integral role in dictating how the brothel and forced prostitution operated. The brothel became a contested space where some prisoners asserted their agency and used sex to their own advantage. Although there were clearly limits to an individuals “choice” and agency, the regime was unsuccessful in imposing absolute control over the brothels or the prisoners within them.

The relative abundance of sources for the Dachau and Buchenwald brothels include: payment receipts, prisoner dossiers, and personal narratives. From these sources an *Alltagsgeschichte* of these two brothels unfolds. By using a focused study of two well-documented brothels, I go beyond generalizations adding detail and richness to this study. Although the women did receive “perks,” their jobs were not without risk. The advantages to “volunteering” to work in the brothel were offset by two major perils with which the majority of the camp population was not usually concerned: venereal disease and pregnancy. On the one hand, working in the brothel was, for some, a step toward survival, but on the other hand, contracting a venereal disease, or becoming pregnant, rendered one’s future uncertain. The policy regarding brothel workers who became either pregnant or sick with venereal disease was neither straightforward, nor comprehensive.

The SS promised “volunteers” they would be released from camp custody after working in the brothel. This promise undoubtedly served as the impetus behind some women “choosing” to “volunteer.” However, this promise was not kept. Due in part to the titillating nature of sexual labor, what actually happened to the women—since they

were not released—has largely remained shrouded in speculation. There lacked a singular policy applied *en masse* to the women working in the ten camp brothels and accordingly, their paths at the end of the war varied. Rounding out the thick description of how the brothels functioned, I trace some of the differing paths these women's lives took after the brothels ceased to operate.

This chapter debunks the misconception the women working in the brothels were all former prostitutes. The evidence culled from prisoner testimonies and brothel records proves that although some of the forced laborers were former sex workers, many were not. By focusing on the demographics of the Mauthausen, Gusen, Dachau, and Buchenwald brothels I offer statistical information refuting Himmler's claim the women staffing the brothels were former prostitutes. The majority of female "volunteers" were classified as "asocials." Women imprisoned as prostitutes were classified as "asocials" but not all "asocials" were prostitutes. Women in the brothels were often "asocials" but also "political" prisoners. Himmler's original intent was to allow only German men into the brothel to have sex with German women in accordance to German race laws outlawing sexual relations between Germans and non-Germans. Yet, among the German women working in the brothel, were also Poles, Czechs, and women of other nationalities. This chapter gives several examples of women working in the brothel who did not exemplify Himmler's original orders. The existence of non-German women working in the brothels implies that not only were racial laws not always upheld, but also that the brothel did not operate as specified. The manner in which it operated in opposition to Himmler's orders will be discussed in the following chapters.

Living and Working in the Brothels

Departing to the brothels in Neuengamme, Dachau, Mittelbau-Dora, Mauthausen, Gusen, Flossenbürg, Sachsenhausen, and Buchenwald, the women left the train station in Fürstenberg, the picturesque village that lay across the lake from Ravensbrück, in a marked departure from how many of the women arrived in Ravensbrück.³ The women heading to work in the camp brothels traveled in trucks or passenger trains under direct supervision by both a female SS-Overseer (*SS-Aufseherin*) and a male SS guard.⁴ The assignment of two members of the SS to oversee such a small number of women speaks to the priority of these laborers to the Reich. During their journey the women were well treated and fed. The presence of a female SS-Overseer was intended to prevent the male SS guard from taking liberties with the prisoners.⁵ Prisoner testimonies suggest the purpose of having a female SS-Overseer was not for the protection of the female prisoners, but to be certain the male guard did not become attached to the women and therefore compromise his ability to supervise them. It was part and parcel of the Nazi process to dehumanize and degrade the inhabitants of the camps so that the SS could better “guard” them. If, due to the wretched living conditions and physical decay prisoners experienced, they ceased to look “human,” the belief in their racial superiority was reinforced. However, the women selected for the brothel were physically attractive,

³ Prisoners were usually transported in cattle cars. For an incredible account of a deportation, see Leo Bretholz, *Leap into Darkness: Seven Years on the Run in Wartime Europe* (New York: First Anchor Books, 1999).

⁴ Archiv der Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (hereafter, AGN) Anna X, Transcription, 5, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03; Reinhild Kassig and Christa Paul, “Bordelle in deutschen Konzentrationslagern,” 28.

⁵ AGN Anna X, Transcription, 11, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

dressed as civilians, and allowed to act as humans. These “humanized” prisoners therefore posed a threat to the SS guard’s ability to treat them inhumanely. The Nazis had intentionally re-sexualized these women, but in doing so they stripped the women of the physical markers of their “unworthiness” to the Reich. These women were chosen precisely for their potential to be sexual objects and subsequently may have jeopardized the SS sentry’s ability to effectively perform his duties.

Upon their arrival in their new camps, the women were exempt from the standard processing procedures common to other new arrivals. They were not kept in quarantine, nor shaved and showered after surrendering their belongings.⁶ Instead, the women were ushered directly to their new quarters: the brothel. Once in the brothel, the SS physician examined the women again to confirm they were ready for work and specifically checked they were healthy and free from venereal disease. It was not a given that all women were immediately cleared for work. For example, Margarethe W. was suffering from edema and told she could not work in her condition. She was told by *Hauptsturmführer* Gust, “We’ll get you back into shape,” she continues, “I received food from the SS kitchen, all those weeks, and they really did manage to get me back on my feet...The others had to start right away.”⁷

Shortly following their physical exams, the women were treated to their first round of better food rations. Often these improved rations came directly from the SS *Kantine* and included real coffee and margarine.⁸ The benefits of their new work assignments were immediately apparent. In addition to the food, the women showered in

⁶ In a normal prisoner processing it would be at this point when the individuals surrendered belongings, identification, clothing etc.

⁷ Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 52-54.

⁸ AGN Anna X, Transcription, 5, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

privacy with hot water in the modern bathrooms. These benefits not only replenished the women's physical strength, but also worked to improving their mental well-being. Staying clean was a daily struggle in the camps and never would the women have had the opportunity to shower in a real bathroom with hot water in Ravensbrück or Birkenau. Maintaining cleanliness, or at least refusing to let go of the rituals of cleanliness, was part of the act of surviving and resisting. Des Pres' study of life in the camps points out washing, if only in a ritual sense, was necessary to survival and those prisoners abandoning the ritual often were not counted among the camp survivors. Des Pres cites the following survivor's testimony,

...consequently many inmates ceased to wash. This was the first step to the grave. It was almost an iron law: those who failed to wash every day soon died. Whether this was the cause or effect of inner breakdown, I don't know; but it was an infallible symptom.⁹

The women in the brothel were now free from the "excremental assault" of the camps. Margarethe W. claimed, "We weren't lacking in cleanliness."¹⁰ By objectively looking at the accommodations the camp prisoner brothels offered, it is impossible to not reach the conclusion, that work assignment aside, life was easier in the brothel and the chance for survival was immeasurably greater. The general worries plaguing life in the camps, hunger, cold, filth, and heavy labor, were removed. The women could then concentrate on surviving the new aspect of camp life, performing and surviving sexual labor. Now free from hunger and filth, the women's coping skills turned to reawakening their minds and personalities.¹¹ Studies on survivors' have shown the use of two cognitive coping

⁹ Quoted in Des Pres, *The Survivor*, 173. See also Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*.

¹⁰ Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 52-54.

¹¹ Levi describes this phenomenon that occurs while he is in the *Krankenbau*. He is fed, free from heavy labor, allowed to sleep, and left in relative peace and in this "peace" he has the time to contemplate his life, "When one works, one suffers and there is no time to think: our homes are less than a memory. But here

strategies: problem-focused and emotion-focused. Problem-focused coping centers on action, where emotion-focused coping is employed when action is not possible. When the women in the brothel no longer needed to take action to adequately feed themselves, remain disease free and so on, they were able to turn their energy toward emotionally coping with their incarceration and persecution.¹² It is in this atmosphere, I contend, that sex, sexuality, and intimacy became forms of mutual assistance aiding survival. Sexual desires, for some, were reawakened, as well as desires for relationships and other forms of intimacy. When the women's basic needs were met, they could then use their labor in a manner aiding their survival and not as a further humiliation.

The brothels, although of varying sizes, were generally constructed in a similar fashion. They had a day room, or living room, serving as both the common area for the women to congregate while the brothel was closed and as the waiting room for their clients during operating hours. Business was conducted in the small bedrooms, *Koberzimmer*, equipped with beds (and sometimes sinks) and doors outfitted with peepholes. Modern bathrooms complete with plumbing yielding hot water and an examination/administration room were the necessary components for the required sanitation procedures. The brothels were exceptionally well furnished and bore no resemblance to the regular prisoners' barracks throughout the camps. Comfortable couches, tables, and chairs furnished the brothels and the bathrooms had not only showers and toilets, but also bathtubs and bidets. Curtains hung on the windows and

the time is ours... We know where we come from... we become aware, with amazement, that we have forgotten nothing, every memory evoked rises in front of us painfully clear." Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 55.

¹² Erlichmann Miller, *Love Carried Me Home*, xxi-xxiii.

vases of flowers adorned the tabletops.¹³ While liberating Dachau, Seymour Frank, a member of the US Armed Forces, learned of a brothel's existence in the camp and his curiosity led him to seek it out. Frank saw the brothel firsthand and while recounting his experiences exclaimed, "it [the brothel] was luxuriously furnished! Luxuriously furnished!"¹⁴ The brothels were opened in 1942—in the midst of Nazi Germany waging both the Final Solution and a two-front war—yet despite this, the brothels were built with modern facilities and allocated many material comforts. Surely for many of the women, setting foot inside the relatively luxurious and clean brothel convinced them their decision to "volunteer," or their selection, was a step in the direction of survival.

Undoubtedly the improved living conditions and rations aided the women both mentally and physically. The medical records of a woman in the Buchenwald brothel, Eugenie C., prove this to be true. Upon her admittance into Ravensbrück in 1942, Eugenie C. was 5'2" and weighed 143lbs; two years later she entered the Buchenwald brothel in September 1944 her weighing 132lbs. In March 1945, while still working in the brothel, Eugenie weighed 141lbs. Eugenie was a concentration camp prisoner who actually *gained* weight during incarceration¹⁵ Eugenie's medical records absolutely attest to the positive impact the improved rations had on the lives of the women working in the brothels. The women were not only relatively well fed, but the clean environment also segregated from the rest of the camp served as a barrier from camp epidemics. Either encircled by a fence, or built in an isolated area, the brothels were segregated from the

¹³ Bundesarchiv Lichteferde (hereafter, BA) NS 4 FL-48; AGN Anna X, Transcription, 25, "Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

¹⁴ Seymour Frank, interview by Rosalie Franks, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Boynton Beach, FL, USA, March 20, 1998, Interview Code 39683, Tape 3, Segment 77.

¹⁵ International Tracing Service of the Red Cross Bad Arolsen (hereafter, ITS) ITS Häftlingskarte Buchenwald Häftlingskarte Eugenie C., Revierkarte.

rest of the camp for the reason of better controlling who was allowed entry into the brothel. Perhaps an intended, or unintended consequence was that the brothels' location kept the women clear from the spread of disease, lice, and other vermin.

Just as life in the camps was strictly regimented, so was life behind the brothel door. Daily schedules were similar in the Neuengamme, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Dachau, Mauthausen, Gusen, Flossenbürg, and Auschwitz I brothels.¹⁶ In either Ravensbrück or Birkenau, the women began their day awakened by sirens at four or five in the morning to begin the “dance of madness” that entailed bed making, dressing, and hurriedly washing before standing at roll call prior to the start of their labor assignments.¹⁷ In contrast, the women in the brothels began their day calmly around 7 or 7:30 in the morning. They were given adequate time to wash, dress themselves, and make their beds. Their daily duties included cleaning and organizing the brothel. Once these tasks were completed, they were free to sit in the day room and have breakfast that commonly included coffee, bread, and jelly. All food items were of a higher quality and quantity than the food the women had received in Ravensbrück.¹⁸ Several times a week the women received special meals directly from the SS *Kantine* and naturally, these meals were of uncompromising quality.¹⁹ Following breakfast, the women were free to

¹⁶ The schedule in the Mittelbau-Dora and Auschwitz-Monowitz brothels differed, due to the prisoners working shifts, either in the V-2 tunnels or in the Buna factory, the brothel was open 24 hours and the women worked designated shifts.

¹⁷ Morrison, *Ravensbrück*, 110.

¹⁸ AGN Anna X, Transcription, 29, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

¹⁹ AGN Anna X, Transcription, 20, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03; Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 52-54.

talk amongst themselves, read,²⁰ or darn socks for the SS guards.²¹ The women were not allowed to leave the brothel²² unless on SS supervised walks around the camp.²³

Typically the brothels in Neuengamme, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Dachau, Mauthausen, Gusen, Flossenbürg, and Auschwitz I opened each evening for two hours and then again on Sunday afternoon from 3pm to 8pm.²⁴ Due to Mittelbau-Dora's production of V-2 and I.G. Farben's rubber production at Monowitz, the brothels in these locations were open around-the-clock to accommodate the workers on all shifts. When the brothel was open for business, each woman was supposed to spend 15 to 20 minutes with each client. The SS had deemed this window of time as sufficient for the men to quickly "do their thing" or "indulge in love."²⁵ Each woman, if keeping to the prescribed schedule, would see eight men per evening. Margarethe W.'s testimony echoes this intended operation,

Every evening we had to let eight men mount us in the space of two hours. It worked as follows: they came in, went to the doctor's office for an injection, and then got their room number, that is the prisoner, took care of business there, in, up, down, out, and back again, then they got another injection and left.²⁶

However, my analysis of the payment records from the Dachau and Buchenwald brothels indicate that the actual amount of traffic in the brothel was slower and the number of

²⁰ Kassig and Paul, "Bordelle in deutschen Konzentrationslagern," 29.

²¹ AGN Anna X, Transcription, 38, "Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03; AGN Herr Z., Transcription, 1, "Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

²² In the Mittelbau-Dora and Monowitz the brothel was opened all day and night resulting in the women working shifts. This is in contrast to the other brothels only open during certain periods of the day.

²³ Archiv der Gedenkstätte Mittelbau-Dora (hereafter, AGMD) DMD-EB/HD-32.

²⁴ Archiv der Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen (hereafter, AGS) D30A 8/3 Bl. 60-108, 101.

²⁵ AGN Margarethe W., Transcription, 4, "Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03; Kassig and Paul, "Bordelle in deutschen Konzentrationslagern," 29; AGS D 30A 82 A, 121.

²⁶ Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 52-54.

daily customers per prostitute was lower, ranging from four to six men per evening.²⁷

The lower number of customers indicated that the 15 minute rule may not have always been enforced and as I later discuss, opens up the possibility for men and women to spend more time together.

Applying for permission was the first step in the process for prospective patrons to enter the brothel. Subsequent to receiving permission, the eligible men were screened for venereal disease and registered before they waited in the day room.²⁸ Once admitted to a *Koberzimmer*, the only permissible form of sex was intercourse in the missionary position. The SS guards were supposed to use the peepholes in the door to patrol the activities of the women and men. If there was a change in position, or if any unsanctioned activities took place, the SS guard stationed outside the door was authorized to administer beatings to both the women and men.²⁹ Zbigniew Piotrowski, a prisoner in the Neuengamme camp, was given the task of placing glass panes in the peepholes in the Neuengamme brothel. When he asked his Kapo why peepholes were necessary, the Kapo responded “here [in the brothel], fucking is only allowed the German way, there will be no French fucking.”³⁰

Why did it matter how sexual intercourse was carried out? Why, if sex was a reward, did it have to be in the missionary position? The existence of this rule lends the opportunity to raise questions, rather than state facts or answers. One possible reason is, that although the Third Reich was, as this dissertation among other studies argues, not

²⁷ ITS, KL Dachau Ordner Nr. 284, GCC 3/231; KL Dachau Ordner Nr. 285, GCC 3/231; ITS KL Dachau Ordner Nr. 287, GCC 3/231; KL Dachau Ordner Nr. 288, GCC 3/231. Kassenanweisungen des KL Dachau; BA NS 4 Bu/41.

²⁸ AGN Anna X., Transkription, 13, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

²⁹ AGS JD 5/3, 135-138.

³⁰ AGN NG 2.8/839/Kat 1, 44.

sexually repressive but a time of liberalizing sexual mores, there was still a tendency to view sex as “productive.” By “productive,” I refer not to its normative definition implying procreation, but “productive” in the sense of reaching orgasm. Perhaps the insistence that 15 minutes was enough time for a man and women to have sexual intercourse is based upon the belief that the male orgasm should be effectively reached in this time period. Or, possibly, as this Kapo implied, sex in the missionary position was sex the *German* way. That is, maybe *German* sex was purposeful in contrast to “French fucking” which may have been perceived as lustful. This rule could be construed as evidence the Nazis were sexually conservative, however, I would assert the very existence of camp brothels is evidence of its liberalizing tendencies with regard to sex despite the insistence on missionary sex.³¹

Neither the official SS correspondence, nor the brothel blueprints, mention the inclusion of peepholes; yet, they were present in all brothels. If the brothel was built in the manner of a panopticon providing the SS with the ability to observe all activities in the brothel, the inclusion of peepholes also provided the SS with a form of “entertainment.” If the brothel was simply a place where industriousness male prisoners could claim their rewards, then why did the SS need to be privy to the activities behind the closed doors? The inclusion of peepholes was most likely due to the need to monitor prisoner activity, much like the watchtowers throughout the camps. However, it was how members of the SS used the peepholes, that was most likely unintended. Not only were the peepholes used for observation duty, but prisoner testimony indicates the SS used the peepholes to both amuse and sexually arouse and satisfy themselves. In the Sachsenhausen brothel, *SS Obersturmführer* August Höhn frequently used the peepholes

³¹ On the conservatism of Nazi policies regarding sex and sexuality, see Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*.

and even requested a mirror be strategically placed in Brunhilde S.'s corner-room so he could better see the bed.³² This request indicates more than just an interest in upholding the “rules,” but suggests he was gaining some type of satisfaction in watching the acts of sexual intercourse. Furthermore, *SS Obersturmführer* August Höhn did not request mirrors be placed in the other rooms, nor the other corner *Koberzimmer* further implying his interest had more to do with Brunhilde and was certainly sexual in nature.

Sachsenhausen prisoner Günther Bullerjahn remarked cynically the same SS men who supported Hitler's tirades against prostitution in *Mein Kampf*, were also enthusiastically looking through the peepholes and couldn't seem to “get enough.”³³ The Commandant of Neuengamme took time to use the peepholes and regale his men with a running commentary on the various sexual performances of the men.³⁴

According to prisoner testimonies, however, not all of the SS guards used the peepholes. Several women in the brothels recall the SS rarely patrolling the brothel hallways and even when they did, the smudged glass in the peepholes had rendered them useless.³⁵ The upkeep of the peepholes, as well as how the SS used them, naturally depended upon the brothel and its SS leadership. The evidence is both incomplete and uneven necessitating a cobbling together of the available sources to illuminate the utilization of the peepholes—whether or not the women and men felt monitored while in the brothel certainly influenced their actions. It is possible the women working in the brothel were eager to downplay the SS use of the peepholes due to the implications,

³² AGS JD 4/13 Bl 6-9, 7.

³³ AGS D30 A 82A, 121-122, 121.

³⁴ Wanda Heger, *Jeden Freitag vor dem Tor: der Bericht der Frau, die im Deutschland der Jahre 1942-1945 vielen skandinavischen Häftlingen in Konzentrationslagern das Leben gerettet und die Rettungsaktion des Grafen Bernadotte ermöglicht hat* (Munich: Schneekluth, 1989), 99.

³⁵ AGN Anna X., Transcription, 18, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

namely that the women were somehow providing the SS men with sexual stimulation or satisfaction and thus in some manner fraternizing with their captors. However, as is well known in the historiography of the Holocaust, is that survival largely depended upon a level of cooperation with the Nazis. Specifically speaking of the women in the brothel, it is likely these women were uncomfortable with their role as sexual laborers for the Reich and moreover, the possibility that their work was monitored by the SS and granted them pleasure, was adding insult to injury. To this point, a woman in the Buchenwald brothel remarked she was especially unprepared for the perverted enjoyment the SS gained by watching the women have sex as there had been no mention of this aspect of their labor during the “recruiting” and selection processes.³⁶

There is no official correspondence mandating the inclusion of peepholes in the brothel doors and this is another piece of evidence supporting my argument the brothels did not operate simply as part of a labor incentive program. Why would the Nazi regime care how camp inmates, imprisoned because they were unfit for Nazi society, had sex? The brothels, under the guise of providing labor incentives, were actually used as another means of exploiting and humiliating prisoners. The SS used the peepholes to as sexual voyeurs and further reinforced the structures of power and domination. As with many aspects of Nazi policy, especially when concerned with sex, incitement and disavowal went hand-in-hand. The SS was entrusted with the task of maintaining the sexual acts taking place in the brothel were not “deviant,” yet their voyeurism was considered entertainment and in no way deviant behavior. It was the Nazi *modus*

³⁶ “Armes Kind, du bist so hübsch,” *Wochenpost*, November 9, 1995, 40-42; Also Hermann Leonhardt, Block Elder of the Monowitz infirmary, recalls the SS men being entertained by watching the women and men in the Monowitz brothel, Archiwum Państwowego Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau W Oświęcimiu (hereafter, APMO) Ośw/Leonhardt/1509, 2.

operandi to benefit from all aspects of camp labor and the brothels not only encourages increased work production from camp laborers, but also provided some entertainment for the SS guards. To this end, Nazi policy exploited sexuality so that sexual intercourse in the brothel was doubly productive.

Case Study: The Dachau Brothel

The Dachau brothel, located between the Disinfection Barracks and the camp's plant nursery, opened on April 18, 1944.³⁷ According to the entry books for Dachau, the women from Ravensbrück chosen to work in the brothel were registered into the camp two days prior, April 16, 1944.³⁸ There is evidence that 23 women worked in the brothel during its existence. Although the documentation for each of the women is incomplete, it is possible to give a statistical overview of this set of women. The 23 women were categorized as follows: 9 German "asocials" (*Asozial*); 1 German "career criminal" (*Berufverbrecher*); 7 German "political prisoners" (*Politisch*); and 2 Polish "political prisoners."³⁹ Among the 23 women the "status" of 14 women is noted: 8 women were single, 2 were married, and 4 were divorced.⁴⁰ The average age of the women in the Dachau Brothel was 22.5 years old. The youngest woman was 19 and the eldest woman was 36 years of age.⁴¹ There are detailed arrest records for 9 women and among these women only 1 was arrested for prostitution. The remaining 8 women were arrested as follows: 3 for thievery, 3 as "work shy," 1 for work sabotage, and 1 as an "enemy of the

³⁷ Engelhardt, "Frauen im Konzentrationslager Dachau," 223.

³⁸ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive (hereafter, USHMM) RG-04.006 M Reel 5, Zugangsbuch Dachau.

³⁹ Archiv der Gedenkstätte Dachau (hereafter, AGD) KX-Sys 2.2.1.6/1084; ITS KL Dachau Ordner Nr. 265, GCC 3/216, 10. The names came from these brothel lists which were then used to find Häftlingskarten for each person: ITS Häftlingskarten Dachau and Ravensbrück.

⁴⁰ ITS Häftlingskarten Dachau: M.B., E.B., E.D., F.F., C.K., I.K., H.L., H.O., I.P., C.S., W.S., E.S., H.S., and E.W.

⁴¹ ITS Häftlingskarten Dachau.

state.” The common misconception, both contemporarily and historically, is these women in the brothel were former sex workers. Evidence proves this simply was not true, the overwhelming majority of women did not have records of prostitution.

SS recruitment entailed promising women payment if they “volunteered” to work in the brothel. Although the women never received these payments (*Einzahlungen*), careful records were kept for the amount of money “paid” into each woman’s account. An analysis of these records give snapshots of how much business the brothel conducted. By using the accounting and receipts from July 24, 1944 until September 5, 1944,⁴² I tracked the amount of customers patronizing the brothel during this period. From this information, the number of customers each woman saw during this period is determined. Receipts for this 41-day period give a snapshot of how the brothel operated during the six months it was open. In this 41-day period, 1,950 men patronized the brothel and the average was 47.5 customers per day.⁴³ When working at full capacity, the brothel employed 12 women as sexual laborers and another woman as the cashier. The cashier did not see customers and in some cases was an “older” woman with some experience as a prostitute. By “older” I mean she was over the preferred 25 years of age. In this period of 41 days, the women saw, on average, 4 clients daily.

Looking more closely at the productivity of one specific woman, Maria B., illuminates other details about how the brothel operated. Maria B. worked each of the days in the 41-day period, saw 209 male clients, or roughly 5 men daily.⁴⁴ This statistical information reveals the women saw fewer clients in an evening than the SS projected.

⁴² ITS, KL Dachau Ordner Nr. 284, GCC 3/231, “Kassenanweisungen.”

⁴³ ITS, KL Dachau Ordner Nr. 284, GCC 3/231, “Kassenanweisungen.”

⁴⁴ An interesting side note is that from Maria B.’s records I can safely assume she no longer menstruated. She worked for 41 straight days (and possibly more) without a break and a menstruating woman could not work.

The 15-minute rule implied women would see 8 men nightly; however, this was not the case in Dachau. Not only do her “productivity” records show that business was slower than expected, it also suggests that since there were not as many men waiting each evening. This is significant for two reasons. First, the brothel guidelines indicated the women would see 8 men and the lower number of customers actually using the brothel suggests the brothels were not as economically viable as Himmler had projected. Second, if women did not have to abide by the 15-minute rule because there were fewer waiting clients, it is likely each man may have had more time with the woman. More time together opens up a greater possibility for relationships to form.

After a male prisoner registered, he was assigned to a particular room and correspondingly, a woman.⁴⁵ This system was likely meant to ensure the brothel operated smoothly and also to thwart the formation of relationships. However, the brothel receipts, and many testimonies, imply this system was not followed. A sample of receipts for 8 days in July 1944, reveal that for 5 of the 8 days there were 12 women working as “prostitutes” and one as a cashier. During this 8-day period, the number of visitors varied from a low of 34, to a high of 81. One woman saw 12 men in a single day while another woman had only 1 customer. This discrepancy strongly suggests men were able to request a particular woman and that their request was granted.⁴⁶

Although the SS attempted to thwart burgeoning relationships by assigning men to certain women, it is clear that some form of courting rituals endured. In June 1944, the SS searched the Dachau brothel and found the women in possession of alcohol, meat,

⁴⁵ Margarethe W.’s testimony includes the following: “It worked as follows: they came in, went to the doctor’s office for an injection, and then got their room number, that is, the prisoner...” Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 52-54.

⁴⁶ ITS, KL Dachau Ordner Nr. 284, GCC 3/231, “Kassenanweisungen.”

clothing, and shoes. Men, the “prominent prisoners” allowed to use the brothel, had given these items as tokens of affection or appreciation to the women.⁴⁷ The women could not have “organized” these items as they were only allowed out of their building for supervised walks. Following the search, it became clear to the SS closer supervision was necessary in the brothel. Consequently, an order was given that only men with written permission could use the brothel and that the time limit was to be enforced.⁴⁸ This order draws attention to the fact that if a new order was needed to keep to the assigned time limit, then it is likely the time limit was not being observed in the first place. It is based upon this statistical evidence and other testimonial sources that I argue relationships did form in the brothel and that these relationships helped aided self-preservation and survival.⁴⁹

The duration of time for a woman to work in the Dachau brothel ranged from 1 to 8 months with the majority working 4 to 6 months in Dachau.⁵⁰ In some cases, women were rotated from one brothel to another. Dachau brothel records show 4 women sent from Dachau to the brothel in Gusen beginning work as *Bordellfrauen* on September 15, 1944. The women remained in the Gusen brothel until transferred to the main camp, Mauthausen, on April 12, 1945 where they worked as overseers (*Aufseherinnen*).⁵¹ These records illuminate two important aspects of how forced prostitution functioned: first, the women were not released (as promised) after work in Dachau, but rather sent to another camp. Secondly, these records suggest women were rotated from brothel to

⁴⁷ Engelhardt, “Frauen im Konzentrationslager Dachau,” 225.

⁴⁸ AGD 970 Schutzhaftbefehl Nr. 10/44.

⁴⁹ Chapter Five discusses the formation of relationships and the possible implications while in the brothel in great detail.

⁵⁰ ITS, KL Dachau Ordner Nr. 284, GCC 3/231; KL Dachau Ordner Nr. 285, GCC 3/231; ITS KL Dachau Ordner Nr. 287, GCC 3/231; KL Dachau Ordner Nr. 288, GCC 3/231. Kassenanweisungen des KL Dachau.

⁵¹ ITS Häftlingskarten Mauthausen, C.S., W.S., I.P., E.W.

brothel throughout the camp system. This rotation was likely a root cause of the misconceptions concerning the fate of female brothel workers. If the women were not returned to Ravensbrück, the Ravensbrück inmates may have assumed they were released, and for some of the women in the camp this may have justified their assertion the women “volunteering” were collaborators. Or, prisoners in Ravensbrück may have assumed the women were killed. The cycling of women from camp to camp made it difficult for camp prisoners to ascertain how the brothels were both operating and recruiting. For example, men in Gusen would not necessarily know if the women in their brothel had worked in another camp, or were “new” recruits. For these reasons, there has been speculation about the brothels and the women working there that has continued into the postwar memoirs and historiography.

The brothel in Dachau operated from April 1944 until December 1944.⁵² After it closed, the SS used the building to house high profile camp prisoners including Pastor Niemöller and other various royal figures. Evidence suggests some of the women working in the brothel were sent back to Ravensbrück after the brothel closed. For example, one woman assigned to a Ravensbrück bound transport escaped on January 12, 1945⁵³ and was recaptured and sent back to Dachau on January 19, 1945.⁵⁴ Another woman successfully escaped from the same transport just one day later on January 13, 1945, but her survival is unknown.⁵⁵ Other women remained in the Dachau camp and were assigned to various labor commandos prior to the camp’s liberation.⁵⁶

⁵² Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Dachauer Tagebücher*, 418.

⁵³ ITS GCC 3/149/1B/7.

⁵⁴ ITS GCC 3/11C/1.

⁵⁵ ITS Häftlingskarten Dachau, L.S.

⁵⁶ ITS GCC 3/IIC/1, 2505.

A case study of Dachau adds detail to this study of the prisoner's brothels due in part to its relative abundance of sources. This case study makes, or supports, three important interventions. First, the brothel roster demonstrates dramatically that the women working in the brothel were not all prostitutes. This claim was made by Himmler at the program's inception and is echoed in prisoner testimony and literature. Secondly, the receipts demonstrate that not only were the brothels less economically lucrative for the SS, but that the lower levels of business allowed for men to spend more time with the woman behind the brothel door. This statistical evidence combined with prisoner testimonies serve to further substantiate my assertion that sex in the brothel was not always, nor uniformly, a negative experience. Finally, the transfer orders serve as starting point to dismantle the confusion regarding what actually happened to the women who "volunteered" to work in the brothels. The Dachau records show the speculation stems not only from the SS promise to the women they would be released, but also their failure to do so, but to instead, rotate the women.

Case Study: The Buchenwald Brothel

The Buchenwald brothel was built in a secluded location, in an area known as the "little camp," between the infirmary and movie theatre. Surrounded by a wooden fence, the brothel was built similarly to the Dachau brothel. Inside was a day-room (*Tagesraum* or *Aufenthaltsraum*) with a window and furnished with benches, chairs, and tables; an office for the SS guard; a physician's examination room; and windowed work-rooms (*Koberzimmer*) outfitted with a bed, table, washbasin, and two doors (one door led to the hallway and the other to the large sleeping area shared by the women).⁵⁷ Framed pictures

⁵⁷ Archiv der Mahn-und Gedenkstätte Buchenwald (hereafter, AMGB) Rupprecht Podszun, "Sonderbau: Das Häftlingsbordell im Konzentrationslager Buchenwald," 8; Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 53.

and vases of fresh flowers brightened the walls of the brothel and curtains hung on the windows.⁵⁸ In the center of the door leading from the workroom to the hallway was the standard peephole allowing the SS to observe the activities. The peepholes in the Buchenwald brothel had a diameter of 5cm and were outfitted with glass panes.⁵⁹ Central heating and hot water were normally luxuries reserved for the SS; nevertheless, the Buchenwald brothel was replete with these amenities. The bathrooms were equipped with bathtubs, bidets, washbasins, and toilets and “warm water [ran] everywhere,” as one new arrival noted with apparent pleasure.⁶⁰

The first records of women arriving in Buchenwald for brothel duty are dated July 2 and July 4, 1943.⁶¹ The brothel most likely opened for business in the middle of the month.⁶² *SS Lagerkommandant* Hermann Pister took on the job of “recruiting” and staffing the Buchenwald brothel himself, personally overseeing not only the selections for the Buchenwald brothel, but also taking an interest in its building plans. He even made a trip to Mauthausen to see its brothel and to improve upon its design.⁶³ During the Buchenwald trial, Pister exhibited pride while recollecting how he traveled to Ravensbrück to select the “volunteers” for the camp’s brothel.⁶⁴ Pister’s presence in

⁵⁸ AMGB “Buchenwald Jahresende 1943” album; also testimony of Anna X. in the Neuengamme brothel speaks of the flowers and furnishings, Anna X., Transcription, 23, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

⁵⁹ AGN NG 2.8/839/Kat 1, 44.

⁶⁰ Anna X., Transcription, 14, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

⁶¹ BA NS 4 Bu/41, Krankenpapiere.

⁶² AMGB NS 4 Bu/41. A receipt exists for July 15, 1943.

⁶³ Archiv der Mahn-und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück (hereafter, AMGR) 22/212 Bl. 1-4, 2. Unlike the Mauthausen brothel, the Buchenwald brothel was for prisoners only and did not include women for the Ukrainian guards.

⁶⁴ AMGB 82-15-1; A male survivor of Buchenwald recalls the women in the camp brothel as attractive and “a lot were blondes, very few brunettes.” Adam Bonet, interview by Susan Rosenblum, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Bayside, FL,

Ravensbrück during the brothel selections further proves the SS were not randomly asking for “volunteers,” but that more time and care in selecting attractive women was put into the process. Pister, by making the trip to Ravensbrück himself, imparted great importance to the selection of women working in the Buchenwald brothel. These selections were not typical examples of the everyday work battalion variety.

A “Medical Records” document dated July 1, 1943, states the transport of 16 female prisoners from Ravensbrück on July 2, 1942 to the Buchenwald camp. The document, signed by the camp physician Dr. Waldemar Hoven, lists 16 women ranging in age from 21 to 32 and includes their venereal disease, medical, and camp records.⁶⁵ These women were given civilian clothing, pleated skirts, blouses, panties, and bras, to wear in the brothel.⁶⁶ The choice of clothing once again suggests the women were expected to look “appealing” for their male customers. The Buchenwald brothel was the largest brothel in the concentration camp system, employing 16 women as forced sexual laborers. Evidence proves that at least 21 women worked in the brothel over the course of its operation. The average age of the women working as “prostitutes” was 25 years old; however, the two prisoner cashiers were 44 and 42 years of age. In the sample of 21 women in the brothel, the marital status is noted for 19 women: 14 women were single, 1 woman was a prostitute (this is what is noted under her marital status), and 4 women were divorced. The prisoner classifications for this same group of women is as follows: 1 “Gypsy,” 1 Polish “political,” 1 Polish “asocial,” and the remaining 16 women were

USA, February 6, 2001, Interview Code 51420, Tape 3, Segment 66. Perhaps the high percentage of blondes was in part due to Commandant Pister’s choosing.

⁶⁵ ITS Bu 505:250, 235-236.

⁶⁶ Paul/Kassig 29; Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 52-54; a Polish Jewish survivor of the Buchenwald camp recalls seeing the women dressed in bright colors, “yellows and reds and greens.” Adam Bonet, interview by Susan Rosenblum, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Bayside, FL, USA, February 6, 2001, Interview Code 51420, Tape 3, Segment 66..

labeled German “asocials.”⁶⁷ As these records demonstrate, the majority of the women were German, but not all. Both Poles and Gypsies were considered racially inferior. Thus, having women of these “races” in the brothel having sexual intercourse with German men would have been committing race defilement (*Rassenschande*); yet, there is no evidence to suggest this was a problem.

During the day, the women in the brothel were free to do as they pleased but had to remain in the brothel. Supervised walks were the only time the women could leave. Average meals in the Buchenwald brothel consisted of “luxury” items such as bread, milk, butter, and wurst.⁶⁸ The women worked for two hours in the evenings between roll call and curfew.⁶⁹ The brothel was open for business unless one of the following occurred: the escape alarm sounded, there were water or electrical shortages, camp speeches, or if evening roll call was delayed or lasted longer than expected. These closings account for some of the missing records and receipts of daily business. For example, on September 15, 1943, a report was filed accounting for closures on the following dates:

- 5.8.43 Late Evening Roll Call
- 14.8.43 Water shortages
- 24.8.43 Light and water shortages
- 30.8.43 Water shortages
- 9.9.43 Water shortages
- 10.9.43 Leadership Speeches⁷⁰

If the camp experienced either water or light shortages, the brothel’s sanitation protocol could not be carried out and for that reason, all business ceased. Standard routine mandated men undergo physical examinations and bathe prior to intercourse with the

⁶⁷ ITS Häftlingskarten Buchenwald.

⁶⁸ AMGB NS 4 Bu/77.

⁶⁹ AMGB NS 4 Bu/41.

⁷⁰ AMGB NS 4 Bu/41.

women. The women also went through a rigorous routine of cleaning themselves both before and after each customer. Injections were also given to ward off pregnancy and disease.⁷¹ These measures were rendered useless without hot water and electricity. The fear of venereal disease was greater than the need to open the brothel.

The records dating from July 1943 until March 1945, offer a glimpse into the inner-workings of the brothel. These records include the names of the women working in the brothel, how many customers they saw each day, and the amount paid to the “prostitute,” overseer, and to the SS. These records also reflect Pohl’s price change and reconfigured distribution of payment. Although the records are not complete, it is possible to use this snapshot to estimate the amount of business conducted in the brothel. In a 13-day period in July 1943, the women had 1257 male clients. Over this 13-day period, 15 women were working as “prostitutes” and one additional woman as the cashier. On average, the women serviced 97 clients with each “prostitute” seeing between 6 and 7 men daily.⁷² On Sundays, the brothel was opened for a longer duration; yet, during the extended hours there were not significantly more clients. On Sunday July 25, there were 139 clients as compared to Wednesday evening July 28, when 117 clients entered the brothel.⁷³ The longer opening hours did not necessarily mean more business, further indicating the presence of a steady client base frequenting the brothel. It is my hypothesis that many brothel customers were repeat customers and came whenever they were able. The extended Sunday hours most likely saw an influx of clients who perhaps did not regularly utilize the brothel, but may have taken advantage of its longer hours.

⁷¹ Podszun, “Sonderbau,” 12.

⁷² AMGB NS 4 Bu/41. “Einnahme im Bordell,” for July 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28, 1943.

⁷³ AMGB NS 4 Bu/41. “Einnahme im Bordell,” for July 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28, 1943.

This evidence further suggests the presence of a steady client base. The quantity of business remains relatively steady regardless of the number of women working. In short, if only 10 women were working they still handled the same amount of business. On most days the brothel was not operating at full capacity—meaning one or more women were not having sex with clients—leaving another woman to shoulder a heavier work load.⁷⁴

Payment records, in addition to tracking the number of clientele, also track when women were not “working.” Menstruating, or ill women did not work. Christel M., for example, is marked sick beginning July 20, 1943 and ending July 24, 1943; if this cycle repeats, it could indicate her menstrual cycle due to the length and frequency of her absences. However, the payment records reveal that women, even when sick for an extended period, were not immediately transported out of the brothel. Ill women seemed to remain in the brothel to convalesce. The Buchenwald brothel records show several of the women being sick for days at time but still remaining on the brothel roster. One woman was sick 7 days in July; 10 days in August; and, 4 days in September 1943; yet, she remained in the brothel despite her poor “productivity” record.⁷⁵ By all accounts, it appears that once the SS filled the brothel battalions, they were keen to keep their workers in their assigned brothels. These women, unlike the general camp population, were not considered an endless supply of labor. Although we do know women were rotated from one brothel to another, the records indicate this did not occur frequently. The surviving records for the Buchenwald brothel suggest that once a cohort of women sexual laborers was established, they generally remained working in the brothel until liberation. Of course, this is not without exception, as there are instances of death,

⁷⁴ AMGB NS 4 Bu/41. “Einnahme im Bordell,” for July, August, and September 1943.

⁷⁵ AMGB NS 4 Bu/41. “Einnahme im Bordell,” for July, August, and September 1943.

pregnancy, and venereal disease; but still, the majority in the Buchenwald brothel remained there until liberation.⁷⁶ The brothel operated until a few weeks prior to the camp's liberation on April 11, 1945.

The SS were forbidden from using the camp brothel; however, testimonies from Eugen Kogon and Buchenwald prisoner Carl Gärtig, maintain the SS did frequent the brothel. Kogon writes, "Nor was the place scorned by SS officers, who could often be found there at the advanced hours of the night."⁷⁷ Gärtig discusses how the two SS women originally in charge of overseeing the brothel "pimped" the women out to their male SS comrades. Gärtig said, "if they [the women sexual laborers] were disobedient, they [the SS overseers] forced the women to be agreeable to their SS comrades."⁷⁸ An SS Main Economic and Administrative Office (*Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt*, *WVHA*) memo dated November 20, 1943, relays Himmler's decision to remove the SS *Aufseherinnen* from the brothel while replacing them with older and "experienced" women from the Ravensbrück camp.⁷⁹ This decision was made due to the corruption in the camp brothels, including the use of the brothel by the SS as Carl Gärtig reveals. Martha G. and Helene J, 44 and 42 years of age, replaced the two SS women in December 1943 working as the supervisor and cashier. These two women were much older than the rest of the women and utilized not as sexual laborers, but to oversee the running of the brothel.⁸⁰ The SS only wanted young women to work as "prostitutes" and thought older women would not attract the same amount of clientele. Both women

⁷⁶ On February 26, 1944 two women suddenly appear on the brothel roster only to disappear, without any record on March 7, 1944. It is very possible that either these women were sent back to Ravensbrück, or possibly even on a *Vernichtungstransport* to the East, but the records to prove this no longer exist. AMGB NS 4 Bu/41. "Einnahme im Bordell," February 26, 1944 and March 7 1944.

⁷⁷ Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, 136.

⁷⁸ AMGB 56-8-3.

⁷⁹ AGD 1419; AGNNG KZ-Sys. 1.4.4.2.

⁸⁰ AMGB 56-8-6.

rotated as cashier in the records from July of 1943 until Martha G. is released in January 1945. It appears Helene J. was still in the brothel in March of 1945.⁸¹ The SS most likely chose Martha G. to run the brothel due to her experience; she is one of the few women with a record of prostitution.⁸²

The mandated change in brothel personnel highlights several informative issues about the brothels. First, the SS *Aufseherinnen* were accused of abusing their position and consequently dismissed from their position. Their dismissal implies the prisoner claims that the SS did in fact use the prisoner brothels a more than likely possibility. Second, their transfer out of the brothel for misconduct is also a reminder that the SS did not always enforce the brothel rules. For example, often the existence of sexual abuse or sexual relations between Germans and non-Germans is downplayed or dismissed because it was illegal for such relationships (consensual or not) to transpire. However, the crime of race defilement (*Rassenschande*) often did not preclude these acts of sexual abuse or relations from occurring.⁸³ Interestingly, the SS sought to remove the SS presence from the brothel in an effort to root out corruption. This decision may have cut down on corruption, but it also put the brothel more squarely under the control of its workers.

The Buchenwald brothel records underline the use of non-German women in the brothels, despite Himmler's insistence that the brothels were for German men and women

⁸¹ AMGB NS 4/41.

⁸² ITS Häftlingskarten Buchenwald, M.G.

⁸³ On the topic of sexual violence against Jews, see Na'ama Shik, "Sexual Abuse of Jewish Women in Auschwitz-Birkenau," in *Brutality and Desire*, 221-246; Regina Mühlhäuser, "Between 'Racial Awareness' and Fantasies of Potency: Nazi Sexual Politics in the Occupied Territories of the Soviet Union, 1942-1945," in *Brutality and Desire*, 197-220; Regina Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen: Sexuelle Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutscher Soldaten in der Sowjetunion 1941-1945* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2010); Monika J. Flaschka, "Race, Rape and Gender in Nazi-Occupied Territories," (PhD diss., Kent State University, 2009); on the "mythologization" of sexual violence against Jews, see Sybil Milton, "Women and the Holocaust: The Case of German and German-Jewish Women," in *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*, Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, eds. (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 213-249; Vera Laska, "Women in the Resistance and in the Holocaust," in *Different Voices*, 250-269.

only. An analysis of the brothel receipts signal the existence of a relatively stable client base as substantiated by the average numbers of visitors weekly and during the days with extended hours. Moreover, the dismissal of the *SS Aufseherinnen* and their replacement with “experienced” older women placed the control of the brothel under prisoner control creating opportunities for men and women to form relationships. Many of the amenities promised to women “volunteers” did in fact materialize; however, as the Buchenwald records demonstrate, women once in the brothel stayed in the brothel. It was generally only due to contracting venereal disease or becoming pregnant did the women cease working in the brothel.

On the Job Risks: Venereal Disease and Pregnancy

The benefits of working in the brothel included better rations, civilian clothing, and living in a clean environment with modern amenities. The “perks” and amenities indeed aided the women in their struggle for survival; however, sexual labor was not without its considerable risks. To begin, the impetus behind most women’s decisions to “volunteer”—the promise of their release women after working in the brothel—was never delivered, thus meaning their incarceration in the camp was still for an unspecified duration. However, even more dangerous and deadly was the possibility of becoming pregnant or infected with a venereal disease.

Nazi Germany was intent on stopping the spread of venereal disease and this quest was one motivation behind the re-institution of state-regulated brothels. The prisoners’ brothels in the concentration camp were no exception, here too the Nazis focused energy on fighting venereal disease. At the close of each shift, the camp physician gave the women injections meant to stave off sexually transmitted diseases and

pregnancy.⁸⁴ The Nazi venereal disease efforts did not stop even with women incarcerated because they were unworthy of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Several survivor accounts discuss women sick with venereal disease returning to the Ravensbrück camp⁸⁵ and placed in either solitary confinement or the *Strafblock*.⁸⁶ Either of these assignments would have hastened their deaths. In contrast, still other sources remember women with venereal disease being killed immediately via a lethal injection.⁸⁷ A female survivor of medical experimentation in Auschwitz remarked the following about the women working in the brothel, "...of course they all got sick and were shipped to Block 10 (the medical experimentation block) to die...how long could you keep that up?"⁸⁸ Contracting a venereal disease in the brothel was a death sentence.

In addition to taking measures against the spread of venereal disease, SS physicians undertook special measures to prevent pregnancies. Injections and douching with lactic acid were methods used to prevent pregnancy.⁸⁹ Pregnancy was a possibility as some of the women still menstruated. However, some women claim the measures to battle pregnancy were hardly necessary. Anna X discussed how women never needed to use the "sick-room," stating "hardly any girl got her period."⁹⁰ This revelation implies how severely undernourished the women were before working in the brothel that the improved rations did not allow their bodies to fully recuperate. Despite the SS

⁸⁴ Kassig and Paul, "Bordelle in deutschen Konzentrationslagern," 29.

⁸⁵ AMGR Bd. 15/17 Bl. 1-12, 7; Karin Berger and Elisabeth Holzinger, eds., "*Ich geb Dir einen Mantel, daß Du ihn noch in Freiheit tragen kannst.*" *Widerstehen im KZ. Österreichische Frauen erzählen* (Wien: Promedia, 1987), 149.

⁸⁶ Berger and Holzinger, "*Ich geb Dir einen Mantel,*" 149.

⁸⁷ AGS JD 4/5 Bl. 28-29; AGS JD 1/13 Bl. 16-17.

⁸⁸ Sientje Backer, interview by Fuzzy Teitelbaum, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Lower Sackville, Nova Scotia, Canada, August 7, 1997, Interview Code 32515, Tape 4, Segment 26.

⁸⁹ AGN Anna X., Transcription, 29, "Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

⁹⁰ AGN Anna X., Transcription, 17, "Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

physician's efforts to prevent pregnancy, both official⁹¹ and unofficial⁹² records indicate women did indeed become pregnant. The conflicting archival and testimonial sources imply there was not a comprehensive policy in place dealing with pregnancies within the brothel. The SS course of action regarding pregnancy varies. Reports range from the immediate execution of women to forced abortions allowing the women to return to work. Margarethe W., a woman in the Buchenwald brothel, recalls a fellow worker undergoing an abortion in five stages.⁹³ Possibly this long drawn out abortion, with days between procedures, was an experiment on different means of terminating pregnancies. A Sachsenhausen prisoner testified in the trial against SS Dr. Baumkötter that pregnant women were given injections of poison that immediately induced the death of both the fetus and the woman.⁹⁴ Erika Buchmann, Block Elder of the *Strafblock* in Ravensbrück, wrote, "most [women] came back to confinement or the *Strafblock* and if they were pregnant or had a sexually transmitted disease they were sent on a *Vernichtungstransport*."⁹⁵ In another case, a 19-year-old Polish medical student "volunteered" to work in the Sachsenhausen brothel and became pregnant within two months time. The prisoner recalls hearing "becoming pregnant meant death" and the young Polish girl was immediately shot.⁹⁶ I draw attention to the variety of testimony with regards to pregnant women in the brothel to support my conclusion the SS lacked a

⁹¹ AMGB 56-8-2.

⁹² Anna's testimony recalls at least two women becoming pregnant during her time in the Neuengamme brothel but does not mention their fate. AGN Anna X., Transcription, 29, "Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

⁹³ AGN Margarethe W., Transcription, 44, "Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

⁹⁴ AGS JD 1/8 Bl 74-80, 77.

⁹⁵ Buchmann, *Frauen von Ravensbrück*, 86.

⁹⁶ AGS D30 A 82A Bl. 121-122 Günther Bullerjahn, "Der Sonderbau im KL Sachsenhausen, Haftbestätigung"; AGS JD 6/5 Teil 2. Bl. 20-32, 31; Harry Kahn, interview by Audrey Heimler, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, West Hartford, CT, USA, April 22, 1998, Interview Code 40965, Tape 5, Segment 124.

cohesive and comprehensive policy toward dealing with pregnancy in the brothel. This had significance in two ways. First, the prospect of being killed demonstrates the dangers these women were exposed to, along with some rewards, by submitting to this assignment. Secondly, here as elsewhere in the camps, the very unpredictability of one's fate only exacerbated the terror and brings to relief the limits of the notion of "choice" for this population.

Camp leadership made decisions based on a case-by-case basis. The case file of a young woman in the Buchenwald brothel, Hedwig S., is worthy of closer examination because it involves some of the only official correspondence (in contrast to prisoner testimony) referencing pregnancy policies. A little background is necessary to provide the context for Hedwig S's pregnancy. The Tilsit *Kripo*, in East Prussia, arrested Hedwig S. on March 3, 1944 for breaking a work contract and her offense led to her deportation to Ravensbrück where she was processed and classified as an "asocial" prisoner. Her prisoner questionnaire notes she is an "Aryan" German with blonde hair and gray eyes. Her camp records show she left Ravensbrück on August 31, 1944 and entered Buchenwald on September 7, 1944 with the work assignment "*Bordell*." Hedwig S., at the time of her transfer to the Buchenwald brothel, had only been in the camp system for at most six months. She had been, prior to her arrest, living as a free German citizen in Tilsit. This timeline is significant because it strongly suggests Hedwig was probably in good physical health prior to her arrest and as a result, her relatively short period of time in Ravensbrück had most likely not yet affected her ability to menstruate.⁹⁷

Consequently, Hedwig was most likely still in stable health when she began her labor

⁹⁷ Hedwig S.'s files do not mention the day she was processed into the Ravensbrück camp but it is possible that one to two months had passed between the time of her arrest in Tilsit to her transport to the camp making her arrival in Ravensbrück in May of 1945.

assignment in the Buchenwald brothel. On December 11, 1944, an SS Doctor in Buchenwald wrote to the Head of Division D III in Oranienburg requesting guidance on the matter of Hedwig S.'s pregnancy. The letter states the prisoner is two or three months pregnant and seeks advice as to how her pregnancy should be "interrupted."⁹⁸ The existence of such a letter indicates firstly there was no standard camp policy for dealing with brothel pregnancies. Second, prisoner testimony suggests pregnant women were immediately shot or sent on a *Vernichtungstransport*; this correspondence proves that this was not the de facto policy. Moreover, it suggests that actions concerning the brothel women had to first be cleared with the SS headquarters in Oranienburg.

Hedwig's case was under review in December 1944, at this time the German *Wehrmacht* had begun its last major offensive in the Ardennes marking the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge on the Western front while facing probable defeat in the East as the Soviets re-captured Warsaw. Also, during this period concentration camps in both the east and west were being dismantled and evacuated forcing camp prisoners to march deeper into Germany in the infamous death marches. During these marches thousands of prisoners died due to SS brutality, the harsh weather, disease, and starvation.⁹⁹ With this information in mind, the existence of a debate between SS leadership in Oranienburg and an SS physician concerning a single prisoner working in the brothel highlights the

⁹⁸ ITS Häftlingskarten Buchenwald.

⁹⁹ The Majdanek camp was the first major camp to be approached by the Allied forces. The Soviet army approached Majdanek, located near Lublin, Poland, in July of 1944. By the end of the summer of 1944 the Soviets had liberated the dismantled death camps Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Himmler ordered the destruction of the gas chambers and crematorium in the Auschwitz camps on November 23, 1944 in order to hide the evidence from the Allied forces. This order also prompted the death marches from the camps in the East back to the camps in Germany. On the death marches, see Joseph Freeman and Donald R. Schwartz, *The Road to Hell: Recollections of the Nazi Death March* (St. Paul, Minn.: Paragon House, 1998); Michael R. Marrus, ed., *The End of the Holocaust* (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1989); Andrzej Strzelecki, *The Evacuation, Dismantling and Liberation of KL Auschwitz* (Oswiecim, Poland: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2001); Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*; Elie Wiesel, *Night*.

importance of the brothels to the Reich. She was considered a valuable part of the labor incentive program warranting special attention

Hedwig's case highlights the fact that special care was paid to the women working in the brothel and dispels the notion the women were summarily executed if they became pregnant. The attention paid to the case of an individual in the Buchenwald brothel exemplifies the significant role the women in the brothels held in the camp system. Their labor was perceived as important and as a result, if they became pregnant, the preferable course of action was the termination of pregnancy rather than losing the laborer. Hedwig S.'s records are incomplete rendering her ultimate fate unknown. However, if she survived the termination of her pregnancy, Hedwig S. may have been in Buchenwald at the time of liberation on April 11, 1945. The brothel ceased to operate as such, but was used as a refuge for the very young male prisoners of Buchenwald.¹⁰⁰ It is possible she may have remained on to take care of the young boys.¹⁰¹

Post-Brothel: Where next?

The fate of the women "volunteers" has remained shrouded in speculation for a number of reasons. Since the women were not released as promised, and often rotated, it is difficult to state with certainty what happened to the women working in the prisoners' brothels once the brothels ceased to operate. As a result of silence on the part of the women forced to work as sexual laborers, those women surviving often did not come

¹⁰⁰ Conversations with Kenneth Waltzer, Professor of History, James Madison College, and Director of Jewish Studies, while at the USHMM "Exploring the Newly Opened ITS Archive, June 16-26, 2008 in Bad Arolsen, Germany. Ken Waltzer was researching his forthcoming book, *The Rescue of Children and Youths at Buchenwald*, which will trace the activities of underground organizations in the camp that helped the boys survive internment.

¹⁰¹ A young Czech Jew was only 15 at the time of liberation and was in the Buchenwald brothel after it ceased to operate, he recalls seeing one of the women still in the camp after liberation. Michael Schwartz, interview by John Kent, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, San Diego, CA, USA, April 30, 1998, Interview Code 41458, Tape 3, Segment 25.

forward to tell their stories. Many prisoners, and Nazi officials such as Ravensbrück SS Dr. Schiedlausky, have gone on record stating the women were promised freedom after six months labor in the brothel and thus, many fellow prisoners in Ravensbrück, when they never saw the women again, assumed they were in fact released.¹⁰² However, not only was this not ever the case, but it was also never Himmler's intention to follow through with the promises of liberation. Himmler wrote in a letter, "...release, that the crazy officers had promised, was, for these women, a question of their affect on the health, order, and security of the youth."¹⁰³ His statement implies first, the SS officers, under the guise of recruiting, made unauthorized promises. Second, Himmler's statement underscores his belief that releasing these women would adversely affect German society due to their "asocial" characteristics. Consequently, it was never an option. The women were to be used and exploited for the good of the state and neither paid, nor released, for their labor. Women "choosing" to work in the brothel were certainly aware that their fate was not in their hands, but still some took the opportunity and possibilities presented to them.

In my sample of 45 women working in the Dachau, Buchenwald, and Mauthausen brothels, I have found no evidence of the release of any women after six months; yet, some women were released for different reasons. In the same sample of 45 women, 13 women were released between the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945 with their records marked "Released" (*Entlassen*). The only details found in their records are the date of release, and in some cases, into whose custody the prisoner was released. Generally the women were released to the local *Kripo* or Gestapo. Releases were

¹⁰² ANG NG 2.8/1273, 94; AGN NG 2.8/839 Kat 1, 44.

¹⁰³ Letter from Himmler, cited in Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 39.

handled by the camps' Political Department (*Politische Abteilung*), this department was the representative arm of the RSHA in the camp and was operated independently of camp commandant regarding its decisions as to the fate of prisoners. It was, however, required to inform the commandant of decisions regarding releases. This department oversaw a lengthy process based less upon a set policy and driven more so by a case-by-case consideration. It was a general rule that only German political prisoners, or those classified by the Nazis as "prominent" prisoners, were ever released from camp custody. Prisoners granted a release signed a form binding them to silence about their time in the concentration camp system. Following a camp release, the prisoners remained registered with their local Gestapo¹⁰⁴ and if they broke their silence they punished by their local Gestapo and subjected to 50 to 100 lashes and possible re-imprisonment.¹⁰⁵

Former Ravensbrück and Buchenwald brothel prisoner, Eugenie C., was released in this manner. Arrested in October of 1942, Eugenie was deported to Ravensbrück and classified "asocial" for being "work-shy." Eugenie's records also establish her "Aryan" ethnicity. From September 1944 until her release on March 10, 1945, she worked in the Buchenwald brothel. Her file contains a document from the head of the political department remarking she was fit for release but lacks any other details.¹⁰⁶ Other Buchenwald records corroborate her release date but still are bereft of an explanation for her release. For example, the invoices tallying the brothel business include the notation

¹⁰⁴ Hebermann, *The Blessed Abyss*, 240. For example, Nanda Hebermann was released after receiving special permission from Himmler; See also, ITS Häftlingskarten Buchenwald. Important to note is the dual use of the word "prominent" or *Die Prominenz*. The Nazis referred to their high-profile prisoners, such as KPD leader Ernst Busse, as a member of *Die Prominenz*. However, when the prisoners use the term, especially in referring to who had brothel privileges, they are not referring to this class of prisoners but to what can be called the "prisoner functionaries"—the prisoners holding higher positions in the camp hierarchy.

¹⁰⁵ Hebermann, *The Blessed Abyss*, 234.

¹⁰⁶ AMGB 56-8-6.

“released” by Eugenie’s name on March 10, 1945.¹⁰⁷ Invoices after this date no longer show her name. Her release had nothing to do with the promises made by the SS while recruiting; but, there is no indication as to why she was released. It is possible she was part of an effort to empty the camp, either by release or death march, prior to liberation in April 1945.

In the sample of 45 women, nearly 30% of the women were released just before the approach of the Allied Forces underlining two important facts: first, the majority of these women were German; and second, not all of the women in the brothels were former prostitutes. Per Himmler’s own instructions, former prostitutes, were ineligible for release as they would only endanger society, especially German youth. So, if indeed the women working in the brothel were all former prostitutes, as Himmler intended, then they never would have been eligible for release. The flurry of releases came at the end of the war and under the duress of the impending arrival of the Allied powers. This timing and impending defeat most certainly motivated the Political Department. These releases were likely related to the dismantling of the camps as part of the effort to hide evidence of SS activities. Certainly, upon liberation, the presence of women in all-male camps would have prompted questions from the liberating armies.¹⁰⁸ The 13 women released undoubtedly survived to see their release date largely due to “volunteering” to work in the brothel and escaping some of the horrors of Ravensbrück. Had the women remained in Ravensbrück, they certainly would not have been released as they were less “problematic.”

¹⁰⁷ AMGB NS 4 Bu/41 Date 10.3.1945.

¹⁰⁸ AGS JD 4/5 Bl. 28-29, 28; AGS JD 4/13 Bl. 6-9, 8; AS JD 1/6T.2 Bl. 42-45, 44; Archiv Sachsenhausen, JD 4/5 Bl. 55; Jacob Werber, interview by Susan Peirez, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Jamaica Estates, NY, USA, February 28, 1996, Interview Code 12485, Tape 8, Segment 43.

If only 30% of the workers in the Dachau, Buchenwald, and Mauthausen brothels were released, then what happened to the majority of the women working in the 10 camp brothels? If, as we know, they were not released after six months, how long were the women in the brothels? Based on a combination of prisoner testimony and camp records it is apparent, like many other matters, there was no set timetable; it was circumstantial, different women spent varying amounts of time in the brothel. Besides pregnancy, contracting a venereal disease, or early release, there seems to have been only one reason women left the brothel: to be rotated from brothel to brothel. Several prisoners in various camps recalled the “brothel women” being transported back to Ravensbrück or other camps prior to the liquidation of the camp before the arrival of the Allied Forces.¹⁰⁹ For example, as the Allied forces approached Neuengamme the brothel was shut down and the women deported en masse to the sub-camp Drägerwerke in Hamburg.¹¹⁰ Still, other prisoners recall seeing the women in the camps after liberation.¹¹¹ One woman in the Flossenbürg brothel, Ella F., survived both Ravensbrück and working in the Flossenbürg brothel until the liberation of the camp on April 23, 1945. At the age of 26, Ella F. was arrested for refusing to work (*Arbeitsverweigerung*) and sent to Ravensbrück. While in Ravensbrück, she “volunteered” to work in a camp brothel after hearing the SS promise all volunteers would be released after six months of labor. At the time of her

¹⁰⁹ AGS JD 4/5 Bl. 28-29, 28; AGS JD 4/13 Bl. 6-9, 8; AGS JD 1/6T.2 Bl. 42-45, 44; AGS JD 4/5 Bl. 55; Jacob Werber, interview by Susan Peirez, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Jamaica Estates, NY, USA, February 28, 1996, Interview Code 12485, Tape 8, Segment 43; Some accounts state the women working in the Flossenbürg brothel were evacuated via railway on April 19, 1945 on a transport with 1000 sick prisoners and 35 “prominent” prisoners, Hans-Peter Klaus, “Das Lagerbordell von Flossenbürg,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 4 (1992): 86-94; 92.

¹¹⁰ ANG NG 2.8/1638/kat 1, 2.

¹¹¹ Michael Schwartz, interview by John Kent, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, San Diego, CA, USA, April 30, 1998, Interview Code 1458, Tape 3, Segment 25. Michael Schwartz attests to seeing former brothel workers in Buchenwald at the time of liberation; In Flossenbürg brothel workers survived until liberation, Heigl, “Zwangsprostitution im KZ-Lagerbordell Flossenbürg,” 1.

liberation, she was gravely ill suffering from edema, but with medical attention she survived her imprisonment.¹¹² In the process of “liberation,” prisoners were asked to fill out various forms including a “Military Government of Germany Concentration Camp Inmates Questionnaire,” and it is entirely likely that many of the women declined to mention their work assignment while incarcerated.

The Brothel Women: A Closer Look

The Nazis, as discussed, propagated a misconception about who the women working in camp prisoners’ brothels really were. The Nazis, by labeling the women “volunteers,” implied they were cooperating; and second, the use of the term “prostitute” further suggested these women were sexual laborers by trade and not forced laborers. Certainly a few women working in the brothels were former prostitutes; yet, the majority were not former sex-workers.¹¹³ Documentation for each of the 10 camp brothels is incomplete; however, the available sources refute two of Himmler’s claims: that the majority of women working in the 10 camp brothels were former sex workers and all women were German.

In the Mauthausen and Gusen brothels there were at least 28 women forced to provide sexual labor. Among these 28 women, only 5 had files indicating a history of prostitution. This means almost 18% of the women working in the Mauthausen and Gusen brothels were former sexual laborers. The Mauthausen and Gusen brothels had the highest percentage of former sex workers laboring in the brothel and yet the figure is

¹¹² Heigl, “Zwangsprostitution im KZ-Lagerbordell Flossenbürg,” 1.

¹¹³ Some of the men imprisoned in the camps with brothels seemed to be aware that the majority of the women were not “prostitutes” but forced laborers but yet the misconception has persisted. See for example, Arthur Heimberg, interview by Esther Rothfield-St., USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Randwick, NSW, Australia, December 18, 1995, Interview Code 07362, Tape 6, Segment 169.

still only 18%, a clear minority. The Buchenwald brothel rosters indicate at least 21 women worked there between August 1944 and the camp's liberation on April 11, 1945. Among the 21 women, 12 have prisoner files indicating the grounds for their arrest and only 1 woman was arrested for prostitution.¹¹⁴ The remaining women were arrested for the following reasons: 9 as "work-shy," and 2 for thievery.¹¹⁵ Similarly, records indicate at least 23 women worked in the Dachau brothel and among the prisoner files 12 women have arrest records with only 1 woman arrested as a prostitute.¹¹⁶ Despite the SS claims that former prostitutes made up the brothel labor force, statistically very few of the women working in the brothels had any experience as sex-workers. "Political" and "criminal" prisoners were among the brothel women; however, the majority of women forced into prostitution were categorized broadly as "asocials."

There is difficulty in portraying these women more fully when the majority of sources came from the Nazis themselves and are laden with their terminology and frame of reference. Few interviews have been done with survivors of the camp brothels, serving as some of the only means of letting these women speak for themselves.¹¹⁷ Despite my intention to give a multi-layered and nuanced view of the women "volunteers," I do need to rely on the Nazi documents and read "between the lines" to move beyond the Nazi imposed labels and classification scheme. The brothel registers and receipts previously cited give a general and statistical overview of the women forced into prostitution; however, these bare numbers can only render so much information. A goal of this dissertation to illuminate how some women made the "choice" to work in the

¹¹⁴ ITS Häftlingskarten Buchenwald, Mauthausen and Dachau.

¹¹⁵ ITS Häftlingskarten Buchenwald, Mauthausen and Dachau.

¹¹⁶ ITS Häftlingskarten Dachau.

¹¹⁷ See the interviews incorporated into the works of Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*; and Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*.

brothels. To do so, I focus on several of these women to provide a more “thick description” of some of the women working in the brothel.

Charlotte S. worked in both the Dachau and Gusen brothels and provides an example of a non-prostitute “volunteer.” The Stuttgart Criminal Police arrested Charlotte S., a married housewife with two children, for “asocial” behavior on May 2, 1942. There is no indication of what behavior precipitated her arrest, but following the arrest she was transported to Ravensbrück. Later, upon her transfer to Mauthausen, her record changes to note she is divorced. It is possible her husband divorced her while she was incarcerated, or there was a mistake on her original intake form. After nearly two years in Ravensbrück, Charlotte S. was transported to the Dachau brothel on April 15, 1944. She spent five months working as a *Bordellfrau* in the Dachau brothel. Charlotte was moved to the Gusen brothel on September 15, 1944 and remained there until her re-designation to a prisoner overseer (*Häftlingsaufseherin*) and sent to Mauthausen. Charlotte S. remained in Mauthausen until liberation. Certainly Charlotte S. did not fit the Nazi transcript, she was not a prostitute, nor had she a record of “deviant” behavior. Based on Charlotte’s history, it is my assumption that she recognized the potential of improving her situation in the camp and perhaps her “impromptu self” urged her to “volunteer” to work in the brothel. Charlotte undoubtedly could have been motivated to “volunteer” for the brothel to help her return to her children. The promise of an early release would have been a powerful incentive to “volunteer.” Charlotte’s story underscores how misunderstood both contemporary and historical understandings of the brothel workforce were. Charlotte S. was certainly not Himmler’s typical “recruit.”

The story of Hännchen S. is very compelling because it also calls into question the “type” of woman working in the brothel. Born at the end of 1914 in Hamburg, Hännchen was living in Cuxhaven, a town on the North Sea, as a married housewife raising three young children during the Nazi regime. Hännchen’s husband was off fighting in the war, leaving her to raise and provide for their three children. Hännchen’s police records list one prior account of petty theft; however, her arrest by the Cuxhaven Criminal Police (*Kripo*) on February 22, 1942 was on the grounds that she had a “friendship with the Jews.”¹¹⁸ She arrived in Ravensbrück on June 27, 1942 as an “asocial.” There is little record to tell us about Hännchen’s time in Ravensbrück, but while in Dachau she was caught smuggling letters and sentenced to 25 lashes and internment in a dark and solitary cell.¹¹⁹ Hännchen was in Dachau working as a *Bordellfrau*. Since the women were not allowed out of the brothel except during supervised walks, it can be assumed she was caught smuggling letters while in the brothel. Hännchen S. remained in Dachau through the camp’s liberation and was released by the US Army on July 1, 1945.

Hännchen S.’s case is illuminating for several reasons: first, she once again provides proof the women “volunteering” to work in the brothels were not all former “prostitutes.” Hännchen was married with children and had no record of prostitution. Second, Hännchen’s family situation suggests her decision to work in the brothel could have been motivated not only by a drive to survive, but also the possibility that she could earn money to send to her family during her imprisonment. Lastly, Hännchen’s record of smuggling letters hints that she may have played a role in the camp’s organized

¹¹⁸ ITS Military Government of Germany Concentration Camp Inmates Questionnaire, H.S.

¹¹⁹ ITS Military Government of Germany Concentration Camp Inmates Questionnaire, H.S.

resistance. It is possible she may have been passing letters between various resistance groups. The SS feared the “political” prisoners in the camps were using the brothel as a place to plan acts of resistance.¹²⁰ Hännchen’s record makes clear that the common tropes applied to the *Bordellfrauen*—prostitutes and collaborators—were inaccurate and certainly could not be applied to her situation.

Just as the SS claimed to staff the brothels with former prostitutes, the women in the brothel were supposed to be German in order to uphold the Reich’s racial laws outlawing sexual activities between Germans and non-Germans. Yet, the women forced to work in the brothels were not all German. The “racial” breakdown of the women in the Mauthausen and Gusen brothels was: 21 German woman, 1 Gypsy, and 6 Polish women. In Buchenwald there were 16 Germans, 2 Poles, and 1 Gypsy among the records of 19 women.¹²¹ The 23 women in Dachau included records for 19 women and 17 were German and 2 were Polish.¹²² In Sachsenhausen, there is discrepancy among the male prisoner testimony as to the ethnicity and classification of the women. Some recall that the women were all German, others remember Poles, and yet another remembers French women being in the transport.¹²³ In the Auschwitz I and Monowitz brothels, according to survivors, the brothels contained more Poles and women from Eastern Europe, as well as many German women.¹²⁴ It is clear that not only German women worked in the brothels;

¹²⁰ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 261-275.

¹²¹ There were 23 women in the brothel, but records exist for only 19. ITS Häftlingskarten Buchenwald; Henry Mikols, interview by Jill Greenberg, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Dummer, NH, USA, August 22, 2001, Interview Code 51743, Tape 3, Segments 72 and 74.

¹²² AGD KX-Sys 2.2.1.6/1084 and ITS Dachau Ordner 265: 10, GCC 3/216, the names came from these brothel lists which were then used to find Häftlingskarten for each person. ITS Häftlingskarten Dachau and Ravensbrück.

¹²³ AGS V/10 p 2; AGS Der Appell 3; AGS XXXV/4 32.

¹²⁴ Samuel Lissing, interview by Philip Joseph, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Dover Heights, NSW, Australia, April 5, 1995, Interview

although German women made up the majority of “prostitutes,” other nationalities also “volunteered.”

Born in Posen, Poland on August 19, 1922, Irene P. is an example of a non-German brothel worker. She was a young, single, Polish Catholic woman working as a shorthand typist before her incarceration. On May 5, 1944, the Posen State Police arrested Irene P. for engaging in a sexual relationship with a German. Irene, as a Pole, was guilty of committing *Rassenschande* (race defilement), and for this offense, she was sent to Ravensbrück. Once in Ravensbrück her crime classified her as an “asocial.” After roughly two months in Ravensbrück, Irene P. was transported to the prisoners’ brothel in Dachau on August 31, 1944. After a brief stay in Dachau, her work card indicates her transfer to Gusen where she began work in the brothel around September 15, 1944. Irene P. remained in Gusen until April 12, 1945; it was at this time she was re-designated an *Häftlingsaufseherin*, (prisoner overseer) and sent to the main camp, Mauthausen where she survived the last days of the war. Irene P. was among the prisoners still in Mauthausen when the US Army liberated the camp in May 1945.¹²⁵ The records kept by the SS indicate that prior to her arrest for *Rassenschande*, Irene P. had a clean record. Nowhere in her documents does it suggest that she engaged in prostitution; her only crime was to enter into a consensual relationship with a German. Irene P.’s brief time in Ravensbrück would have made her an ideal candidate for work in the brothel. She was most likely still in relatively good physical condition and eager to survive.

Perhaps, given the late date of her arrest in 1944, she was also aware of the progress

Code 01901, Tape 2, Segment 59; Salek Benedikt, interview by Emilie Erbmman, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, London, England, UK, February 18, 1998, Interview Code 40881, Tape 7, Segment 37.

¹²⁵ ITS Häftlingskarten Mauthausen, I.P.

made by the Allied powers and hoped that she would only have to survive the camp for a short period of time before Germany lost the war. “Volunteering” for the brothel would have been a viable means of increasing her chance of survival.

Christel M., also non-German, worked in the Buchenwald brothel and had sexual relations with German men. Born in 1921, Christel M. lived in Germany and considered herself a Lutheran; however, she “racially” considered a Gypsy. Christel had never been married and had steady employment as a sales clerk in a shop prior to her arrest in 1942. Arrested for the dual reason of being “work-shy” and a Gypsy, she was sent to the Ravensbrück camp in June 1942. Classified as an “asocial Gypsy,” Christel was most likely assigned to live in either the punishment or prostitute block. Her *Häftlings-Personal-Karte* for both Ravensbrück and Buchenwald give her physical attributes as the following: 5’3”, slim build, oval face with dark eyes, a middle-sized nose and eyes and a small mouth, dark hair, and a fluent German speaker. Christel M., despite her asserted non-German ethnicity, was selected to work in the Buchenwald brothel. She quite possibly could have been selected by Camp Commandant Pister himself, as he did most of the selections on his own.

These two examples prove that despite Himmler’s intention to run the brothels without committing *Rassenschande*, non-German women did work in the brothels. The one rule that was consistently followed was that no Jewish women worked in the camp brothels.¹²⁶ At the close of the war and when the death marches began marching prisoners from the East to camps in the west there was a great deal of confusion and there

¹²⁶ There are still conflicting testimonies about Jewish women in the brothels due largely to Ka-Tzetnik 135633’s book, *House of Dolls* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955). If evidence is found that a Jewish woman was employed in the prisoners’ brothels it is most likely because she was not identified in the camp as a Jew.

are reports of Jewish women being mixed into transports that ended up in all male camps and thus the women were kept in the brothel. However, these instances were immediately rectified. The women, while staying in the brothel, did not work as sexual laborers, but remained until the next transport removed them from the camp. Halina Ragazzoni, a Polish Jew, was part of a death march that left from Camp C in Birkenau and stopped in a place in Oberschlesien. According to Ragazzoni, Oberschlesien was a “terrible confusion,” as the entire area was chaotic and overrun with prisoners and soldiers.¹²⁷ Ragazzoni, with 24 other women, joined with a male transport that ended up in Mauthausen. Once the women arrived in Mauthausen (a men’s camp), the camp commandant, Franz Ziereis, did not know what to do with the women and placed them in the brothel. The women were ultimately removed from the brothel and sent to Kammer am Attersee in Austria. While there they were labeled as “dangerous prisoners” and “flight risks.” Also by mistake, a group of 7 or 8 Jewish women were marching from Auschwitz-Birkenau and ended up in the Mauthausen brothel for an evening. While the Jewish women were in the brothel they were given tea and food by the “prostitutes” and reassured that while there they were safe.¹²⁸

Another example of Jewish women in a brothel is also due to confusion at the end of the war. In this case, two Jewish women were mixed into a transport of men from Buna to Buchenwald. Once the women arrived in Buchenwald, as they were the only women in the transport, they were sent to the Buchenwald brothel. The elder of the two

¹²⁷ Halina Ragazzoni, interview by Naomi Rappaport, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, New York, NY, USA, March 20, 1995, Interview Code 01539, Tape 4, Segment 105.

¹²⁸ Sylvia Hack, interview by Naomi Rappaport, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Brighton, MA, USA, May 20, 1996, Interview Code 15277, Tape 4, Segment 104.

young women quickly realized where they were and began to scream, “this is not right! We shouldn’t be here, we [are] Jews!”¹²⁹ Her younger companion, afraid, did not understand why her friend was so worried and asked, “Why are you screaming? We have food, we have a bed, why do you want us to be killed?” The SS guard on duty heard the screaming and informed the two girls that their presence in the brothel was *Rassenschande* and immediately removed them from the brothel and placed them on the next transport to Bergen-Belsen where they were to be hung for trying to escape.¹³⁰ In Auschwitz-Birkenau a Dutch Jewish woman was mistakenly selected for the “*Hurenblock*” and while undergoing the medical exam a Polish physician realized the mistake and sent her back to Birkenau.¹³¹ These three examples draw attention to the fact that mistakes were made and it is possible Jewish women were “selected” for brothel duty; however, if mistakes were made, the evidence indicates they were quickly rectified. The SS seemingly took every precaution to make certain Jewish women did not work in the brothels. A possible reason for the rumors claiming Jewish women worked in these brothels could be the women, once in the brothel, wore civilian clothing and no longer had the symbols (colored triangles, letters, and numbers) that easily identified their place in the camp prisoner hierarchy. To be sure, non-German women were working in the brothel; however, all evidence proves Jewish women did not work as sexual laborers.

¹²⁹ Doris Ostrow, interview by Sara Aftergood, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA, January 11, 1995, Interview Code 527, Tape 3, Segment 75.

¹³⁰ The women were not hung and survived until liberation. Doris Ostrow, interview by Sara Aftergood, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA, January 11, 1995, Interview Code 527, Tape 3, Segment 75.

¹³¹ Henrika Englischman, interview by Felicia Carmelly, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, North York, ON, Canada, June 16, 1995, Interview Code 03220, Tape 3, Segment 67.

The Stigmatization of the Brothel Women

Since it was widely known the SS dangled many incentives before the women of Ravensbrück in effort to rally women to “volunteer” for work in the brothel, why then have these women been stigmatized? Why did many prisoners in the camp view “volunteering” as an act of cooperation and correspondingly treated the “volunteers” with scathing condemnation? The norm has been to abstain to talk about sex in the camps or sex in exchange for survival: both instances considered too distasteful or unimportant to include in histories of the Holocaust and survival. Sex, both in its positive and negative guises, has essentially been absent from historiographical discussions of camp life until relatively recently. However, new work is now taking full consideration of the role of both sex and sexuality during the Third Reich and in the concentration camps.¹³²

Pertinent to this chapter are the immediate and contemporary responses to the institution of forced prostitution in the camp brothels. The pressures of Nazi persecution amongst this involuntary society did not seem to alter the limits of “acceptable” behavior among women who either could not, or did not work in camp brothels. This chapter, and dissertation, confronts this sensitive material and argues the women who did “volunteer” most likely “chose” to do so in order to survive. Their fellow prisoners, by holding these women responsible for their own sexual victimization and making them feel ashamed about circumstances they were virtually powerless to prevent, has resulted in these

¹³² The pairing of war and sexuality in the twentieth century is aptly discussed in Dagmar Herzog’s edited volume, *Brutality and Desire*; on sex in the Third Reich see *Sexuality and German Fascism*. On the topic of sexual violence against Jews, see Na’ama Shik, “Sexual Abuse of Jewish Women in Auschwitz-Birkenau,” in *Brutality and Desire*, 221-246; Regina Mühlhäuser, “Between ‘Racial Awareness’ and Fantasies of Potency: Nazi Sexual Politics in the Occupied Territories of the Soviet Union, 1942-1945” in *Brutality and Desire*, 197-220; Regina Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen: Sexuelle Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutscher Soldaten in der Sowjetunion 1941-1945*; Monika J. Flaschka, “Race, Rape and Gender in Nazi-Occupied Territories;” on the “mythologization” of sexual violence against Jews, see Sybil Milton, “Women and the Holocaust: The Case of German and German-Jewish Women,” 213-249; Vera Laska, “Women in the Resistance and in the Holocaust,” 250-269.

women being doubly victimized. It is usually women who are punished for utilizing, or embracing, a different value system in society.¹³³ If these contemporary accounts citing the women as “volunteers,” “whores,” and “collaborators,” are left unexplained, our historical understanding of Nazi persecution is impeded while a misunderstanding of how forced prostitution operated is further propagated. The prisoners labeling the women as such were utilizing the Nazi language therefore buying into the Nazi official transcript. Numerous memoirs and survivor accounts include the strong negative reactions that “volunteering” precipitated and it is the impact of these reactions that is discussed in the concluding section of this chapter.¹³⁴

In Liana Millu’s memoir, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, she tells the story of two Dutch sisters, Gustine and Lotti, whom she befriended during her time in the camp quarantine. Later, while still in the camp, she runs into Gustine and inquires about her sister, Lotti, and shockingly receives the following answer, “Lotti’s gone. Lotti is dead.”¹³⁵ Liana later repeats this sad news to a fellow prisoner who in turn disputes Gustine’s proclamation her sister was dead, the prisoner tells Liana the following:

[Lotti is] Anything but dead! She’s in better shape than we are. I wouldn’t mind stuffing my face the way she is. Her sister may go up the chimney, but whores have all the luck...Lotti signed up for the Auschwitz Puffkommando, and from then on her sister said she was dead, she didn’t want anything more to do with her. That’s why she told you that. She won’t take anything from her, and she has a fit when Lotti sends her things.¹³⁶

¹³³ The works of Atina Grossmann, Elizabeth Heinemann, and Maria Höhn have sketched the transformation of values in early postwar Germany and shown the highly gendered nature of moral judgment once society returns to its normative state. See Elizabeth Heinemann, *What Difference Does a Husband Make?*; Maria Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins: the German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany*.

¹³⁴ Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss*, 131; Buber, *Under Two Dictators*, 199, 213; Millu, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, 170; Póltawska, *And I am Afraid of my Dreams*, 104.

¹³⁵ Millu, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, 149.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 153.

The fellow prisoner uses the word “whore” to convey her disapproval of Lotti’s choice; yet, she also acknowledges, somewhat jealously, that Lotti’s situation was better than her own. Lotti’s own sister, however, chose to deny her existence and claim she was dead out of shame for her sister’s actions. Gustine believed it was better for her to think of her sister as dead than as a prostitute. When Liana tries to give Gustine, who is very ill, a package from her sister, Gustine responds crying, “She gave it to you? She knows I don’t want her things! I don’t want anything from her, do you understand?”¹³⁷ This story is indicative of the varying emotions women felt towards the women working in the brothel. Even if the women viewed the actions of the “volunteers” as reprehensible, they still, on some level, understood that the women were trying to survive. Despite this, women stigmatized the “volunteers.” For example, Nanda Herbermann expresses her dismay with “beautiful, little Frieda” “volunteering” for the brothel. She directly addresses Frieda in her memoir:

You in particular could have begun a different life someday in freedom, you had a good foundation for that. But you disappointed me and volunteered yourself for the bordello in the Mauthausen Concentration Camp for Men, where the delivery of ten female inmates had been requested. I applied all my powers of persuasion with you, reminded you of your resolved good intentions, of your poor condition. Yes, I warned you...¹³⁸

The stigmatization of the “volunteers” resulted in a hierarchy of victims. Herbermann and Gustine relegated Frieda and Lotti to a second-class victim status: both were shamed for their behavior. In the eyes of many of the women, the “volunteers” were no longer unsullied victims of Nazi persecution but complicit in their subjugation. One anonymous Ravensbrück prisoner remarked disgustedly, “with regards to this work

¹³⁷ Ibid., 159.

¹³⁸ Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss*, 131.

[prostitution] the prostitutes volunteered and viewed it as an honor to be selected.”¹³⁹ If women were “choosing” their fate than they were no longer victims but accomplices. Wanda Póltawska, a Ravensbrück political prisoner arrested for carrying letters for the Polish resistance, puts distance between herself and the woman who “volunteered” in her memoir. Póltawska was among a group of political prisoners asked to “volunteer” for the brothel. She writes, “after a time, one girl did step forward (she was a professional prostitute who somehow had been given a red, political prisoner’s triangle) and a storm of boos greeted her.”¹⁴⁰ Póltawska seeks a separation from the “volunteer” by first emphasizing the woman “volunteering” had been incorrectly labeled a “political” and should have been labeled “asocial,” and secondly points out the “volunteer” must have been a prostitute. Póltawska seeks to separate herself from any political prisoner who would degrade by “volunteering” for brothel duty. For Póltawska, women working in the brothel were not victims like she was, but rather different and she seeks an explanation for that difference. Póltawska is not alone in taking this stance, I argue that many of the women in Ravensbrück and Birkenau were employing Zygmunt Baumann’s concept of “social gardening” by weeding out those unwanted elements that went against the moral and value systems of the community. In this act of “othering,” many of the female prisoners were in fact saying the women “volunteering” or working in the brothel were not like the rest of the women, they were corrupted elements of the camp society.

In contrast, men in the camps housing prisoner brothels seem to be much more understanding of the women’s decision to work in the camp brothels. Perhaps because the men were not confronted with a similar “choice,” they could more clearly see that for

¹³⁹ AMGR, Bd. 42/986, 22.

¹⁴⁰ Póltawska, *And I Am Afraid of My Dreams*, 104.

many women “volunteering” was to take a road pointing in the direction of survival. It was more difficult for women to remain neutral, if they were able to “volunteer” and declined, they perhaps questioned if they had made the right decision. Men were not presented with this type of “opportunity,” or the incentives that were dangled along side it. Chaim Feig’s testimony is exemplary of the less judgmental view many men seemed to take of the “volunteers.” When Feig, a Jewish survivor of Mittelbau-Dora, was asked what he thought about the women in the brothel, he responded, “What opinion can I have? I’m a dead person...just a ghost walking around...you don’t know tomorrow what you’re going to do...day to day, hour by hour.”¹⁴¹ The act of “volunteering” was taking a measured risk to increase the prisoner’s likelihood of survival. It simply was a means to an end; women who worked in the brothel increased their chance of survival. Canadian Army POW William Gibson was held at Buchenwald and said simply, “[they volunteered] to be in the brothel so they would live longer...it is no disgrace.”¹⁴²

The scorn with which these women were regarded has resulted in the repeated victimization of the women working in the brothels. The women “recruited” for sexual labor were prisoners attempting to survive the horrors of Ravensbrück and Birkenau; they were not free and able to make decisions as one could outside the camp universe. Primo Levi writes the following about his fellow camp prisoners:

Even if one did not want to take into account the infernal environment into which they had been abruptly flung, it is illogical to demand—and rhetorical and false to maintain—that they all and always followed the behavior expected of saints and stoic philosophers.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Chaim Feig, interview by Carol Stulberg, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, October 12, 199, Interview Code 34315, Tape 6, Segment 164.

¹⁴² William Gibson, interview by Lisa Newman, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, September 22, 1997, Interview Code 35015, Tape 3, Segment 74.

¹⁴³ Levi, *The Drowned and Saved*, 49.

This dissertation places the “decisions” made by women in the context of the “infernal” environment of the concentration camp. Life in the brothels is another, largely unexamined, aspect of life in the concentration camps. The women who worked in the brothels were victims of National Socialism like their counterparts in the camps; however, they differed in that they were presented with an opportunity that would almost unequivocally improve their living situation and chance of survival. These women made a “decision” that was often viewed as shameful by their fellow camp inmates despite the fact that it was, essentially, a decision to survive.

The story of Lotti, a Dutch woman who “volunteered” for the brothel to escape Birkenau best exemplifies how some of the women found worked in the brothel in order to survive:

And then, you remember, we were both sent to work in that ghastly sewer Kommando—knee deep in water and slime all day long. We had to dig ditches near the crematoria where they could throw away the ashes, and it wasn’t only the hard work, it was having to smell that smoke all the time. Just to see it—it was so thick and black, it looked like it would never dissolve and go away. Each time you picked your head up from the shovel and saw it hanging there you’d think, ‘another week, another month then my turn.’ I could actually feel it. I felt myself going up the chimney and over the roofs of the lager and vanishing little by little till there was no trace. No one would know I’d ever been alive...I’m eighteen years old—I don’t want to die. I know, no one wants to die, you’ll tell me. But maybe I don’t want to more than the others. Maybe that’s the difference. Because I can feel how disgustingly wrong it is that I should have to die because I couldn’t steal soup or I had no cigarettes to trade for bread, while other people who weren’t as good as me, who might have committed crimes or led wicked lives, would somehow manage to survive...Who says I have to give up my life, just like that? Everyone in the lager goes around picking up leftovers from the garbage. They suck bones other people spit out—and I’m supposed to refuse life because it’s offered on a dirty plate?¹⁴⁴

Lotti was determined to survive: she did not want to become a *Schmuckstücke* or

Goldstücke (the female equivalents of the *Muselmänner*) and await her death. Self-

¹⁴⁴ Millu, *Smoke Over Birkenau*, 171-172.

preservation made it impossible to continue to live life in a normative fashion; value systems were altered and even disregarded in this new universe. To conform to the will of the oppressors was essentially an act of self-preservation. Lotti chose to maximize her strategy for survival by working in the brothel that essentially could harm no other prisoner beside herself—compare this act of survival with stealing another prisoners shoes which was commonplace—is Lotti’s act somehow less of a means to survive?

Very little can be learned about this historical moment if we simplify the act of engaging in prostitution, a seemingly deferential act, as a sign of cooperation or complicity and ignore its impact on survival. Nor can we learn about this aspect of the Holocaust experience if female survivors are considered “good” or “bad” based upon their sexual history.¹⁴⁵ Survivor testimony of men in the camps where brothels existed tells stories of these women as courageous and giving—the women realized they were in a position to help others and often did. Consider the following example, Sam Goodchild was a young Polish Jew working in Monowitz on a labor squad repairing roofs and his squad was assigned to repair the roof of the Monowitz brothel. While repairing the roof, Goodchild spoke with the women working inside and arranged that “they used to throw us up some bread.”¹⁴⁶ Similarly, Jack Unikowski was a Jewish prisoner in Auschwitz given the task of cleaning the brothel, he recalls the women giving him and others bread and even chocolate.¹⁴⁷ Another prisoner in Auschwitz I, Meyer Schwartz, was in Block

¹⁴⁵ So often tropes of female “good” and “evil” are based upon sexuality. See Sara R. Horowitz, “Women and Holocaust Memory,” in *Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and its Aftermath* eds. Jonathan Petropoulos and John K. Roth (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 166.

¹⁴⁶ Sam Goodchild, interview by Jason Walker, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Melbourne, VIC, Australia, March 14, 1997, Interview Code 29135, Tape 5, Segment 25.

¹⁴⁷ Jack Unikowski, interview by Ruben Zylberszpic, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, East Ivanhoe, VIC, Australia, March 19, 1998, Interview Code 42633, Tape 1, Segment 34; Sam Nivin, interview by Debbi Portney, USC Shoah Foundation

13A—the block across from the brothel. One day he was given the task of cleaning the stairs in the brothel and met a woman from Łódź, his hometown. The woman told him to be outside a certain window in the brothel at a certain time each day and she would lower food to him in a pot. The female brothel worker supplied Schwartz with food for “quite awhile.”¹⁴⁸ These examples serve to complicate the idea of the “prostitute” and to further stress how work in the brothel not only saved the lives of many of these women, but also placed them in a position to help others.

Conclusion

The sample of prisoners for whom I have records proves unequivocally that Himmler’s brothels did not contain only former sex-workers but women of all occupations and backgrounds. Women from all over Europe, with the exception of Jewish women, strove to survive their incarceration by working in the brothel. The names are known of 168 women who worked in the prisoner brothels; however, the stories known are far fewer. The brothel was an institution whose purported purpose was to uphold the racial laws of the land while providing labor incentives for “worthy” German prisoners. In actuality, the SS used the brothel for entertainment, whether while selecting attractive women to work there, or by acting as voyeurs and watching sexual acts between the prisoners. The brothel seemed to bear little resemblance to the German-only dwelling it was supposed to be, nor were all of the German females former prostitutes. George Mosse’s book, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, contended that the body was treated as a symbolic form “transcending sexuality;” however, this chapter has

Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Kew Gardens, NY, USA, August 17, 1995, Interview Code 05563, Tape 2, Segment 57.

¹⁴⁸ Meyer Schwartz, interview by Sandy Rebitzer, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Kalamazoo, MI, USA, August 25, 1995, Interview Code 06005, Tape 3, Segment 71.

demonstrated that Himmler's brothels used the female body not as a symbolic form, but as a commodity.¹⁴⁹

The Nazi assertion that only former sex-workers worked in the brothel resulted in the diminution of these women's status as victims. The Nazi's terminology and characterization of the camp brothels suggests the women were able to survive and benefit due to their "trade." This is wholly untrue and a gross simplification of how forced prostitution in the camps operated. The women, as discussed, were not simply "volunteers," did not receive payment, and certainly were not released after six months in the brothel. Until the recent wave of German historiography, these misconceptions relegated these women to second-class victim status. By applying the "volunteer" label to these women, they have been overlooked as victims of Nazi persecution.¹⁵⁰ The recent exhibit about forced prostitution featured at the Ravensbrück concentration camp has led the way to integrating the stories of these women into the camp memorial and literature.¹⁵¹ The forced sexual laborers occupy a largely unexamined place in the "Gray Zone." The concept of the "Gray Zone" has been used to examine prisoners and victims of Nazi persecution compelled to provide and perform various acts of labor for the regime. Labor for "fit" prisoners was compulsory in the camps. All jobs were staffed either with or without "volunteers." However, as a result of their "volunteer" status, these women were shunned by fellow prisoners and viewed, by some, as collaborators. The women forced to work as sexual laborers shared the same goal as their fellow prisoners at Ravensbrück: survival. The path they took in effort to survive may have

¹⁴⁹ Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, 153.

¹⁵⁰ See Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*; Wickert, "Tabu Lagerbordell"; Schikorra, "Prostitution weiblicher Häftlinge als Zwangsarbeit" and Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*.

¹⁵¹ The exhibition is currently in Rome, Italy. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,459704,00.html>

differed from the paths of others; nonetheless, it was based on rational calculations in an irrational setting aimed at increasing their likelihood of survival.

Chapter Four

Prisoner Johns: The Eager, the Reluctant, the Curious, and the Forced

There existed among the masses of prisoners suffering in agony in the concentration camps a small group of prisoners living lives of relative luxury and ease: *Die Prominenz* or *Die Prominenten*.¹ Nicknamed the “prominents,” these prisoners were responsible for the daily administration of the camps. Among this cohort was a tiny echelon of men so privileged as to belong to the camp “aristocracy.” This group of prisoners did not have the same experiences that have come to shape our understanding of daily life in the camps. Although these prisoners still suffered deprivations, their existence, when compared to their less fortunate fellow prisoners, presented fewer difficulties. The “prominents” had undemanding work assignments, their stomachs were comparatively full, and when inclined they could visit the camp’s “cultural offerings.” Included in these offerings was the camp prisoners’ brothel.

As a general rule, only the highest echelon of the prisoner hierarchy was granted the opportunity to use the camp brothel. Their privileged status placed this group of prisoners in the “gray zone...where the two camps of masters and servants both diverge and converge.”² Prisoner-functionaries were among the so-called “prominents,” and this group made up the majority of the men allowed to use the camp brothel. An even smaller portion of the “prominents,”—the “aristocracy”—had regular access to the brothel. This

¹ Prisoners used this term to describe the inmates with power in the concentration camps.

² Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 42.

chapter begins with a survey of the Nazi classification system that greatly dictated the prisoner hierarchy in the camps. A prisoner's classification largely determined one's camp experience, from the quality of their uniform to their work assignment.

The passing of the *Prämien-Vorschrift* order in 1943, paved the way for prisoners to earn brothel visits as a reward for economically productive labor. Prisoners qualifying for such a bonus underwent a process of obtaining permission and were required to abide by a certain protocol once in the brothel. This chapter discusses the process of obtaining permission, what happened once inside the brothel, and gives a statistical history of the brothels' clientele. Due to incomplete evidence, it is impossible to state exactly how many men used the ten camp brothels; however, there is documentation to provide statistics of the number of clients received at the Buchenwald, Dachau, and Mauthausen camp brothels. Looking closely at the three camps and the available statistical evidence indicates the number of men using the brothel was a very small percentage of the overall camp population. Additionally, this section discusses the frequency with which some individuals exercised their privilege. Different men used the brothel with different degrees of regularity thus suggesting varying motivations spurring their visits. The impetus behind some men's decision to use the brothel affected not only their experience, but also the experiences of the women. A consideration of the possible motivations behind the choice to patronize the brothel is a necessary aspect of illuminating how the brothel functioned. Lastly, not all men visited the brothel willingly. The brothel was not only wielded as a tool of exploitation for the women forced to work behind its doors, but also for a portion of men forced to engage in intercourse behind the brothel doors.

Prisoner Society in the Concentration Camps: An Imposed Hierarchy

SS Obergruppenführer Theodor Eicke's agency, the *KZ-Inspektion*, centralized and formalized the camp system in the 1936.³ The reorganization and expansion of the camp system was accompanied by the institution of a classification system providing a quick visual cue to the SS guards as to where prisoners ranked in the camp system. This classification system, and its resulting social structure, dictated among which prisoners power and wealth were dealt. The visual cue consisted of colored triangles and Stars of David, attached to both the left side of the prisoner's jacket and the right side of their pants, insuring a prisoner's classification could be determined from various angles.⁴ Beginning in 1937, "political" prisoners wore red triangles; "asocial" prisoners wore black; "criminals" wore green; homosexuals wore pink; Jehovah's Witnesses wore purple; and, Roma and Sinti wore first brown and then later black triangles.⁵ An additional marking layered upon the triangles denoted nationality. For example, a Polish prisoner wore a red triangle with a "P" inscribed.⁶ The classification system, implemented by the Nazi authorities, carried such weight that camp prisoners used the colored triangles as a type of shorthand, referring to one another as "greens," "reds," and so forth. Classification became a language in which the color one wore was laden with preconceived notions and biases about the individual. By noting at how a prisoner was classified, one could ascertain exactly where that individual fit into the Nazi hierarchy. A prisoner's number further gave further information as to approximately how long an

³ Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, 30; and also Hoess, *Commandant of Auschwitz*, 237.

⁴ On the classification system see Wolfgang Sofsky "Classes and Classification" in *The Order of Terror*, 117-129.

⁵ Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, 118.

⁶ All foreign prisoners, if they were not Jewish nor Roma and Sinti, were considered "political" enemies and therefore wore red triangles.

individual had been in the camp system. The classification system aggravated existing tensions between groups in the camp and played upon common tropes and stereotypes.

The classification system was also a cipher for the probability of a prisoner's death in the camps. Prisoners considered *Untermenschen*—a categorization including Jews, Slavs, and Roma and Sinti—were at the bottom of the hierarchy. These prisoners were classified by ethnicity and therefore could not be “reformed.” Prisoners classified as a racial “other” had the lowest probability of surviving the camp. Germans and Northern European prisoners countries had a higher status than those from Southern or Eastern Europe and were treated better and received better jobs, rations etc. The “social” classifications denoting a prisoner as a “political,” “criminal,” or “asocial” further determined their status. A German “political,” “criminal” or “asocial” prisoner occupied a higher position in the camp than any other prisoner. A former Buchenwald prisoner's experience of being “processed” into the camp relates the importance of a prisoner's classification:

We enter into the prisoners' dressing room. Stacked on the shelves are large numbers of uniforms, underclothing and boots. The prisoners working here appear to be relatively clean; they look fairly good. Almost all of them have the red triangle...The first thing almost every prisoner working behind the table asks me is: what is my color. There's some “black” guy standing next to me. It is very obvious the clothing he gets handed is worse than mine. At boot distribution, they initially give me a pair of worn-out shoes. As the prisoner hands them to me, he asks: “you political?” After I answer “Yeah,” he gets me a better pair of boots.⁷

The classification schema not only provided visible cues of a prisoner's rank to the SS, but also strongly dictated the conditions under which prisoners would live.⁸

⁷ Walter Poller, *Arztsschreiber in Buchenwald* (Hamburg: Phönix-Verlag, 1946), quoted in Sofsky, 117.

⁸ For example, only Jews were used to build the Monowitz concentration camp and similarly entire prisoner groups were sent the Category Three labor camp, Mauthausen, to work in the stone quarries.

The SS ran the camps by relying on the prisoners to carry out many of the daily tasks necessary to keep such enterprises running smoothly. By using a system of prisoner self-administration (*Häftlingsselbstverwaltung*), the Nazi regime was able to use fewer SS personnel to run the camps while simultaneously minimizing resistance by infiltrating the prisoner population with “accomplices.” Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, arrested by the Gestapo in 1940 as a “political enemy” of the Reich, was subsequently imprisoned in Dachau and worked as a clerk in a storeroom. During his time in the camp, he kept a diary in which he noted the following about the prisoners working with the SS:

I had the impression that in addition to the SS camp regime, there was also a regime run by the prisoners. Prisoners ruled over other prisoners. So people were locked up in a double sense: by the views of National Socialism and the SS that embodied this outlook, *and* as a prisoner of one’s fellow prisoners. We were just as much at their mercy as at the mercy of the Gestapo, maybe even more so, because they were with you, all around, day in, day out.⁹

The selected prisoners running the camps were referred to as “prisoner-functionaries” and in return for performing their tasks, they received certain benefits both tangible and otherwise. Prisoners in these positions had more power because either they were under SS protection or their position gave them access to more “wealth.” When asked about the “prominents,” Henry Mikols, a Polish “political” prisoner in Buchenwald, responded, “[they] had everything, they were in control of the food.”¹⁰ Another prisoner remarked simply, they [the prominents] were “inmates in power.”¹¹

⁹ Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz, *Die Mächtigen und die Hilflosen. Als Häftling in Dachau* (Stuttgart: Friedrich Vorwerk Verlag, 1957), 77.

¹⁰ Henry Mikols, interview by Jill Greenberg, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Dummer, NH, USA, August 22, 2001, Interview Code 51743, Tape 3, Segment 74.

¹¹ Leopold Lustig, interview by Rosalie Franks, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Middletown, RI, USA, October 4, 1996, Interview Code 20566, Tape 6, Segment 179.

The prisoner-functionaries did many jobs in the camp from overseeing labor battalions to cleaning the camp kitchens. Prisoners in the highest prisoner-functionary positions wielded the most power as these positions put them in close proximity to the SS. The Senior Camp Prisoner (*Lagerältester*) was the highest-ranking prisoner-functionary. The SS generally selected this position, which could be more than one individual, from the German “red” or “green” prisoners. This job included overseeing the camp and choosing Block Elders (*Blockälteste*) who were responsible for maintaining order and discipline in the barracks.¹² These prisoners worked closely with the SS and followed their orders, but had no influence in making camp policy. The Block Elders in turn selected prisoners to oversee the rooms (*Stubenälteste*) and were responsible for keeping the Blocks orderly in the event of an inspection. Kapos, another group of prisoner-functionaries, oversaw labor battalions. Kapos themselves did not work, but rather delegated the tasks to the prisoners and yielded immense power over their fellow prisoners. Prisoner-functionaries without much influence or social capital were those working in the SS administrative offices, kitchens, laundries, infirmaries, and taking on the lowest positions, including “lice checker,” and “bed smoother.”¹³

It was from the top of the prisoner hierarchy, the German “political” and “criminal” prisoners, that the SS generally chose prisoner-functionaries to run the camp. The prisoner-functionaries were simultaneously victims *and* perpetrators. The prisoner-functionaries were still prisoners, therefore unable to act on their own accord, yet they enforced the very rules that oppressed them and by doing so increased their chance of survival. This cadre of prisoners relied on the SS to keep them in power because they

¹² On self-administration in the concentration camps, see Hermann Langbein, *Against All Hope: Resistance in the Nazi Concentration Camps, 1938-1945*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Paragon House, 1994).

¹³ Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 44.

knew that if they fell from power, they would not be welcomed back by the general prisoner population. National Socialist oppression was so harsh and unyielding it created a field of individuals open to varying degrees of “collaboration.” In the concentration camps people were eager to ameliorate their circumstances and survival in the camps often meant, “collaborating” to some degree. As Levi wrote in his memoir, *Survival In Auschwitz*, “survival without renunciation of any part of one’s own moral world—apart from powerful and direct interventions by fortune—was conceded only to a few superior individuals, made of the stuff of martyrs and saints.”¹⁴ Survivors survived because they adapted to the camp, they refused to become “drowned” or *Musselmänner*, and the adaptation usually meant a degree of cooperation was necessary. It is for this reason that although the percentage of “prominents” in the camp was very small, they constituted a large majority among survivors.¹⁵

The SS gave prisoner-functionaries power and made them, to a degree, complicit in the crimes they committed. This, consequently bound the prisoner-functionaries to the SS.¹⁶ Prisoner-functionaries, by the nature of their jobs and perceived collaboration with the SS, could not survive in the camps without SS support. Although this methodology of creating “accomplices” was not unique to the Nazis, it was nonetheless a successful means of creating a prisoner self-administration.¹⁷ A cycle formed where prisoners in positions of power fiercely protected their advantages by performing according to the

¹⁴ Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 92.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁶ See Levi’s chapter, “The Gray Zone” for a discussion about the complicity of prisoner-functionaries in *The Drowned and the Saved*.

¹⁷ Two other examples of this process are readily available in popular culture. For example, before being initiated into a gang the member wishing to join often has to perform a task (usually murder), which not only shows their devotion, but also ties them to their organization. The plethora of Mafia movies, *The Godfather*, *Casino*, and more recently the TV series, *The Sopranos*, are also rife with examples of this “binding” of new members to the perpetrator organization.

standards (which as a rule were ruthless) set by the SS. If they, the prisoner-functionaries, did not carry out their duties—no matter how brutal—they would be removed and replaced.¹⁸ In reference to this in the camps, Primo Levi wrote, “privilege, by definition, defends and protects privilege.”¹⁹ These roles in the camp administration also granted prisoner-functionaries the chance to either abuse or help their fellow prisoners; however, whichever route they chose, they still relied on the SS to keep them in power. Himmler recognized both the pitfalls and advantages of placing prisoners in charge of other prisoners. In a “secret” speech given on June 21, 1944, Himmler said, with regards to the cadre of professional criminals in many of the prisoner-functionary roles in the camps, the following:

These 40,000 German criminals, I’ll tell you, whether they are political or professional make up my “non-commissioned officer corps” for this entire society...and from the second we are no longer satisfied with him, he will no longer be a Kapo and will go back to sleeping with the rest. He will be beaten to death his first night and he knows this all too well.²⁰

The classification of the prisoner-functionaries varied from camp-to-camp, depending on that camp’s population. For example, Dachau was known as a “red” camp and correspondingly “political” prisoners largely controlled the camp’s self-administration. In contrast, Mauthausen had a high population of “green” triangles and there they made up majority of the camp’s self-administration. Although initially the SS preferred all prisoner-functionaries to be German and to wear either “green” or “red” triangles, this changed to include “black” triangles among the prisoner-functionaries as well as non-

¹⁸ Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, 147.

¹⁹ Levi, *The Gray Zone*, 41.

²⁰ Himmler, *Geheimreden*, 203.

German prisoners.²¹ As the war progressed, the populations of the concentration camps became increasingly varied leading to foreign prisoners becoming eligible for certain prisoner-functionary roles.²²

The prisoner-functionaries were at the top of the camp's social order; however, not all prisoner-functionaries were considered "prominents." The "prominents" were a group comprised of mainly "political" and "criminal" prisoners and included some high-profile prisoners usually shielded from SS harassment. The camp "aristocracy" was an even more elite group carved out of this already privileged class who enjoyed extensive privileges. For example, Ernst Busse, a prominent member of the KPD and member of the Reichstag in 1932, was an example of both a high profile prisoner and a member of the "aristocracy." Busse continued his political activities working "underground" until his arrest in 1934. He was imprisoned in solitary confinement and held in various prisons until his deportation to Buchenwald in 1937. While in Buchenwald, he was a Block Elder, Infirmary Kapo, and Senior Camp prisoner. Busse was one of the most powerful prisoners in the camp. For example, in his position as Infirmary Kapo, he dictated who received treatment.²³ Busse's power was so great that after liberation, he was initially tried for his activities as a prisoner-functionary. Although he was ultimately exonerated, under Soviet rule he was later arrested and sent to a Gulag as punishment for his activities as a Kapo in Buchenwald. Busse died in the Gulag in 1952.²⁴

²¹ In fact, at the end of the war any member of the prisoner hierarchy could rise to the position of Kapo. Heinz Heger, a homosexual prisoner in Buchenwald, was a kapo and also some Jewish prisoners sought the role as a possible escape from certain death. Heger, "A Pink-Triangled Kapo," chap. 8 in *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, 88-97; Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 47.

²² For examples see Maršálek, *Die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers*, 317; Pike, *Spaniards in the Holocaust*; Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*.

²³ Harry Stein, *Buchenwald Concentration Camp 1937-1945: A Guide to the Permanent Exhibition* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004), 147.

²⁴ Stein, *Buchenwald Concentration Camp*, 295-296.

The members of the “aristocracy” bore visible markings of power. These prisoners were not starving. They often were eligible to receive additional food packages and for this reason retained some semblance of a normal physique. These men also wore their hair longer and had better kept uniforms and shoes.²⁵ Whereas the majority of camp prisoners were not allowed free movement within the camp, “prominent” prisoners possessed the ability to move through the camp at will and could take advantage of the “cultural offerings” available. Among the cultural offerings were sporting events, plays, movies, recitals, and brothel visits.²⁶ Even if these events were open to the general population of the camps, it most likely would have only been the “prominents” who were physically well enough to attend such events.²⁷

Different from the prisoner-functionaries, the “prominents” partially earned their status by accruing social capital and status within the self-contained camp universe. The camp had its own social structure and part of adapting to camp life was learning how to use the system to one’s own advantage. For instance, a means of earning “social wealth” was staying alive in the camp. Prisoners who managed to stay alive were considered camp “elders” and treated with respect by their fellow prisoners. Especially lauded were prisoners who had “low numbers;” low numbers signified the prisoners were among the

²⁵ Maršálek, *Die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Mauthausen*, 60-61. For example, a “prominent” in the Mauthausen camp was described as “King Kong” because of his size. He received his meals from the SS kitchens and additionally was clean-shaven and received regular haircuts.

²⁶ The brothel at the Auschwitz-Stammlager was in the “cultural” section of the camp, which included the library; at Mittelbau-Dora there was a movie theatre for the “prominent” prisoners’ use; soccer matches were played at both Gusen and Mauthausen; Sachsenhausen had a choir and Buchenwald had a band.

²⁷ Various men discuss that even if they had been able to go to these events, they lacked the energy to do so, see Sam Goodchild, interview by Jason Walker, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Melbourne, VIC, Australia, March 14, 1997, Interview Code 29135, Tape 5, Segment 25; Herbert Kolischer, interview by Merle Goldberg, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Malibu, CA, USA, September 19, 1996, Interview Code 20003, Tape 6, Segment 29.; Michael Schwartz, interview by John Kent, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, San Diego, CA, USA, April 30, 1998, Interview Code 41458, Tape 3, Segment 25.

camp's earliest inmates and thus their survival was an impressive feat. In *The Order of Terror*, Wolfgang Sofsky uses an example of a German Communist working to receive new camp arrivals to convey how survival translated into power in the camps. This individual was registered in Dachau with the prisoner number "9" and his low number immediately told new prisoners that he knew how to survive. A fellow prisoner remarked,

His registration number was a low one, number 9; that not only instilled fear based on his long past in the camp, but a mute respect as well. He'd already spent more than ten years in this prison world. He'd laid the camp's foundation stones out in the swamps, soaked with the sweat of blood of Hitler's first victims... There he stood, a person who'd survived the unimaginable, like Lazarus risen from the grave.²⁸

This individual had survived since the early days of the camp and to do so he had to have adapted to the camp and used its opportunities, when presented, for his own good.

Prisoners not only surviving in the camp, but also *living*, had a wealth of invaluable experience and knowledge on how to adjust and adapt to concentration camp life.

In order to have survived, the prisoner had to have "cooperated" and procured a work assignment affording him some benefits; once such an assignment was won, these "elders" were ruthless in protecting their territory from incoming prisoners. Prisoners had to concentrate on adapting to their new reality and quickly lose the "smell of home" in order to survive.²⁹ Camp "elders" and members of the "prominents" knew how this was done; yet, instead of helping newcomers acclimate, they often treated the new prisoners with derision. For this reason and others, prisoners rising to the status of "prominent" were not revered, but reviled by the majority of the prisoner population. Leopold Lustig, a Jewish survivor of Flossenbürg, gave his opinion of these men,

²⁸ Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, 315n3.

²⁹ Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 39.

“Prominent means murderers who were Blockälteste...and they were getting the salary, there was little coupons the were getting [sic].”³⁰ As Wolfgang Sofsky points out, the seasoned inmates had become “seasoned” by embodying the characteristics of the camp: inner callousness, intolerance, and vigilance when it came to protecting their interests.³¹ Survival necessitated such an adaptation and renegotiation of reality and morality.

The men we have been discussing, the “prominents” and the larger group of prisoner-functionaries, were eligible to visit the camp brothel. To underscore the new importance of camp labor, an incentive program was devised and implemented providing rewards to deserving prisoners.³² The *Prämien-Vorschrift*, the order for the “regulation of granting benefits to prisoners,” went into effect on May 15, 1943. This order stressed the importance of camp labor for the benefit of Germany and for Germany’s victory in the war. As with many Nazi policies, including those dealing with the brothel, initially only German prisoners were eligible for these rewards. However, as Germany occupied more territory and the population of the concentration camps diversified, prisoners of other nationalities also became eligible recipients of work incentives. The incentive system, despite being touted as increasing labor productivity, actually rewarded prisoners based more on their status in the camp, than their productivity. No matter how diligently some prisoners worked, including Jews, they would never receive any benefits of the incentive program.

³⁰ Leopold Lustig, interview by Rosalie Franks, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Middletown, RI, USA, October 4, 1996, Interview Code 20566, Tape 6, Segment 179.

³¹ Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, 147.

³² Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde (hereafter, BA)NS 3/426; Archiv der Mahn-und Gedenkstätte Buchenwald (hereafter, AMGB) 31-2-15, “Dienstvorschrift für die Gewährung von Vergünstigungen an Häftling,”

The incentive system set forth a five-tier system rewarding “prisoners excelling through diligence, prudence, good behavior and especially good performances.”³³ SS *Obergruppenführer* Oswald Pohl, head of the SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt (SS-WVHA, SS main bureau for economic administration) listed the following benefits:

1. Improved imprisonment conditions (*Hafterleichterung*)
2. Extra Rations (*Verpflegungszulagen*)
3. Cash bonuses (*Geldprämien*)
4. Purchase of tobacco (*Tabakwarenbezug*)
5. Visits to the brothel (*Bordellbesuch*)³⁴

The fifth and highest level of privilege permitted prisoners to apply for permission to go to the brothel. This privilege was restricted to “prisoners with outstanding achievements.”³⁵ Although the brothel was initially conceived as a place where only German men would have sexual intercourse with German women, the racial requirements for visiting the brothel varied from camp-to-camp. Each camp had its own policy, based on its camp demographics, dictating which prisoner groups occupied the highest levels of prisoner society and thusly could earn brothel visitation rights. According to former Buchenwald *Blockführer* Max Beulig, Czech, French, Polish, and German prisoners could use the brothel.³⁶ Odd Nansen’s Sachsenhausen memoir states that Norwegians used the brothel; and in Mauthausen, the Spanish earned brothel vouchers.³⁷ However, one aspect of policy remained consistent throughout the camp system: Jews and Russian prisoners of war were forbidden from patronizing the brothel.

³³ Archive Neuengamme, Kz-Sys 1.4.4.2/1084, also BA NS 3/426.

³⁴ AMGB 31-2-15. In the original I.G. Farben incentive plan there was also a promise of working toward early release, “*Inaussichtstellung der Freiheit*,” which was disregarded in the incentive plan for camp prisoners.

³⁵ BA NS 3/426.

³⁶ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive (hereafter, USHMM) RG-06.005.05M Reel 1, 5. Aussage Beulig.

³⁷ Nansen, *From Day to Day*, 188; Pike, *Spaniards in the Holocaust*, 73.

It was usually still only the “prominents” who were allowed to reap the rewards of the incentive system; the general prisoner population was often not eligible to receive the different levels of privilege. A Flossenbürg prisoner remarked, “there was [*sic*] little coupons they [the “prominents”] were getting...they could buy tobacco or old rotten anchovies or something...and also the women.”³⁸ There were cases where “regular” prisoners used the brothel, but as a general rule it was only members of the “prominents” patronizing the brothel.

The Male Patrons’ Process

There were cases, as will be discussed later in this chapter, of the SS forcing male prisoners to use the brothel. However, members of the brothel clientele were there predominately of their own volition. The process of gaining admittance varied only with regard to small details, such as where the prisoners applied and received their physical examinations, so it can be discussed rather generally and applied to all ten prisoner brothels. Prisoners requested permission (some at the *Schreibstube*, others appealed directly to their Block Elder) and once their request was made, their eligibility and funds were checked. A brothel visit initially cost 2 *Reichsmark*. Later per Oswald Pohl’s orders, the cost was decreased to 1 *Reichsmark*.³⁹ The piece of paper signifying permission was officially called a *Bordellschein*; yet, camp inmates referred to this ticket by its slang term, *Sprungkarte*, which can be loosely translated as a “getting off card.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Leopold Lustig, interview by Rosalie Franks, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Middletown, RI, USA, October 4, 1996, Interview Code 20566, Tape 6, Segment 179.

³⁹ BA NS 3/426; AMGB NS 4/41. “Dienstvorschrift für die Gewährung von Vergünstigungen an Häftlinge,” v. 15.5.1943, and “Einnahme im Bordelle am 21.2.1944 and 22.2.1944.”

⁴⁰ Pike, *Spaniards in the Holocaust*, 335n28.

Prisoners, once granted a *Bordellschein*, underwent physical examinations specifically checking for venereal diseases.⁴¹ These assessments involved an examination of the man's penis and throat,⁴² a check for lice, and in some instances, blood and urine tests. The physician would then give an injections to ward off venereal disease.⁴³ Charles Dekeyser,⁴⁴ a Flossenbürg prisoner, described his exam as follows:

Then quickly, if you were in there you had to pull your pants down. Penis out. Then either one or two helpers with a tube slapped on pomade...what was it for? I assume it was for special circumstances, disease or something, that's what it was for. Then I received a number. The number of the room where I should go next [*sic*].⁴⁵

A prisoner with venereal disease was categorically denied permission to enter the brothel. The spread of venereal disease was taken very seriously and the infected man would have been considered a danger to both the camp and brothel, resulting in the revocation of his *Bordellschein*.⁴⁶ Former sex laborer Anna X further describes the procedure in Neuengamme, including the mandatory bathing:

The men were examined. Before they came to us, they had to go in the physicians office...so that no diseases were brought in. The men also had to take a bath. They had to be registered in advance, it went according to a list. [SS *Rapportführer*] Dreimann completed this list...[the men] waited in the office. The SS man on duty brought the men in. They were brought through the watchtower.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Henry Mikols, interview by Jill Greenberg, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Dummer, NH, USA, August 22, 2001, Interview Code 51743, Tape 3, Segments 72 and 74.

⁴² Henry Mikols, interview by Jill Greenberg, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Dummer, NH, USA, August 22, 2001, Interview Code 51743, Tape 3, Segments 72 and 74.

⁴³ Pike, *Spaniards in the Holocaust*, 73; Fritz Kleinmann: "Überleben im KZ." in *Doch der Hund will nicht krepieren... Tagebuchnotizen aus Auschwitz.*, eds. Reinhold Gärtner and Fritz Kleinmann (Thaur: Kulturverlag, 1995): 34–114, 88–89.

⁴⁴ Name has been changed by Robert Sommer who conducted the interview.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 166.

⁴⁶ BA NS 4/41 "Meldung" K.L. Buchenwald, 21 Juli 1943.

⁴⁷ Anna X, Transcription, 13, "Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

Physical cleanliness was a priority for both men and the women in the brothel. The lure of a bath with hot water had to be enticing for even the “prominent” prisoners. Although this group of prisoners did not live in the same wretched conditions as the majority of their fellow prisoners, they were still surrounded by the contaminated conditions of the camp. A bath allowed these prisoners, as it did the women, a temporary escape from the excremental assault of the camp.⁴⁸ Not only were both parties physically clean, but the brothel was clean as well. The camp brothels were examples of “prophylactic” brothels⁴⁹ that provided sex in a medically supervised and “sterile” environment. Modern bathrooms complete with hot water for bathing were necessary components of the sanitization process. The brothels were closed if water shortages did not allow the proper sanitation measures to be carried out.⁵⁰

Following the “sanitization” procedures, the men had their pertinent information (name, prisoner number, classification) recorded into the brothel register.⁵¹ Each prisoner was assigned a number corresponding to a room and thus to the woman working in the room.⁵² Depending on the camp and brothel, the men waited in either the brothel waiting room or in a hallway. In the Neuengamme brothel, there was a comfortably furnished

⁴⁸ Des Pres, *The Survivor*.

⁴⁹ See Alain Corbin, “The Twentieth Century: The New Economy of Bodies,” chap. 8 in *Women for Hire*, 331-370.

⁵⁰ AMGB NS Bu 4/41. For example, a memo dated 27.12.1943 announced that the Buchenwald brothel was closed on 25.12.1943 due to water shortages. See also Jean Michel, *Dora: The Nazi Concentration Camp*.

⁵¹ Archiv der KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen (hereafter, AGM) K2/1Mauthausen Bordellbuch, Block 3. Some prisoners visiting the brothel did not want their name in the brothel register, or *Statistik*, and found a way to switch a *Bordellschein* with another eligible prisoner. Henry Mikols, a Polish political prisoner in Buchenwald, earned the privilege of visiting the brothel and traded his *Bordellschein* with other “prominents” in exchange for food, “Henry can I have your number? You put your number in the *Statistik*, I’ll give you bread, some soup...I made a business out of it!” His name was therefore listed in the *Statistik*. Henry Mikols, interview by Jill Greenberg, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Dummer, NH, USA, August 22, 2001, Interview Code 51743, Tape 3, Segment 74.

⁵² United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive (hereafter, USHMM) RG-06.005.05M Reel 1, 5. Aussage Beulig.

waiting room where men waited without SS surveillance; in the Mauthausen brothel, the men waited in the hallway under the watchful eye of the SS.⁵³ The presence or absence of the SS naturally influenced the actions of the men. In fact, many “political” prisoners feared the SS used the brothel as means of eavesdropping on the men and discovering potential plans for resistance or organization.⁵⁴ The men feared the environment would “loosen them up” and they would talk while waiting for their turn and the SS would then use the information they garnered against the prisoners. When SS supervision was absent, as in Neuengamme, the men did indeed use the time to their benefit. Common activities were discussions of “organizing” and black market trading.⁵⁵

Once a man entered his assigned room, referred to as the *Kabinette* or *Koberzimmer*, he was allotted a timeframe of 15-20 minutes⁵⁶ to complete the task of sexual intercourse in the missionary position.⁵⁷ Humiliating prisoners, both male and female, was also form of entertainment for the SS. Sachsenhausen prisoner Willi Hollein remarked that when a prisoner stayed over the set time limit, the SS would taunt, “Aren’t you done yet?” through the peephole.⁵⁸ In the Mauthausen brothel, prisoners were

⁵³ Anna X, Transcription, 13, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03; Pike, *Spaniards in the Holocaust*, 73.

⁵⁴ Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, 135; Hans-Peter Klausch “Das Lagerbordell von Flossenbürg,” 91.

⁵⁵ Anna X, Transcription, 21, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03; Christensen, Transcription, 94, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

⁵⁶ In Sachsenhausen the men were only allotted ten minutes according to Odd Nansen’s account (188), in the Mauthausen brothel the men had 12 minutes, Pike, *Spaniards in the Holocaust*, 73; and in Buchenwald 15 minutes, USHMM RG-06.005.05M Reel 1, 5, Aussage Beulig; and 15 minutes in Mittelbau-Dora, Archiv der Gedenkstätte Mittelbau-Dora (hereafter, AGMD) DMD-EB/HT-81, 5.

⁵⁷ A former prisoner assigned to outfit the peepholes in the with glass panes in the Neuengamme brothel was told by an SS officer, “because here, fucking is only allowed the German way, there will be no French figures.” Piotrowski, Transcription, 44, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

⁵⁸ Willi Hollein, “Errinerungen an Sachsenhausen,” XXXV/4 Bl. 32, Archiv Sachsenhausen

“dragged by the ankle, naked, into the waiting room and his clothes thrown after him” once the time limit expired.⁵⁹ Günther Bullerjahn, a Sachsenhausen prisoner, remarked cynically that the SS men enthusiastically looked through the peephole and could not seem to “get enough.”⁶⁰ The peephole, when used, served as both entertainment for the guards, but also to humiliate the prisoners. A group of SS officers in the Monowitz brothel were “obviously amused by what they had seen [through the peephole)” and “making dirty remarks.”⁶¹ In contrast to these testimonies of the SS enjoying themselves, there are also other reports that the peepholes remained unused. Several women in the brothels maintained the SS rarely patrolled the brothel hallways and the peepholes in the door were so smudged they were useless.⁶² The disparity in testimonies can be attributed to the fact that the women may not have wanted to acknowledge that by performing their jobs they were also providing the SS with entertainment and at worst, sexual pleasure.

After discussing generally which prisoners were granted brothel privileges, how they went about securing permission, and what transpired once in the brothel, case studies of the Dachau, Buchenwald, and Mauthausen brothels reveal more details regarding how men used the brothel. The statistical evidence available for these three brothels estimates the number of men using brothel privileges, while consequently indicating larger trends in the camp system with regard to the role the brothel played in the camps.

The Business of the Buchenwald and Dachau Brothels

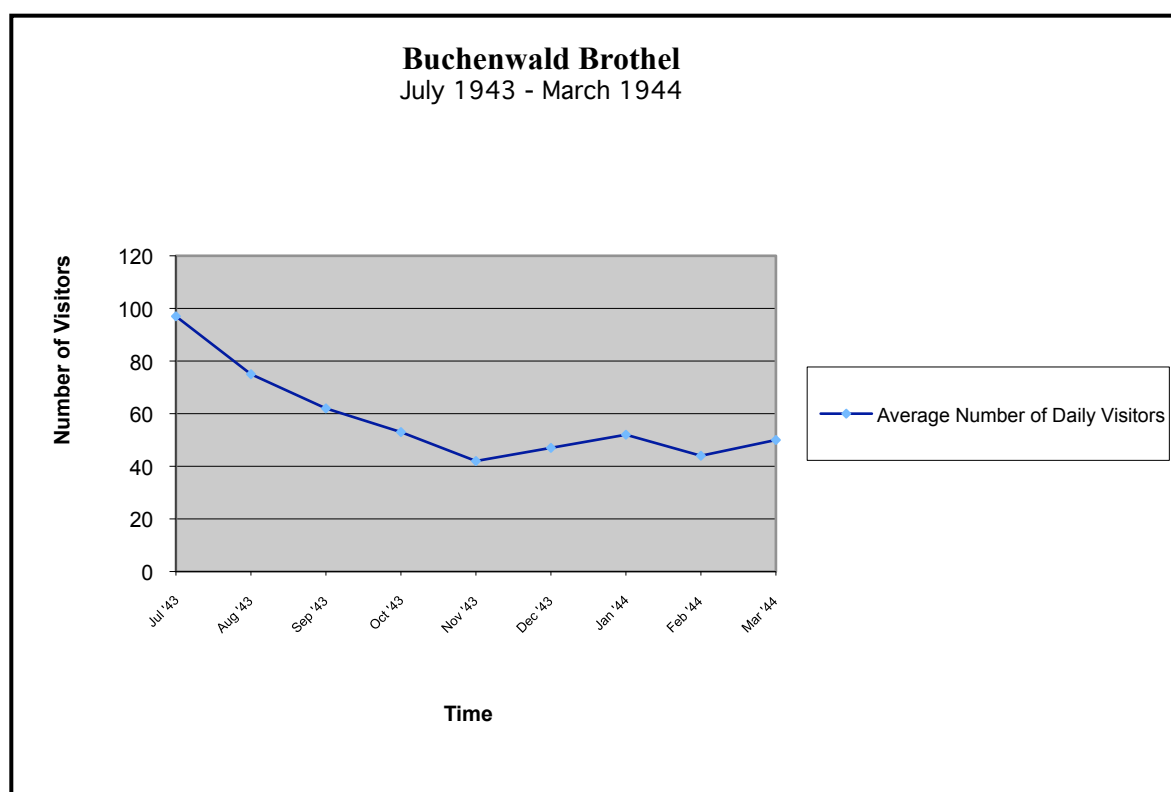
⁵⁹ Pike, 73

⁶⁰ Archiv der Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen (hereafter, AGS) D30 A 82A Bl. 121-122, 121.

⁶¹ Archiwum Państwowego Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau W Oświęcimiu (hereafter APMO) Osw./Leonhardt/1509, 2.

⁶² Anna X., Transcription, 18, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

The first records of the women sexual laborers arriving in Buchenwald are dated July 2 and July 4, 1943.⁶³ The brothel most likely opened for business on July 15, 1943.⁶⁴ There is documentation, although not complete, beginning in July 1943 and ending in March 1944. In this 9-month period there are receipts for only 181 days. The missing records could be due to brothel closures or simply lost records. The brothels were closed for the following reasons: light and water shortages, escape attempts, and camp leadership speeches.⁶⁵ During the 181 days, the brothel received 9,900 clients and on average, 15 women worked in the brothel as sexual laborers and an additional woman worked as a cashier.⁶⁶



⁶³ BA NS 4 Bu/41, Krankenpapiere.

⁶⁴ This is the first record of receipts for the brothel.

⁶⁵ Christa Schulz, "Weibliche Häftlinge aus Ravensbrück in Bordellen der Männerkonzentrationslager," in *Frauen in Konzentrationslagern. Bergen-Belsen Ravensbrück*, ed. Claus Füllberg-Stolberg (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1998), 144; AMGB NS Bu4/41.

⁶⁶ Although, depending on the date of operation, two women often worked as "cashiers" running the brothel. AMGB NS 4 Bu/41, Buchenwald Brothel Receipts.

Month	Average Number of Daily Visitors ⁶⁷
July 1943	97
August 1943	75
September 1943	62
October 1943	53
November 1943	42
December 1943	47
January 1944	52
February 1944	44
March 1944	50

The brothel was busiest when it first opened and the number of brothel patrons generally decreased as time went on. The receipts for 19 days in March 1945 show only 455 clients, approximately 24 a day.⁶⁸ This is a small number compared to the 1257 clients in July 1943 over a 13-day period averaging 97 per day.⁶⁹ One logical reason for this steady decrease could be the deteriorating conditions in the camp and therefore the increasingly weakened state of even the “prominent” prisoners.

Another possible explanation for the decrease in business is the success of the “political” prisoners’ boycott of the brothel. According to former Buchenwald prisoner-functionary Eugen Kogon, the “political” prisoners believed the SS was using the brothel to corrupt “political” prisoners and distract them from resistance and organization.⁷⁰ As a result, according to Kogon, the “political” prisoners boycotted the brothel:

The camp grapevine has passed along instructions that the brothel was not to be patronized...It was regarded as shameful that wives and mothers sent money they could ill afford, only to have the prisoners pay out two marks admission to the brothel.⁷¹

⁶⁷ AMGB NS 4 Bu/41, Buchenwald Brothel Receipts.

⁶⁸ AMGB NS 4 Bu/41, Buchenwald Brothel Receipts.

⁶⁹ AMGB NS 4 Bu/41, Buchenwald Brothel Receipts.

⁷⁰ Kogon, *The Theory and Practice*, 135.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Buchenwald was considered a “red” camp and correspondingly a large percentage of the eligible men (*Die Prominenz*, or *Die Prominenten*) were “political” prisoners and possibly have been influenced by the boycott.

The percentage of prisoners actually using the brothel is placed in perspective with a focused examination of two different timeframes: a 13-day period beginning on July 15, 1943 and ending on July 28, 1943 and a 21-day period beginning on September 1, 1943 and ending on September 30, 1943. In the July 1943 timeframe, there were 1257 visits made to the brothel, roughly 97 per day.⁷² Throughout the second timeframe, there were 1296 visits to the brothel, approximately 62 daily. The Buchenwald camp population for the months of July and September 1943 was approximately 12,500 and 15,000 respectively. This means that if we assume (incorrectly) that each man only visited once, the percentage of Buchenwald population using the brothel was extremely small: .77% and .41%, respectively. This information combined with knowledge garnered from testimonies that many men were repeat customers, further drives the percentage down to a smaller number. These statistics show that a very small, and statistically insignificant, number of men used the brothel in Buchenwald.

The Dachau brothel opened on April 18, 1944.⁷³ In a 46-day period commencing on July 19, 1944 and ending on September 5, 1944, the Dachau brothel had 2,222 visitors.⁷⁴ The daily average for this period was 48 patrons daily. The estimated population of the Dachau camp in August 1944 was 22,000 prisoners making the

⁷² AMGB NS 4 Bu/41, Buchenwald Brothel Receipts.

⁷³ Engelhardt, “Frauen im Konzentrationslager Dachau,” 223.

⁷⁴ International Tracing Service of the Red Cross Bad Arolsen (hereafter, ITS) GCC 3/231, Ordner 283, GCC 3/231, Ordner 284, GCC 3/231, Ordner 285.

percentage of the population using the brothel .21%.⁷⁵ These statistics are meant to draw attention to the fact that the brothel, touted as a labor incentive, was in fact used by only a privileged few. If it truly were a labor incentive, it would have been more beneficial to expand its reach to include more prisoners—which clearly it did not. Access to the brothel was strictly controlled and limited to those prisoners residing in the highest strata of prisoner society. The small number of prisoners that used the brothel coupled with the incorrect labeling of the women as “volunteers,” accounts for the absence of a discussion of the brothel’s existence in the historiography of the concentration camps. The camp prisoners’ brothels did not impact the lives of the majority of the camp population, and although the Jewish prisoners often knew of its existence, it certainly did not affect the lives of the majority of Jewish prisoners.⁷⁶ The fact of the matter is, that other than the men granted brothel visits and the women forced into prostitution, the brothel had no meaning for the majority of the camp and did not change their situation in the camp.

The Mauthausen Brothel: August 1942

⁷⁵ National Archives, “Concentration Camp Dachau Entry Registers (*Zugangsbücher*), 1933–1945,” M1938, <http://www.archives.gov/research/captured-german-records/microfilm/m1938.pdf>.

⁷⁶ However, some Jewish prisoners did come into contact with the brothel and if they did, they usually benefitted from the generosity of its female workers. Chapter Three discusses some of these examples of Jewish men being fed by the women in the brothel and in some cases, due to a mistake, Jewish women were housed in the brothels for a short period of time. See Sam Goodchild, interview by Jason Walker, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Melbourne, VIC, Australia, March 14, 1997, Interview Code 29135, Tape 5, Segment 25; ⁷⁶ Sylvia Hack, interview by Naomi Rappaport, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Brighton, MA, USA, May 20, 1996, Interview Code 15277, Tape 4, Segment 104; Jack Unikowski, interview by Ruben Zylberszpic, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, East Ivanhoe, VIC, Australia, March 19, 1998, Interview Code 42633, Tape 1, Segment 34; Sam Nivin, interview by Debbi Portney, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Kew Gardens, NY, USA, August 17, 1995, Interview Code 05563, Tape 2, Segment 57; Doris Ostrow, interview by Sara Aftergood, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA, January 11, 1995, Interview Code 527, Tape 3, Segment 75; Halina Ragazzoni, interview by Naomi Rappaport, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, New York, NY, USA, March 20, 1995, Interview Code 01539, Tape 4, Segment 105; Meyer Schwartz, interview by Sandy Rebitzer, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Kalamazoo, MI, USA, August 25, 1995, Interview Code 06005, Tape 3, Segment 71.

The brothel in Mauthausen opened for business on June 11, 1942⁷⁷ with 10 women from the Ravensbrück concentration camp working as “prostitutes.”⁷⁸ The Mauthausen brothel book is a complete record of prisoners who visited the brothel in August 1942. In this register are the names, birthdates, and classification of prisoners who visited the brothel during this month.⁷⁹ In August 1942, 57 men were registered into the book. Of these 57 men, 56 were *Reichsdeutsche*, and 1 man was Polish.⁸⁰ Of the 56 *Reichsdeutsche*, 13 were classified as “asocial;” 36 as “career criminals;” and 7 as “political” prisoners.⁸¹ The high percentage of “criminals” among the “prominent” prisoners is due to Mauthausen’s designation as a category III work camp.⁸² In Mauthausen, the prisoner functionaries were largely culled from the “green triangle” group that held a very large presence in the camp. According to a census taken on February 23, 1945, there were 184 prisoner functionaries in the Mauthausen camp and 114 were classified as German “criminals.”⁸³

The Mauthausen brothel book is simply a register noting names, birthdates, and classifications. However, tracing these names through individual prisoner files has provided far greater detail giving a more thick description of the men than the statistics render.⁸⁴ The Nazis compiled prisoner dossiers for each inmate “processed” into the

⁷⁷ AGM K2/1. Mauthausen Bordellbuch, Block 3.

⁷⁸ Maršálek, *Die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Mauthausen*, 115; Herbermann recalls the recruitment taking place in June 42, *The Blessed Abyss*, 131-132.

⁷⁹ AGM K 2/1. Bordellbuch Block 3 June 11-December 31, 1942.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² In January 1941, SS General Reinhard Heydrich, the chief of the Reich Main Office for Security (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt--RSHA*), designated Mauthausen a category III work camp. This designation meant that the prisoners incarcerated at Mauthausen were not considered worthy of reform and were subjected to the harshest living and working conditions. In 1943 the life expectancy of a camp inmate working in the quarries was six months. See *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, “Mauthausen,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed September 13, 2009, <http://www.ushmm.org>.

⁸³ Maršálek, *Die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers*, 58, 62.

⁸⁴ ITS Häftlingskarten Mauthausen.

camp system.⁸⁵ These dossiers include correspondence, arrest records, medical records, and photos that were meant for internal use only. However, simple biographic information and arrest records do provide a more rounded view of the men using the brothel. To give a better idea of the men who decided to exercise their brothel privilege, I will give three examples of individuals listed in the Mauthausen brothel book, chosen as typical of many of the men using the brothel in Mauthausen.

Born in the final months of 1898, Lawrence Dohler⁸⁶ was a baker in Nazi Germany living with his wife and their one child. The Munich *Kripo* arrested Dohler on July 7, 1940. This was the first mark on his record. Dohler arrived in Mauthausen on August 16, 1940 and was classified as a “green” German *Berufsverbrecher* (career criminal). Beginning on August 9, 1943, he was given the coveted position of *Lagerälteste* (Camp Elder) and with his promotion he received a bevy of privileges.⁸⁷ Dohler exercised his privileged status in August 1943 by using the camp brothel. Another individual, Frank Glowornek,⁸⁸ a single German man, was arrested in 1938 by the Gleiwitz *Kripo* and also sent to Mauthausen as a “criminal.” Imprisoned in the camp system since 1938, Glowornek was considered a camp “old timer.” He had reached the highest echelon of Mauthausen prisoner society due in part to his ability to survive in the camp. His status was also helped by his work assignment putting him in close proximity to the SS. Glowornek served as part of the cleaning crew entrusted with the task of keeping the *SS Kommandatur* clean.⁸⁹ One final example is another German, Heinrich

⁸⁵ Only “processed” prisoners had files, therefore the thousands of prisoners sent to the death camps were not given files in many cases.

⁸⁶ Name has been changed.

⁸⁷ ITS Häftlingskarten Mauthausen, L.D.

⁸⁸ Name has been changed.

⁸⁹ ITS Häftlingskarten Mauthausen, F.G. Positions that put prisoners in close proximity to power often yielded large rewards; for example, the surviving prisoner file records for 40 of the 57 men using the

Sohr.⁹⁰ Sohr was from Hamburg, arrested and deported to Dachau in 1939 as a “criminal.” Sohr was transferred to Mauthausen on January 25, 1940 where he rose among the prisoner hierarchy to the position of Kapo in June 1944. He was later promoted again to another prisoner-functionary position and named Block Elder. Although his position in August 1942 is unknown, it is safe to assume, looking at his later trajectory, Sohr held a position of power in the camp and this was the reason he was counted among the camp “aristocracy.”⁹¹ Common to all three men were two things: they were German and they worked in a close relationship with their SS captors. Both of these attributes were significant as they vaulted these men into their prominent status.

The 57 men, including the aforementioned three, account for 519 visits in August 1942.⁹² Although the number of men using the brothel is interesting; more telling is the frequency with which men took advantage of their privilege. The frequency with which a man visited the brothel gives insight into his motivations and the purpose the brothel held for him. Of the 57 men, 13 used the brothel only once in this period; 25 men visited the brothel between 2 and 9 times; 9 men made between 10-19 visits; 6 men visited between 20-19 times; and 4 men used the brothel between 30 and 43 times.⁹³ The diversity in the frequency with which the men visited the brothel implies not all prisoners used the brothel in the same manner. It is clear from the August 1942 register, that only four men used the brothel regularly. This small cohort was most likely part of the “aristocracy” among the men granted brothel visits.

Mauthausen Brothel the month of August 1943 include three men working in the *SS Kommandatur* cleaning. Similarly, another individual in the Mauthausen brothel book worked as a mechanic keeping the camp leadership’s cars running. ITS Häftlingskarten Mauthausen, J.H.

⁹⁰ Name has been changed.

⁹¹ ITS Häftlingskarten Mauthausen, H.V.

⁹² AGM K 2/1. Bordellbuch Block 3 June 11-December 31, 1942.

⁹³ AGM K 2/1. Bordellbuch Block 3 June 11-December 31, 1942.

This existence of four regular visitors suggests some men were involved in “relationships” with the women forced to work in the brothel. Members of the “aristocracy” not only visited the brothel regularly, but also brought the women various gifts. These 4 men visited the brothel between 30 and 43 times, which means, they were in the brothel everyday it was open and on some days more than one visit was made. This heavy use certainly indicates that it is quite possible the men were seeing the same woman frequently and may have been able to forge a type of relationship. Certainly a man visiting the brothel 43 times in the course of a month had a different motivation than a man visiting only once. The records for the Mauthausen brothel prove that the men used the brothel with varying frequencies and these differing frequencies necessitate delving into plausible motivations prompting the men to use the brothel.

Willing Visitors

Camp brothels were more than simple spaces where sexual intercourse occurred between male prisoners and female “prostitutes.” This simplistic view of the brothel denies the larger implications and significance the existence of camp brothels had for some camp prisoners. Previous chapters discussed the role the brothel played in many of the women’s quest for survival by offering refuge from the “excremental assault” of the camps while providing benefits that both physically and mentally strengthened the women. The brothel also functioned as a refuge from camp life for some of its male patrons. Although the “prominent” prisoners were not experiencing the same dire conditions the majority of camp prisoners dealt with daily, these men still were prisoners and experienced differing levels of deprivations. However, the atmosphere of the brothel—its cleanliness and its promise of female contact—surely drew various men to it

for different reasons. For all of the men the brothel held the possibility of something different from the normal routine of camp life. I argue some men utilized the brothel for pragmatic reasons, whether it was to enter into a clean environment, or to strike up a conversation with a female. Not all men entered the brothel due to sexual desire. To explain the brothels as simply places for sexual intercourse, or prostitution, is to deny that the captive men in the camps may have used the brothel in a practical manner that best suited their needs.

The simplest explanation accounting for the amount of business the camp brothels conducted is the fact that they offered “free” sex to the eligible prisoner population. The brothel was a space where men were able to have sex with women relatively unencumbered. This is not to say that sex only occurred in the brothels, because sex and intimate relationships took place throughout the camps; however, in the brothels sex was allowed in a more “normal” atmosphere.⁹⁴ To say that having sex while possibly being monitored, under time restrictions, and after undergoing a physical examination was “normal” only underscores the abnormality of the camps. In the brothel, in contrast to the rest of the camp, the men and women could have sex in a clean room, on a clean bed, and use of modern facilities. Sex among prisoners in the camp-at-large often took place in quick moments in whatever space was available.⁹⁵ Sexual desire and drive were basic

⁹⁴ Numerous concentration camp memoirs discuss sex among inmates, sex with Kapos, and instances of homosexual sex. For example, see Fania Fenelon, *Playing for Time*; Liana Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*; Louis J. Micheels, *Doctor # 117641: A Holocaust memoir* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Gisella Perl, *I was a Doctor in Auschwitz*; Olga Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*; Heinz Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*; Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*. See also, Rittner and Roth, *Different Voices*; Dalia Ofer and Lenore Weitzman, *Women in the Holocaust*.

⁹⁵ Once again, see the myriad of references to sex in the squalid conditions of the camp, including in the latrines, found in Holocaust memoirs. For example, Olga Lengyel describes the inevitability of love and sexual desire in the camps as follows, “Nature dictates that wherever men and women are together there shall also be love. Even in the shadow of the crematory the emotions could not entirely be suppressed.

human instincts that the camps did not always eradicate; sexual drive could be a powerful motivation among the prisoner population. On the opening day of the Flossenbürg brothel, Heinz Heger stated 100 prisoners queued for the brothel:

These prisoners, laughing and joking as they queued up outside the brothel, were by no means all men still in their prime—those were mostly Capos or foremen—but also included a good number of half-starved and exhausted human wrecks, floating between life and death, and looking as if they might collapse at any minute. Yet they still wanted to have their “pleasure”—a clear sign of how sexuality is the most powerful of human drives.⁹⁶

The power of sexual drive, as a human instinct, should not be understated; some men certainly visited the brothel purely because it provided them with the opportunity to have sex. The “half-starved” and “human wrecks” Heger describes, were not the “prominent” prisoners, but other *Reichsdeutsche* given the opportunity to spend some time with a woman. The SS often gave vouchers to men to entertain themselves by further humiliating the men.⁹⁷ Despite their exhaustion, some men seized upon the unprecedented offer.

The brothel was a sanctioned sexual outlet for the men, but it also provided something that was often nonexistent in the men’s camps: contact with women. The camps were built in a manner limiting prisoner interaction between the sexes. The “zone” system separated the camp area according to functions (work, sleeping etc.) and prisoner groups (prisoner groups were housed together in barracks), making sustained contact between men and women unlikely in camps housing both women and men, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, and impossible in camps where women simply were not present. Glimpses of the opposite sex were rare and any extended contact—including

Love, or whatever passed for it in the degraded atmosphere of the death camp, was but a distortion of what it is for normal people.” Olga Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, 195.

⁹⁶ Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, 99.

⁹⁷ Examples of this practice are discussed later in this chapter.

conversation—was inconceivable for most.⁹⁸ Ryszard Dacko was an example of a man who simply craved female company. Dacko was a Polish “political” in Auschwitz working for the camp fire brigade. He accounts his experience as follows,

If I wanted to get a voucher, I had to sort things out with an SS-man...Prisoners who worked as cooks for the SS, as hairdressers for the SS—the special prisoners got those vouchers. I got two vouchers.⁹⁹

Dacko went to the brothel because he wanted to see and be with a woman, he states, “I wanted to cuddle up to her as much as I could, because it was three and a half years since I’d been arrested, three and a half years without a woman.”¹⁰⁰ Some of the “prominent” prisoners had earned their status due to their long tenure in the camp and as camp “elders” some of the men had been incarcerated either in prisons or camps since the Nazi takeover of power in 1933. For this group of men, it was possible they had not had contact with a member of the opposite sex in nearly a decade. The lure of physical contact with a woman could have provided enough motivation for these “prominent” prisoners to begin the process of obtaining permission.

In Buchenwald a young “political” prisoner worried he would die in the camp without experiencing “the love of a woman” and upon hearing the prisoners’ brothel opened, he expressed interest in obtaining permission for a visit.¹⁰¹ Virgin men and men believing death was imminent, may have perceived the brothel as an opportunity to have sex for possibly the first or last time. Although these claims are impossible to back with

⁹⁸ Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, 53.

⁹⁹ *Auschwitz: Inside the Nazi State*, PBS Documentary, accessed October 14, 2010, <http://www.pbs.org/auschwitz/40-45/corruption/1943b.html>.

¹⁰⁰ *Auschwitz: Inside the Nazi State*, PBS Documentary, accessed October 14, 2010, <http://www.pbs.org/auschwitz/40-45/corruption/1943b.html>.

¹⁰¹ AMGB 31-494, 5.

statistics, sex for a first or last time was most likely among the motivating factors.¹⁰²

Among the Mauthausen records for August 1942, are the names of 13 men who made one single visit to the brothel. The single visit these men made indicates they were not engaging in “relationships,” and it seems unlikely that sexual desire was their main motivation because they only made one lone visit. Although impossible to prove, it is conceivable that a few of the men making one visit to the Mauthausen brothel in August 1942 were either sexually inexperienced men wanting to experience “the love of a woman,” or men expecting it to be their last chance for intimacy in the face of certain uncertainty.

The stated purpose of the brothel was to offer sex as a reward for diligent labor to a segment of the prisoner labor force; yet, according to a variety of sources, some prisoners visiting the brothel did not actually have sex. Some prisoners used their allotted time in the brothel to seek companionship with a woman in a non-sexual manner. A former forced prostitute, Ella, worked in the Flossenbürg brothel and recounted in a post-war interview she did not always have sex with her clients. It is difficult to imagine the SS allowing men and women to simply spend time together in the brothel, considering there was a protocol mandating that sex not only occur, but also transpire in a specified manner and timeframe. However, many prisoners attest that the peepholes were not always used, nor did the SS guards always patrol the brothel, making it possible for women and men to have spent time in one another’s company without having intercourse.

¹⁰² The use of the “comfort women” by the Japanese military is based upon a cultural belief that men should not die as virgins and also that they would become better soldiers. On the “comfort women” see George L. Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan’s Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War* (New York : W.W. Norton & Co., 1995); Toshiyuki Tanaka, *Japan’s Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002); Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Margaret D Stetz and Bonnie B C Oh, eds., *Legacies of the Comfort Women of World War II* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2001).

Ella maintained that while in the Flossenbürg brothel she had a client with whom she simply embraced.¹⁰³ Further corroborating Ella's insistence that sex did not always occur between the woman and her client is the testimony of Polish "political" prisoner Henry Mikols. Mikols was imprisoned in Buchenwald and visited the brothel once, "just to find out," and met with a woman, who

after she found out what my name was, how old I was, she gave me a couple of cookies and a little glass of wine and she sent me home!...They didn't even have to delouse me...usually after every experiment...they had to do some kind of injection...so you would not spread any disease.¹⁰⁴

Mikols was either 19 or 20 years of age when he entered the brothel and perhaps his young age prompted the woman working in the brothel to treat him like a child. Mikol's oral history not only tells us that sexual intercourse did not always occur between a man and woman in the brothel, but his statement that he was not "deloused" implies the SS knew that he had not engaged in sexual intercourse. Mikols had been allowed to enter the brothel, go into a *Koberzimmer*, meet with a woman, and incredibly, share wine and food without ever having sexual intercourse. If the SS had let him have intercourse without abiding by the sanitization procedures, that would have defied Nazi and camp law; subsequently, it is likely the SS knew he had not engaged in sexual intercourse and for this reason he was not "deloused." Although Mikols refers to the practice as "delousing," I assume he is referring to the injections and sanitation procedures that sometimes, depending on the brothel, also followed sexual intercourse.

Arthur Heimberg also spent time in a brothel without having sex. In the Mauthausen brothel, he made conversation with several of the women, prompting one

¹⁰³ Heigl, "Zwangsprostitution im KZ-Lagerbordell Flossenbürg,"

¹⁰⁴ Henry Mikols, interview by Jill Greenberg, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Dummer, NH, USA, August 22, 2001, Interview Code 51743, Tape 3, Segments 72 and 74.

woman to chide him, “you’re so hard to please, you can’t pick one?”¹⁰⁵ and to this he replied, “I don’t want any, I just want to know where you come from?”¹⁰⁶ Heimberg was curious and desired something more than the physical act of intercourse, he wanted to connect with the women and perhaps find a companion. These men may have sought permission to enter the brothel to satisfy their curiosity, as in Henry Mikols’ case, or to spend time with a woman, as in the cases of Ella’s client and Arthur Heimberg. Just as sexual drive is a natural instinct, so too is a craving for intimacy and physical contact that can be totally non-sexual.

The following example of a relationship in the Mauthausen brothel serves to underscore my argument that the brothel was not just a place for the act of sexual intercourse; but also a place where two individuals could also connect in a wholly non-sexual manner. Anny K. worked as a “prostitute” in the Mauthausen brothel and had a client whom she entertained several times weekly. According to Anny, her client received 50 *pfennige* a week from his wife earmarked for his visits to the brothel.¹⁰⁷ Describing the relationship, Anny said, “With one man I had something like a friendship—a relationship built on mutual trust.”¹⁰⁸ Typically, an exchange between a prostitute and her client would not be referred to as a friendship. Anny’s language suggests that if sex did occur, it was not the most significant aspect of their relationship. Anny’s client’s wife knew about his visits to the brothel, suggesting that there was an understanding between the male prisoner and his wife. Perhaps they both recognized the

¹⁰⁵ Arthur Heimberg, interview by Esther Rothfield-St., USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Randwick, NWS, Australia, December 18, 1995, Interview Code 07362, Tape 6, Segment 169.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ “Armes Kind, du bist so hübsch,” 41.

¹⁰⁸ “Armes Kind, du bist so hübsch,” 41.

use of the brothel for more than sexual intercourse. Conceivably, his wife understood that by visiting the brothel her husband was able to more readily withstand his incarceration by fostering a type of companionship with Anny. The combination of language Anny used to describe her relationship and the frequency of her client's visits, strongly suggests their time together in the brothel was not simply about sex, but had more meaningful implications.

The opportunity the brothel afforded men to reassert their humanity and masculinity also may have motivated men to visit the brothel. The camps were designed to dehumanize and infantilize its inhabitants.¹⁰⁹ Survival necessitated an adaptation to the unnatural environment that included disconnecting with one's past. The act of sexual intercourse gave the men a chance to take part in an act that was natural and could potentially reconnect them with their humanity, and perhaps by acting as their former selves they could reclaim their masculinity. Masculinity, a social construction shaped by historical circumstances and discourse, is a relational concept that takes on meaning not least when juxtaposed with models of femininity.¹¹⁰ The cultural norms considered men as caretaker and protector and these roles and identities were generally severed when men were separated from their families upon entering the camp.¹¹¹ This separation deprived

¹⁰⁹ On this see most notably, Bruno Bettelheim, *Surviving, and other Essays*; Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor*.

¹¹⁰ On the construction of masculinity, see Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, Simon Watson and Carrie Mae Weems, eds., *Constructing Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹¹¹ Ruth Harris discusses the process of psychological emasculation men felt when they were unable to protect their wives and children. Ruth Harris, "The Child of the Barbarian: Rape, Race, and Nationalism," *Past and Present* 141, (1993): 170-206; see also Anna Hájková, "Strukturen weiblichen Verhaltens in Theresienstadt," in *Genozid und Geschlecht: Jüdische Frauen im nationalsozialistischen Lagersystem*, ed. Gisela Bock (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2005). Hájková's work is on the sexual barter and "rational relationships" in the Theresienstadt ghetto; on gender and masculinity during war, see more generally Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Paul Frederick Lerner, *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma, 1890-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Karen

them of the opportunity to care for and protect their families and thus challenged the normative means of defining their “masculinity.” Nor did the camp atmosphere make any type of aggression a viable means of asserting power. Such displays were met with violence from the SS, or even death. The SS had created a culture that sought to emasculate male prisoners through a variety of humiliations (for example shaving Jewish men’s beards) and by opening a brothel they perhaps unwittingly presented a segment of the male population an easily recognizable symbol of masculinity: the ability to have sexual intercourse.

Notions of masculinity are often tied to the ability of a man to sexually perform. Thus, by virtue of “performing” in the brothel, the eligible men were able to prove to themselves, and others, their manhood was still intact.¹¹² Through the act of sexual intercourse, men could reassert their masculinity. The theory of genitalization, posits male thought patterns result in the prioritization of qualities of “hardness” or “upness” as positive and necessary attributes for success.¹¹³ The brothel created opportunities where men could prove they were “up” for the task of sexual intercourse, and perhaps this show of masculinity served as a means of not only indicating sexual virility but proof the men were “up” to the task of survival. The brothel not only put male prisoners in contact with females, thus allowing their “masculinity” to bloom in relation to the women’s “femininity,” but their sexual prowess also served as a symbol of their unwillingness to be emasculated by the SS.

Hagemann, “Military, War and the Mainstreams: Gendering Modern German Military History,” in Karen Hagemann and Jean H. Quataert, eds., *Gendering Modern German History: Themes, Debates, Revisions* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007).

¹¹² On the connections between masculinity and male sexuality, see James B. Nelson, *The Intimate Connection: Male Sexuality, Masculine Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988).

¹¹³ Consider the following common phrases, “being up for the job,” “doing a hard day’s work,” Nelson, *The Intimate Connection*.

Sex was not the only means of combating the perceived “emasculating” effects of the camp; other “courting” rituals dispensed chances for men to “provide” for the women in the brothel. It was a common practice for the “prominent” brothel patrons with “wealth” to bring gifts to the women. Men gave clothes and nylon stockings to their “sweethearts.”¹¹⁴ In Sachsenhausen, a frequent brothel patron known as “*Der Buckel*” (the hunchback), began courting a woman, Brunhilde, with whom he shared a common hometown, Hamburg.¹¹⁵ Their relationship flourished over the course of his numerous brothel visits and during one of their encounters, “*Der Buckel*” presented Brunhilde with a present, a watch.¹¹⁶ This gesture was laden with meaning: “*Der Buckel*” proved himself as “provider” by giving Brunhilde a gift, while simultaneously resisting dehumanization by engaging in a familiar courting ritual. “*Der Buckel*” did not need to give a token of affection to Brunhilde, she was obligated to have sex with him without any payment of gift yet in the midst of the camp, and he presented her with a valuable object. Furthermore, he risked his own safety by giving Brunhilde such an offering, the SS did not allow gift giving and routinely searched the brothels for contraband items. Additionally, a watch was an expensive article and “*Der Buckel*” could have easily benefited from its “sale” on the black market. His decision to give the watch to Brunhilde indicates that despite camp rules, and the highly abnormal atmosphere of the camp brothels, he felt the need to present his “sweetheart” with a gift that signaled her

¹¹⁴ Chaim Feig, interview by Carol Stulberg, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, October 12, 1997, Interview Code 34315, Tape 6, Segment 164; Henry Mikols, interview by Jill Greenberg, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Dummer, NH, USA, August 22, 2001, Interview Code 51743, Tape 3, Segment 72.

¹¹⁵ AGS JD 4/13 Bl. 6-9.

¹¹⁶ AGS JD 4/13 Bl. 6-9; Heinz Heger also discusses gift giving between prisoners and the women in the brothel, Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, 100.

high priority to him. This act proved that he was not a *Musselmann*, nor had he lost his former sense of self.

In Neuengamme, two male prisoners who considered themselves friends were both frequent visitors to the camp brothel. However, after one of the men discovered that they were both after the same female, they fought and ended their friendship.¹¹⁷ Both men “courted” the woman and considered themselves to be in a relationship with the woman. The example of these two men very tellingly illuminates the fact the men did not consider their relationships with the woman to be prostitutional, but rather “normal.” Neither man considered that the other could be carrying on a relationship, sexual and otherwise, with other men. These two men valued their relationship with the woman in the brothel above even their friendship. This is a significant point because it implies that in the wholly unnatural camp environment they understood their intimate relationships to be not only sound, but also vital. When presented with an opportunity to have a “relationship,” some men risked their lives to court their new female companions. Men did not use the brothel only to satisfy their sexual urges, but also as a place to rebuild their masculinity and revisit their pre-incarceration roles of “provider” and “caretaker.”

Despite their privileged status, “prominent prisoners” were not in control of their future in the camps. Many prisoners who made their way into the highest echelons of prisoner society did so by acknowledging the uncertainty of their future and adapting to the camp so they could capitalize on available opportunities. The brothel, and its guarantee of sex, was one of these opportunities. Some prisoners under the omnipresent threat of death formed an “impromptu self” in their quest for survival. By forming an impromptu self, prisoners allowed themselves to take actions they may have never

¹¹⁷ AGN 127, 96.

considered outside of the camp.¹¹⁸ Among these actions was stealing from inmates, ignoring the suffering of others, and for some, paying for sex.

The SS leadership failed to foresee the prisoners' potential use of the brothel as an escape from the realities of camp life. For both the women and the men the brothel was a refuge from the excremental assault of the camps. The purpose of the concentration camp system was to dehumanize and weaken its victims by reducing them to their animal instincts. However, the brothel and its protocol gave the men and women a small window of opportunity where they themselves were physically clean, had access to clean beds, and could engage in sexual intercourse, in itself an act that could be life affirming.¹¹⁹ The twenty or so minutes behind the brothel bedroom doors were twenty minutes where men were no longer designated only by numbers and symbols, but were once again individuals. For those men eligible for brothel rewards the brothel signified masculinity, power, and privilege.

The Unwilling visitors

Among the small percentage of men who making use of the brothel were also men forced to visit the brothel against their will. Although it is not possible to give statistical evidence as to how many of the brothels' customers were unwilling participants, it can be proven that some men were in fact forced visitors. Making up part of the small percentage of the unwilling patrons were those individuals forced to use the brothel to set an "example" for the rest of the eligible camp population. The SS forced the *Lagerälteste*

¹¹⁸ Langer, "Redefining Heroic Behavior: The Impromptu Self and the Holocaust Experience," in *Lessons and Legacies*, 227-242.

¹¹⁹ Sex was not relegated to just the camp brothels, sex occurred throughout the camp but in the fetid conditions of the camp. See Chapter Five for a complete discussion of sexual relationships in the camp.

of Buchenwald to use the brothel in the midst of the “political” prisoner boycott. After refusing for two days, he relented and went to the brothel—but only that once.¹²⁰ In Neuengamme, an SS guard asked a “political” prisoner whether or not he had made use of the brothel. The prisoner responded “no,” and was given an official order to report to the brothel the following day. The prisoner explained he was not going to cheat on his wife and that he had a son, to which the SS guard “laughed” but rescinded his order.¹²¹ These are only two documented examples of individuals being forced to use the brothel but they are indicative of a possible trend. The brothel could also be used as “punishment” for male prisoners.

In 1944 the brothel opened in the Mittelbau-Dora camp. Mittelbau-Dora was the location for the underground manufacturing of V-2 missiles and it was the SS’s hope that visits to the brothel would raise labor efficiency. To provide an incentive, the brothel was perched in a prominent position on top of a hill within eyesight of all prisoners during roll call. To the frustration and dismay of the SS, according to French prisoner Jean Michel, business in the brothel was slow. Michel, in the camp system since September 1943, stated the horrible conditions of the camp contributed to the lack of interest in the brothel, or *Puff*. Conditions at Mittelbau-Dora were notoriously difficult; men worked in the tunnels without appropriate tools, without food, and without sunlight.¹²² The tunnels were a cold and damp work environment lacking adequate

¹²⁰ Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*, 136. The *Lagerälteste* at that time was Erich Reschke, a prominent Communist imprisoned in Dachau. For more on Erich Reschke, see the *The Buchenwald Report* trans. David A. Hackett (New York: Basic Books, 1997); also Stein, *Buchenwald Concentration Camp*, 102.

¹²¹ AGN 1273, 95.

¹²² On the Mittelbau-Dora camp see Jens-Christian Wagner, *Produktion des Todes: Das KZ Mittelbau-Dora* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2001); Manfred Bornemann and Martin Broszat, “Das KL Dora-Mittelbau,” in *Studien zur Geschichte der Konzentrationslager*, Martin Broszat, ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche-Verlags-Anstalt, 1970), 154-98; André Sellier, *A History of the Dora Camp*, trans. Steven Wright and Susan Taponier,

sanitation facilities and ventilation. Barracks were not completed until March 1944 and prior to this prisoners slept in the tunnels or exposed to the elements. The diseased and starved prisoners showed little interest in the SS provided “incentive.” As a result, the SS decided to force a labor commando to use the brothel:

The men were stupefied. There they were marching in ranks towards the barrack which had been transformed into a house of ill-repute. The poor fellows were drunk with fatigue and only wanted to sleep after twelve hours of work. The first line was put one in front of each door and commanded to drop their trousers. The doors will still closed. The girls must have been inside. The second order was given: ‘Enter!’ They went in, trousers lowered, feeling as much like making love as an ailing octogenarian.¹²³

The SS, before compelling all of the men to have sex, realized the water was not working in the brothel and therefore sanitation protocol could not be followed. As a result, not all of the men were forced to have sex. Despite the SS officers’ intent to force the men into using the brothel, they would not do so if it involved breaking the rules. Jean Michel remarks on the irony of the situation, “when you think that these miserable men lived in the tunnel covered in fleas, vermin, boils and shit!”¹²⁴ It logically follows that this example of forcing laborers in Mittelbau-Dora to use the brothel was not an isolated incident. Experiences in the brothel were highly varied depending on the agenda of the prisoner or of the Nazis. In this case, the men were being forced to use the brothel according to the SS agenda of “rewarding” the men, or incentivizing them to increase their labor output.

foreword by Michael J. Neufeld, afterword by Jens-Christian Wagner (Chicago: Irving R. Dee, published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2003); on the rocket program see, Michael J. Neufeld, *The Rocket and the Reich: Peenemünde and the Coming of the Ballistic Missile Era* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

¹²³ Jean Michel, *Dora: The Nazi Concentration*, 156-7.

¹²⁴ Jean Michel, *Dora: The Nazi Concentration*, 157.

Also included among the ranks of men forced to patronize the brothel were homosexual prisoners. As discussed previously, Himmler was interested in finding a “cure” for homosexuality. Himmler believed the brothel could play a role in “curing” homosexuals by forcing gay male prisoners to have sexual intercourse with women. Himmler thought if homosexual prisoners could “learn” to be with women, subsequently they could be “cured” of their deviant tendencies. One prisoner, after having forced sex with a woman was told, “Now you are a real German man.”¹²⁵ Heinz Heger, a homosexual prisoner in Flossenbürg, unwillingly visited the brothel three times, writing:

What pleasure was I expected to get, when the poor girl lifted her legs and called, “hurry up, then, hurry up!” so that she could be finished as soon as possible with a situation that was certainly just as painful for her? On top of which, I knew that some SS man would be spying on me through the hole. Certainly no “cure” was to be expected from this “enjoyment of the opposite sex.” Quite the contrary: I was so shattered by this form of sexual intercourse that I never again tried to have sex with a woman, and my homosexual orientation was only reinforced.¹²⁶

Heger, after his third forced visit to the brothel, learned to “keep up appearances” and continued to request permission to use the brothel while sending someone else in his place.¹²⁷ Forcing homosexual prisoners into heterosexual sex with women in the brothel was especially prevalent in the Buchenwald and Flossenbürg camps where there were larger populations of homosexual prisoners.

Conclusion

This chapter, and dissertation, is about the women forced into prostitution in the concentration camps. The experiences of these women also bring into focus the

¹²⁵ Plant, *The Pink Triangle*, 233n28.

¹²⁶ Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, 100.

¹²⁷ Apparently this practice of switching happened in many camps and begs the question of how closely the brothel was in fact monitored. The testimony of Buchenwald prisoner Henry Mikols also discusses the practice of giving another prisoner the *Bordellschein* in another prisoner’s name. Henry Mikols, interview by Jill Greenberg, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Dummer, NH, USA, August 22, 2001, Interview Code 51743, Tape 3, Segments 72 and 74.

experiences of the men who also had occasion to patronize the brothel. Looking at the experiences of women and employing a gendered analysis also indirectly makes an inroad for a gendered analysis of the men using the brothel. Just as the brothel was a tool employed by the SS to exploit female prisoners and extract sexual labor, it was also a tool aimed at both squeezing labor from the men and simultaneously rewarding and humiliating them for making use of their “privilege.”

Himmler’s prisoner brothels were camp institutions meant to provide labor incentives for eligible prisoners and serve as a reeducation facility for homosexual prisoners. Despite Himmler’s intentions for the brothel, the space operated in a very different manner. Men occupying the highest rungs of the prisoners hierarchy ladder used the brothel for a variety of reasons: due to their sex drive, desire to have contact with a woman, to feel human, and out of a desire to gain sexual experience in the face of death. Although it would be simple to assume the brothels were nothing more than buildings where sex was exchanged; archival research, personal memoirs and testimony, indicate that the brothel, for those privy to use it, served as more than a place for sexual encounters. The very small percentage of men who actually used the brothel is negligible when discussing the overall history of the concentration camps; however, for those women forced into working as prostitutes and the men who became their patrons, the polyvalent nature of the brothel allowed it to be another weapon of humiliation while simultaneously offering a possible path to survival. The brothel, for those in contact with it, played a role in their everyday camp experiences.

Chapter Five

Instrumental Sex in the Concentration Camp Universe

Primo Levi wrote, “Sooner or later in life everyone discovers that perfect happiness is unrealizable, but there are few who pause to consider the antithesis: that perfect unhappiness is equally unattainable.”¹ This single sentence written in his memoir, *Survival in Auschwitz*, is heavy with meaning. Levi contends that despite the inhumanity of the concentration camps, there were spaces and moments where humanity still existed and flourished. More simply, he reminds us that life and happiness existed even in the abyss of Auschwitz. According to Levi, the act of *living* and not merely *existing* is what distinguished a camp inmate from the *Muselmann*, or in Ravensbrück, a *Goldstück*. A *Muselmann* may have been surviving in the camp, but he was a broken shell of his former self and only able to go through the motions of living. As Lawrence Langer argued, it was possible to remain alive after the camp without necessarily surviving the camp.² This chapter explores a facet of the differentiation between *existing* and *living*: the role of intimate relationships in the camps. Inmates resisted the dehumanizing structure of the camps by going beyond the basics of survival and engaging in acts reminiscent of pre-camp life. The establishments of intimate and sexual relationships were acts of *living*, and thus, I argue, also acts of survival.

¹ Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 17.

² Langer, “Redefining Heroic Behavior,” 241.

Sex in the concentration camps was not confined to the camp brothels, nor only to other SS-sanctioned spaces. Due to the private nature of sexual acts, discussions of sexual intimacy are largely left out from prisoner testimonies making researching sex in the concentration camps a difficult task.³ Consequently, it is necessary to employ a discursive analysis to uncover the layers of experience that are not always explicitly discussed in the memoirs and testimony. When the topic of sex is broached, it is often part of a discussion about sexual violence and abuse, leaving its possible positive uses largely unexplored. In historian Dagmar Herzog's introduction to *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century*, she argues, "the place of sexuality in wars will never be understood adequately if we only attend to its negative manifestations."⁴ This dissertation, while acknowledging the difficulty in speaking generally about the role sex played for all of the camp prisoners, argues it is misleading to suggest that abuse characterized all sexual experiences both in the camps and in their brothels. Based on evidence culled from memoirs, testimony, and oral interviews, I contend sex and sexual relationships in their positive forms served as both a distraction from the everyday miseries of the camp and as a survival technique. Sex, as part of camp life, must be historicized and its implications analyzed. This dissertation asks new questions about the role sex played for a certain prisoner strata in the concentration camps. Interactions in the camp brothels, and in the camp in general, grant an opportunity to investigate how individuals made sense of their sexual encounters.

³ Consider Anna Hájková's recent work on sexual barter in the Theresienstadt ghetto. In it, she discusses how often stories of sex are marginal stories, told by "others," and considered by many, including those who took part, as not "relevant." Anna Hájková, "Strukturen weiblichen Verhaltens in Theresienstadt," 202-219.

⁴ Dagmar Herzog, "Introduction: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century," in *Brutality and Desire*, 5.

Moreover, my study of sex in the camps enables me to evaluate assumptions of sexual behavior and morality in an extreme environment.

Included among the vast historiographies of the Third Reich are histories of sexuality under Nazism ranging from the persecution of homosexuals, to the sexual mores of Nazism, to, more recently, the rapes of Jewish women.⁵ The recent historiography has paved the way for this study focusing on the Nazi use of the camp brothel and more specifically the act of government-sanctioned sex.⁶ I remove the taboo of speaking about sex amongst concentration camp prisoners and emphasize that a certain cohort of prisoners, sex was an important and influential part of life in the camps. Sex and intimacy deserve more than the cursory treatment it receives in the rich everyday histories of the concentration camp. Can we not learn about life in the camps, survival, and Nazi persecution by also studying moments of intimacy, relationships, and sexual agency? This chapter has three goals aimed at offering a historicization of how prisoners used sexual acts to both their advantage and detriment. The first is a discussion of how sexual desire was both intertwined with the daily experiences of camp prisoners, and tied to general survival. Second, I argue the definition of mutual assistance needs to be expanded to include sex as a facet of thereof. Although the brothels were sites of

⁵ On sexual violence against Jewish women, see Na'ama Shik, "Sexual Abuse of Jewish Women in Auschwitz-Birkenau," in *Brutality and Desire*, 221-246; Regina Mühlhäuser, "Between 'Racial Awareness' and Fantasies of Potency," 197-220; Regina Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen*; Monika J. Flaschka, "Race, Rape and Gender in Nazi-Occupied Territories;" On the persecution of homosexuals under the Third Reich, see Günter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust*; Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle*; Heinz Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*; Rüdiger Lautmann, Erhard Vismar, and Jack Nusan Porter, eds., *Sexual Politics in the Third Reich*; Wolfgang Röhl, "Homosexual Inmates in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp," *Journal of Homosexuality* 31, no. 4, (1996): 1-28; Geoffrey J. Giles, "Legislating Homophobia in the Third Reich;" Jellonnek, *Homosexuelle unter dem Hakenkreuz*; Geoffrey J. Giles, "'The Most Unkindest Cut of All';" Harry Oosterhuis, "Medicine, Male Bonding and Homosexuality."

⁶ Robert Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*; Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*; Wickert, "Tabu Lagerbordell"; Christa Schikorra, "Prostitution weiblicher Häftlinge als Zwangsarbeit;" Halbmayer, "Sexzwangsarbeit in NS-Konzentrationslagern;" Engelhardt, "Frauen im Konzentrationslager Dachau;" Robert Sommer, "Der Sonderbau;" Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*.

sanctioned sex, a reduction of their purpose to only include the act of sex is both simplistic and false. This simplification takes the Nazi transcript at face value and denies the men and women in the brothel any agency. Behind the brothel doors, some men and women chose to engage in relationships that went beyond the proscribed or ordered act of sexual intercourse. These relationships, as some of those elsewhere in the camp, aided survival. I explore the prostitutional, or “rational”⁷ relationships flourishing in and outside of the brothels that provided forms of invaluable support to prisoners.

The term “sex” can be defined broadly and encompass many physical acts: this dissertation uses the term “sex” to include sexual intercourse and other intimate acts such as kissing, heavy petting, and oral sex. Camp prisoners, both male and female, generally used sex in one of two ways: as a form of mutual assistance or as a commodity to be traded. Although this dissertation’s primary focus is on the camp brothels, this chapter discusses the intimate and sexual relationships formed not only in the brothels, but also elsewhere in the camps, further proving that sex and sexual barter were not always uniformly negative experiences. Although important, this chapter does not explicitly investigate the role of friendship or camaraderie, the common forms of mutual assistance that aided many women and men in survival.

It is admittedly difficult to generalize about sex in the camps largely because of the absence documentation. Sex, in some cases was not institutionalized, and thus lacks official documentation, or because even when it was, prisoners often thought their experiences were irrelevant to the larger picture. This chapter relies on written memoirs and oral testimonies to support its argument while providing insight into the complexity

⁷ Thank you to Anna Hájková who through our discussions and debates about “prostitutional” and “rational” helped me clarify the argument presented in this chapter and dissertation. “Rational relationship” is the term she uses in her work, Anna Hájková, “Strukturen weiblichen Verhaltens in Theresienstadt.”

of camp life and modes of survival. I employ a discursive analysis in my investigations of these sources to move beyond simply the language to uncover the meaning the words have in these particular historical conditions. The narrative nature of oral testimony gives the survivor's experiences more immediacy; the survivor, lacking the time to edit or rehearse, revisits their past while telling their story bringing the listener into more direct contact with their story. In the course of conducting oral histories of women survivors, Joan Ringelheim's research has shown that just as there exists a wide variety of camp experiences, sexual experiences in the camps also varied. Due to the personal nature of sexual experiences, survivors have dealt with their camp pasts in different manners ranging from bluntly discussing victimization, to minimizing or omitting the experiences from their personal history.⁸ In contrast, written memoirs, by nature, are more polished and poetic, the survivor has had more time for reflection in the process of writing and revising a written memoir. Time benefits the memoir by offering more insight into actions and decisions and therefore the language used is more laden with intentional meaning. Memoirs are, as historian Marion Kaplan has argued, an entry into unexplored histories of individuals.⁹ But perhaps the most compelling argument for using memoirs to tell a history of sex in the camps and the uses of sex in the brothel is the most obvious—this is a story of “non-elites” with no official documentation of their experiences. Third Reich documents give not only one side of the story; but also a blatantly subjective one at that.

⁸ Joan Miriam Ringelheim, “The Unethical and the Unspeakable: Women and the Holocaust” *Simon Wiesenthal Annual* (1984): 69-87; Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan, eds., *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*.

⁹ Marion A. Kaplan, “Revealing and Concealing: Using Memoirs to Write German-Jewish History,” in *Text and Context: Essays in Modern Jewish History and Historiography in Honor of Ismar Schorsch*, eds. Eli Lederhendler, Jack Wertheimer (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2005), 384. Kaplan discusses memoirs as “ego documents” because they reveal an individual's self-understanding of their fears, values, and place in history.

It is the historian's job to realize the absence of clearly detailed concerns or re-telling of sexual experiences does not invariably indicate they did not exist. It was not until recently that questions about sex were even asked of Holocaust survivors due to the discomfort in discussing topics deemed taboo or at least, disrespectful. It is therefore necessary to use a discursive analysis to probe the many layers of testimony essential in exploring the sexual experiences of women. Many survivors, including women in the brothel, have not spoken about their sexual experiences during their incarceration. Work in the brothel constituted a major part of camp life for these women, yet these experiences are omitted. Reasons for this reticence can be attributed to the painful nature of the memories, belief that discussing sexual matters is inappropriate, or that their personal experiences were too trivial and not part of the overall collective narrative of camp prisoners. This chapter, and dissertation, moves beyond the traditional tomes of Holocaust historiography that rely heavily upon the male experience to convey the experiences of all prisoners to join a minority of research including the gender specific ordeals of women. For example, many women, and certainly all Jewish women, experienced the same humiliation of being "processed" into camp. This experience entailed being marched naked in front of others, including male SS guards, and having their heads and pubic hair shaved. This constituted a collective experience and as a result is echoed in the historiography and literature on the concentration camp experience. Individual experiences, those occurrences that did not apply to the group *en masse*, such as rape or abortion, tend to be left out of the historical record. Without doubt, forced prostitution and prostitutional relationships serve as examples of these omissions. By combining the available memoir and testimonial sources, this chapter rectifies these

omissions, offers a nuanced interpretation of how sex was used by prisoners in the camp, including in the brothel, to increase their potential for survival, while adding to the existing literature providing a gendered analysis of the female experience.¹⁰

Coupling in the Camp

Sex and sexuality were integral parts of everyday life in the concentration camp. Sexual desire was not extinct among the prisoner population and was oftentimes a topic of debate and concern. Just as sexual desire was a normal part of life outside of the camps, it resurfaced inside the camp's barbed wire enclosures. In the prisoner populations of several camps including Auschwitz, Ravensbrück, and Buchenwald, speculation circulated that sexual desire was being manipulated. It was rumored that the SS, in an effort to stanch the sexual proclivities of the camp inmates, was adding saltpeter, or other chemicals, to the daily rations. Survivor Pelagia Lewinska remembered tasting saltpeter in her "first spoonful of soup," and that the "food, impregnated with saltpeter, burned our entrails and set our mouths afire."¹¹ This rumor is mentioned in numerous prisoner memoirs and its repeated presence signifies prisoners were certainly concerned the SS were chemically manipulating their bodies.¹² Admittedly, in most memoirs these worries are overshadowed by the more immediate concerns that kept prisoners alive: food, sanitation, and work details. However, the presence of these worries are indicative of a level of concern that the Nazis were chemically slowing "the

¹⁰ Sybil Milton, "Women and the Holocaust," 213-250; Joan Ringelheim, "Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research," 373-405; Elizabeth Heineman, "Sexuality and Nazism," 22-67; Judith Tydor Baumel, "Women's Agency and Survival Strategies During the Holocaust."

¹¹ Pelagia Lewinska, "Twenty Months at Auschwitz," in *Different Voices*, 89.

¹² Survivors Olga Lengyel, Livia E. Bitton Jackson, and Vera Laska discuss the camp gossip regarding salt peter, see Lengyel, "Scientific Experiments," Livia E. Bitton Jackson, "Coming of Age," and Vera Laska, "Women in the Resistance and in the Holocaust," in *Different Voices*, 80, 89, 126, 263. See also, Gisella Perl, *I was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, 32; Louis J. Micheels, *Doctor #117641*, 60; Felicja Karay, *Death Comes in Yellow*, trans. Sara Kitai (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers GmbH, 1996), 209.

most powerful of human drives.”¹³ an individual’s sex drive. I understand these mentions to be more than casual references to sexual desire, but an indication of a larger concern with fertility and virility. For many women, conversations about sexual desire were really about fertility. Virility and fertility served as indicators of not only survival, but also of femininity, masculinity, and the future. Especially for women, the waning of sexual desire was met with concerns that their fertility was also diminishing and in turn, this influenced their notions about their own femininity. The Weimar “motherhood eugenics consensus” had lasting implications in that it stressed the importance of fertility and intimacy in building strong relationships and healthy families.¹⁴ Women worried they would be “damaged goods” upon surviving the camps if they could no longer bear children.¹⁵

The Nazi leadership was not satisfied by merely imprisoning biological and social outsiders, but also wanted to be sure that those outside of the *Volksgemeinschaft* could not be a future threat to Germany. Prisoners were aware of this and understood the manipulation of sexual desire as another facet of Nazi policy. For the Nazis, natural instincts, including sexual desire, were incompatible with life in the camps. Camp prisoners were aware of the omnipresent dehumanization policies. Olga Lengyel wrote, “The supermen in charge of our destinies sought to extinguish every desire in the inmates,”¹⁶ and a male Neuengamme prisoner remarked similarly, “the general

¹³ Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, 99

¹⁴ On the emergence of this consensus as well as the continuities/discontinuities between Weimar and Nazi fertility and birth control movements, see Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*.

¹⁵ See Lengyel, “Scientific Experiments,” Livia E. Bitton Jackson, “Coming of Age,” and Vera Laska, “Women in the Resistance and in the Holocaust,” in *Different Voices*, 80, 89, 126, 263.

¹⁶ Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, 195.

elimination and repression of all active instincts also affected the sexual instincts.”¹⁷ The existing feelings of helplessness were intensified as prisoners worried that a very natural instinct, sexual desire, was being manipulated. To further heighten anxieties, women faced the cessation of their menstrual cycles. This served as a physical reminder they were no longer in charge of their bodies while sparking fears that their ability to reproduce in the future was impeded. Livia E. Bitton Jackson, a survivor of Auschwitz, Plaszow, and Dachau, openly discussed her fear:

Three weeks pass and I do not menstruate. Neither does anyone else. With amazement we realize that menstruation ceased in the camps...There is bromide in our food, we are told by old-timers. Bromide is supposed to sterilize women...Married women keep wondering about the bromide in their food again and again. Will they bear children again? What will their husbands say when they find out?¹⁸

These fears of chemical manipulation resulting in sterility forced some women to evaluate which was more important, food or fertility.¹⁹

Although women who still menstruated faced the difficulty of not being able to find adequate sanitary materials, the absence of a period was deemed more distressing. Menstruation was a marker of “womanhood” and the loss of this biological process that often also accompanied extreme weight loss exacerbated their feelings of being stripped of their femininity when their heads were shorn. Fania Fénelon, a prisoner at Auschwitz-Birkenau, was jealous of the women who still did menstruate; she wrote, “It’s upsetting to not go through those unclean periods...You begin to feel like an old woman.”²⁰ As menstrual cycles were part of “normal” life for women, any changes to their cycles

¹⁷ Archiv der Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (hereafter, AGN) Thygesen Transcription, 29, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

¹⁸ Livia E. Bitton Jackson, “Coming of Age,” in *Different Voices*, 80.

¹⁹ Bitton Jackson recounts how the fear of sterilization was enough to convince women to refuse their daily rations—for a time, but then when faced with starvation they relented. Bitton Jackson, 80.

²⁰ Fénelon, *Playing for Time*, 89.

garnered their attention. When a woman ceased to menstruate she felt dispossessed of not only a marker of her gender, but also an aspect of her humanness. The women working in the brothels also shared these concerns and in the limited amounts of available testimony there are mentions of menstruation.²¹ The SS chose young women still in relatively good health to work in the brothel and due to these choices; some of the women selected still menstruated. In the case of women working in the brothels, the continued presence of their menses sparked fears of possible pregnancy. Additionally, when a woman in the brothel was menstruating she was exempt from work; this caused anxiety about her perceived “productivity.”

Men, although presumably equally preoccupied with sex and sexual desire, did not seem to express the same anxious feelings pertaining to their ability to reproduce once out of the camp. The absence of these fears, are most likely a result of men lacking a biological marker (such as a menstrual period), serving as a signpost for reproductive health. For men, malnutrition and even the side effects of chemical tampering would not result in such a visible and worrisome sign of waning virility.

Despite the fears prisoners expressed concerning their dwindling sexual desire due to tampering chemically with their rations, there is no evidence proving that this was a practice in the camps. It is plausible that the loss of sex drive was the inevitable outcome of a prisoner’s weakened physical state. Prisoners had to quickly readjust to their new surroundings and adapt to their new reality in order to survive in the camp—first and foremost was battling starvation, disease, the elements, and the uncertainty of the camp. This readjustment would have certainly included a change in the prisoner’s

²¹ AGN Anna X., Transcription, 17, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03; Archiv der Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen (hereafter, AGS) JD 4/13 Bl. 6-9, 6.

sex drive. Once prisoners began to figure out how to “live” in the camp their sexual needs resurfaced. Sex was a sign that the prisoner was doing more than just *surviving*, but also *living*. Olga Lengyl’s memoir, *Five Chimneys*, supports this claim, she wrote, “The constant nervous tension under which we lived did little to depress our desires. On the contrary, the mental anguish seemed to provide a peculiar stimulus.”²² Lengyl suggests living in a constant state of terror led prisoners to engage in sexual relationships not only as a distraction, but also as a reminder of how life was lived prior to their incarceration. Former physician, Dr. Louis J. Micheels describes the changes that he and his partner, Nora, underwent with regards to their sex drive during the beginning of their imprisonment:

For almost ten months I had experienced little sexual desire, and Nora had not either. Others reported similar reactions, and we wondered whether this was due to some additive to our soup or simply because of the generally deficient diet.”²³

As Dr. Micheels and Nora found ways to “organize” better food rations, they found their sex drives increasing. Micheels writes, “I had begun to notice a difference myself since I was eating better...Nora said that she too had noticed a difference.”²⁴ Gerhard Valfer, a young German Jewish prisoner in Theresienstadt, remembered the ways in which access to extra food influenced his sex drive, “At first, when I was grossly hungry, perhaps I was not so interested in physical relationships, but once our food packages came from Denmark and I was better fed, my interest in sex grew.”²⁵

Felicja Karay, a woman in the Skarzysko-Kamienna labor camp echoes this trend. In the spring of 1944, the living conditions in Skarzysko-Kamienna began to improve as

²² Lengyl, *Five Chimneys*, 195.

²³ Micheels, *Doctor #117641*, 60.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁵ Jerry Valfer and Kate Rutherford, *Jerry's Story: Sometimes I didn't think, I just kept on living: A heart-rending Saga* (Coon Valley, Wis.: K. Rutherford, Avery Counseling & Press, 2000), 56.

the camp's administration received word that the transports of Jews would be ceasing. The administration realized they could no longer rely on an influx of new and healthy prisoners and their present prisoner population, as a result of the poor treatment and living conditions, could not work at the needed pace. This realization provided the impetus behind the decision to rejuvenate the present prisoner population by increasing rations and improving the living conditions. These improvements, in turn, revitalized the social lives of the prisoners and coupling became more common. Karay writes about the relationships that blossomed throughout the camp and mentions that even those individuals who found "fornication in the shadow of death" shameful, eventually engaged in intimate relationships.²⁶ The decision to engage in sexual acts can be attributed to the "foxhole" mentality the prisoners developed. When unsure of their future, many prisoners made impromptu decisions to engage in activities they may not have participated in prior to camp life.²⁷ As living conditions improved, prisoners found once again their sexual instincts resurfaced.

It is difficult, as Levi wrote, to imagine that even in the barbarous camps "perfect unhappiness" did not exist.²⁸ The historiography of the camps and the many survivor memoirs detail the everyday horrors of life in the camps. Yet, in the shadow of death, relationships did blossom, moments of intimacy took place, and sex was indeed prevalent. Fania Fénelon, a prisoner and member of the Auschwitz orchestra, wrote poignantly in her memoir about the desires both she and a friend had for a relationship while in the camp. The Third Reich irreparably interrupted the lives of prisoners, but still, the very desire for companionship continued to blossom. The following passage

²⁶ Felicja Karay, "Women in the Forced Labor Camps," in *Women in the Holocaust*, 297.

²⁷ Langer, "Redefining Heroic Behavior."

²⁸ Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 17.

from Fénelon's memoir could be taken from any young woman's diary; she writes of the envy she felt when she and a friend watched a fellow musician take double bass lessons from a male prisoner. Jenny, Fénelon's friend, remarked

‘It's a real private lesson, if I were you I'd keep an eye on her; her teacher might still have just enough strength in his trousers to deflower her.’...He was young and his hands were tender and caressing with his instrument, as they would have been with a woman...We fell silent. We contemplated the male hand...and we daydreamed.”²⁹

Ideas of romance and a yearning for intimacy still prevailed in the camps. Furthermore, the separation of women and men in the camps heightened, not extinguished, the sexual desire of prisoners. Both men and women sought the rare moments when the sexes were able to intermingle.

This chapter does not seek to diminish the driving concerns that the prisoners faced daily, nor disproportionately stress sexual desire. Thoughts of food, illness, and work battalions certainly occupied prisoners' minds, yet, worries over sex and fertility were also present. Human nature was not completely suppressed in the camps and human nature encompasses desires for companionship, intimacy, and sex. Survival necessitated a fight against the processes of dehumanization and part of the fight was resisting isolation by engaging in relationships. These relationships—intimate and otherwise—acted as another survival tactic available to the prisoner.

The diverse nature of camp experiences subsequently led to a variety of camp relationships. This chapter focuses on two types of sexual relationships in the camp: an intimate relationship based in part on affection and prostitutional relationships. The former most closely resembled the types relationships prisoners had before their imprisonment. Intimate or affectionate relationships included pre-incarceration acts such

²⁹ Fénelon, *Playing for Time*, 73.

as, flirting, courting, dating, and marriage. These sexual relationships should fall under the survival strategy of mutual assistance due to their emotional component. This is not to say that all participants had equal power in the relationship, but were based on a more lasting and emotional connection. The second type of relationship, prostitutional, or “rational,” had a pragmatic component. These relationships occurred when one or both of the participants entered into the arrangement for practical, or businesslike, reasons.³⁰

In the vast amount of concentration camp historiography there exists a vein of literature devoted to the analysis of the impression that women tended to fare better and outlive the men in the concentration camps.³¹ Both scholars and survivors alike have posited that women, due to their gendered nature as caretakers and homemakers, were able to apply these characteristics to camp life and increased their odds of survival. The majority of the research on “mutual assistance”—the formation of relationships between individuals for emotional and material support—has concentrated on Jewish women; however, this phenomenon was not particular to Jewish prisoners³² and can be applied to other prisoner groups. Mutual assistance networks took on many different guises, including relationships modeled on the “mother-daughter,” “sister-sister,” and “family” paradigms, and its rubric should be expanded to also include both hetero- and homosexual relationships. If mutual assistance is defined as a framework allowing the

³⁰ Anna Hájková, “Strukturen weiblichen Verhaltens in Theresienstadt.”

³¹ Judith Tydor Baumel, *Double Jeopardy*; Judith Tydor Baumel, “Social Interaction Among Jewish Women in Crisis During the Holocaust; Judith Tydor Baumel, “Gender and Family Studies of the Holocaust;” Jutta T. Bendremer, *Women Surviving the Holocaust*; Esther Fuchs, ed., *Women and the Holocaust*; Myrna Goldenberg, “Different Horrors, Same Hell; Myrna Goldenberg, “Lessons Learned from Gentle Heroism: Women’s Holocaust Narratives;” Brana Gurewitsch, ed., *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters*; Joy Erlichman Miller, *Love Carried Me Home*; Nechama Tec, *Resilience and Courage*.

³² Charlotte Delbo, for example, speaks about the bonding and mutual aid that was present among her group of French prisoners in Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, 73-74.

formation of relationships aiding survival, then it is clear that sexual and intimate relationships must be considered another facet of this camp phenomenon.

In order to understand sexual relationships as another guise of mutual assistance, the common misperception that sexual relationships in the camp were uniformly abusive needs to be reconsidered. Certainly sexually abusive relationships occurred; however, the intent of this chapter is to explore the positive functions of sexual relationships. Resuming sexual and intimate relationships was a means of relearning social interactions crucial in battling the isolating effects of the concentration camp. Judith Tydor Baumel's extensive research on women's survival strategies concluded "the very framework that was meant to be an instrument of prisoner atomization and human fragmentation became the testing grounds for the true meaning of the term *human community*."³³ This chapter asserts that in the face of the concentration camp as a structure of domination many prisoners did resist becoming detached by forging new sexual relationships reminiscent of those relations existing prior to incarceration. Sex and sexual relationships became a sign of "successful" adaptation and assimilation to camp life.

The camp atmosphere demanded a renegotiation of "normality" that included the rebuilding and re-formation of bonds among strangers to take the place of the broken and lost familial bonds. Among the newly formed bonds were intimate relationships. These relationships included some sort of physical contact such as sexual acts, kissing, and petting. These relationships formed both hetero- and homosexually, providing the prisoners with a new sense of companionship that acted as a bulwark against the isolating and dominating camp structure. It is important to note that there is a difference between companionship and comradeship. Companionship is based on an emotional bond

³³ Baumel, "Women's Agency and Survival Strategies During the Holocaust," 345.

whereas comradeship is grounded in feelings of solidarity. The individuals I refer to made a choice to emotionally attach themselves to another individual based on personal and individual compatibility. Feelings of solidarity, although they too existed and had an important impact on prisoner relationships, were built upon the understanding that everyone was in the same group and in the same predicament without paying attention to individual compatibility.³⁴

A language was developed in the camp to refer to the new relationships popping up; references are made to *kochany*, *kuzyn*, and sweethearts etc. all referring to a partner in a sexual relationship. Liana Millu, a prisoner in Birkenau, refers to many of her fellow prisoners as having boyfriends, or “*kochany*, a Polish term of endearment meaning “darling.”³⁵ Especially illuminating is Liana’s story about her friend Lili’s improved emotional well-being and general outlook after engaging in a camp relationship with her *kochany*. Liana asked Lili about her new boyfriend, she writes,

Lili broke away. She wasn’t in love at all, she declared—I must be crazy. But her marvelous eyes, all aglow, proved that even in *Vernichtungslager*, an extermination camp, a thought and a smile could transform number A5480 into a breathless, at times even happy, young girl.³⁶

Although we are not privy to the details about Lili’s relationship, it is apparent her engagement in an intimate relationship with another prisoner had rejuvenated her. Millu wrote that the relationship rehabilitated Lili, and these effects were apparent even in the midst of an extermination camp. Personal relationships may have endowed prisoners with a sense of purpose, simply given prisoners something to look forward to, or helped

³⁴ Todorov, *Facing the Extreme*, 84.

³⁵ Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*, 17.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

to pass the time. However they functioned, relationships certainly served as a reminder of what was possible outside the barbed wire.

The Nazis could not, even in the camps, suppress human beings' sexual desire or inclination toward love and intimacy. Judith Tydor Baumel's studies of camp prisoners demonstrate how frameworks based on human relationships flourished in spite of all Nazi intentions.³⁷ Just as other aspects of life in the concentration camps necessitated a renegotiation of reality, what constituted a relationship also had to be re-designated. The concentration camp influenced every aspect of life in the camps and naturally, relationships in the camps too were affected by the dominating structure. Women and men who never before would have dreamed of having sex in public places, or surrounded by unimaginable filth, found themselves looking forward to surreptitiously meeting in the filthy latrines to share rare moments of intimacy. Auschwitz survivor, Olga Lengyel, succinctly makes this point in her memoir, she writes:

Nature dictates that wherever men and women are together there shall also be love. Even in the shadow of the crematory the emotions could not entirely be suppressed. Love, or whatever passed for it in the degraded atmosphere of the death camp, was but a distortion of what it is for normal people...³⁸

Prisoners adapted, "love, or whatever passed for it" blossomed in the camps, and human nature was not easily extinguished. The concentration camp environment was so wholly unnatural that whatever occurred within its confines was a distortion of reality. However, the unnatural environment does not make these relationships, or emotions, any less authentic. Human relationships built upon sincere affection and companionship helped prisoners to move forward in the camps and not just exist, but *survive*.

³⁷ Baumel, "Women's Agency and Survival Strategies During the Holocaust," 345.

³⁸ Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, 195.

Louis Micheels and his fiancée, Nora, discussed the need for diversions, or “amusements” in Auschwitz after being “cooped up day after day and the threat of mutilating operations hovering over them.”³⁹ He writes about his decision not to let jealous doubts interfere with his relationship with Nora, nor to ask her about “that” aspect of her life. Although he does not explicitly state that by distractions he meant sex, it is clear that is what he refers to. His decision to refrain from becoming jealous suggests he assumes Nora may be engaging in sexual acts, and this assumption is most likely in response to his own actions. Micheels understands their actions to be acceptable and situational. Micheels regards these actions as a reaction to the camp atmosphere, an act of an “impromptu self” recognizing the need for intimacy and its potential in providing an essential component to his survival strategy.

The bonds formed among the prisoners were a means of mutually helping one another by recreating the emotional ties that had existed prior to camp life.⁴⁰ Communal bonds strengthened the will to survive while providing the impetus often needed to commit oneself daily to the fight for survival. In the morass of the camps, prisoners reformed bonds the Nazis has worked so diligently to break, and in this most unlikely of atmospheres, new relationships sustained prisoners and often lasted until and past liberation.⁴¹

³⁹ Micheels, *Doctor #117641*, 93. Micheels’ memoir is especially insightful due in part to his training as a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. He credits his training as a doctor and the deep affection he felt for his fiancée, Nora, who accompanied him to Auschwitz, as the most important explanations for his ability to survive the camps. Both he and Nora survive Auschwitz, but are so irreparably changed by their experiences that they could no longer marry once reunited.

⁴⁰ Ringelheim, “The Unethical and the Unspeakable: Women and the Holocaust,” 69-87.

⁴¹ Baumel, “Women’s Agency and Survival Strategies During the Holocaust,” 345, 343.

Pragmatic Relationships

Relationships blossomed in the camps not always due to feelings of affections, but sometimes out of rational need. A prospering black market existed in the camps. The black market allowed prisoners to procure extra, or needed, goods by trading them with a fellow prisoner to their advantage. Although bartering one object for another was the most common method of payment, some prisoners used sex as currency in exchange for material goods or services. I refer to these transactions based upon the exchange of commodities for sex as prostitutional relationships. Anna Hájková, in her work on sexual barter in Theresienstadt, refers to this type of “rational.”⁴² The argument we both make is that participants took a pragmatic approach in entering into relationships where sex was bartered in exchange for needs such as food, tangible goods, or protection. Most often this type of relationship was a result of the woman offering sex for goods or protection are most widely known; however, situations also existed where men also exchanged sex for the same reasons. Often these relationships were homosexual, but the premise was the same. In these situations, women were empowered by their ability to give sexual pleasure in exchange for much needed material support.⁴³ These participants were not “prostitutes” and most certainly the normative paradigm of prostitution cannot be applied to these situations in the camps. Rather, these individuals were also exercising their “impromptu” selves and taking action in response to their situation and needs. According to Lawrence Langer’s definition of the “impromptu self,” the prisoners experienced a

⁴² Anna Hájková, “Strukturen weiblichen Verhaltens in Theresienstadt.”

⁴³ Melissa Raphael, *The Female Face of God In Auschwitz: a Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 97.

temporary detachment from the familiar value systems that allowed them to act in a manner that aided survival.⁴⁴

Prostitutional relationships existed throughout the camp universe because the camp society was predicated upon a Nazi imposed hierarchy. That is to say, wherever there was inequality among prisoners, prostitutional relationships existed. Female prisoners generally were, in comparison to the men, the less powerful of the two groups. Women lacked the same opportunities to “organize” exchangeable assets necessary for bartering on the camp’s black market.⁴⁵ The prisoner classification system and its resulting hierarchy, led some women to look for other prisoners, both male and female, to help them. The camp held both the “haves” and the “have-nots,” with the bargaining power of those “have-nots” being considerably small. The ability to give sexual pleasure was a valuable commodity and some women, exercising the agency they possessed, offered sex in exchange for other goods.

Felicja Karay’s account of her imprisonment in the Skarzysko-Kamienna labor camp describes the inequity among her fellow prisoners and how intimate relationships were used as currency. In her memoir, *Death Comes in Yellow*, she recounts how the “experienced” or veteran women in the camp recommended the practice of finding a “kuzyn” to the new prisoners. The term *Kuzyn* translates to “cousin” but was the term adopted in this camp to refer to boyfriends. Karay writes, “Here in Werk C the poor were most dependent on the rich, and this fact was even apparent in their sex life. More and more private corners were closed off in the women’s barracks and love-life flowered.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Langer, “Redefining Heroic Behavior.”

⁴⁵ Naturally, this applied to camps that held both women and men, and not in the all-female Ravensbrück camp. Baumel, “Women’s Agency and Survival Strategies During the Holocaust,” 329-47.

⁴⁶ Karay, *Death Comes in Yellow*, 209.

Karay includes in her memoir the lyrics of a camp folk song about the prostitutional relationships forming throughout the camp.

For soup, for soup
For a piece of bread
Girls will spread their...
Just between you and me,
They'll do it even
When there's no need.⁴⁷

Karay's memoir suggests finding a "cousin" was critical to survival. Even women who began their imprisonment unable to fathom having affairs with such "undesireable" men, found their resistance diminished as their bodies were weakened by hunger and hard labor.⁴⁸ The existence of camp folk songs about the "cousin" relationships implies this practice was widespread. Consider the following folk song that clearly indicated men had the (relative) power in the camps:

Come and I'll whisper a secret in your ear:
Pickings are pretty slim with the "cousins" here!
They have their cake and they eat it too,
"Kuznyka" [female cousin] makes one and their wifemakes two!⁴⁹

The prisoners in the Skarzysko-Kamienna camp, like in other camps, realized that sex was a worthy commodity that could be traded for material goods. Due to the power structure, there was a disparity in relative wealth and the men were able to "purchase" sex and could even afford one or more "cousins." In Theresienstadt a similar story highlights the disparity in wealth between Gerhard Valfer and his girlfriend Helen. Valfer offers the following:

My first girlfriend was Helen, who was from Holland. She weighed about 80 to 90 pounds. She would do anything for food. When I had extra food, I would bring it to her. She was starving and I suppose it could be said that I took advantage of

⁴⁷ Karay, "Women in the Forced Labor Camps," 296.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 210.

her, as she was skin and bones and hungry. I was stronger, and not so hungry, so I could obtain extra food.⁵⁰

In the vast majority of cases where prostitutional or “rational” relationships are found, it is the man who is in the position of consumer and deciding to “buy” sex from the woman. Although some may argue this is similar to the traditional paradigm of prostitution, it is incorrect to refer to these inmates as “prostitutes” because similarly to the women in the brothel, they lived in a world where their range of personal agency was severely limited. No one was in a camp by choice, thus their actions were reactions to their environment. The existence of the folk songs and the content of their lyrics indicate that similar to the Ravensbrück women, these women also suffered from a degree of ridicule for their actions. The women in both situations had the same goal—survival—and this prompted their decision to exchange of sex for certain amenities or usable goods.

This perceptible shift in values, or an implementation of a survival strategy, often occurred once the prisoners had adjusted to camp life and accepted the primacy of the present. Gisella Perl’s memoir provides one compelling example for this phenomenon. Prior to her deportation, Perl was a very prominent physician in Budapest, Hungary and correspondingly enjoyed a very high standard of living. She, as a Jew, was deported to Auschwitz in 1944, and was soon put to work as a physician in the Revier. Upon entering Auschwitz, Perl received a pair of men’s shoes that were too large for her, a men’s size 10. She quickly realized that the shoes she had been given were hindering her ability to work and march—both were matters of life and death. She was aware that her inability to keep up with her fellow prisoners would hasten her death. As she became increasingly incapacitated by the sores on her feet, she decided she had to solve the

⁵⁰ Valfer, *Jerry's Story*, 56.

problem. Perl heard that there was a man working around the latrines who had string to trade for bread. Believing she could use the string could lace the shoes, Perl saved her bread ration and sought out the man with the string. She writes,

I stopped beside him, held out my bread and asked him, begged him to give me a piece of string in exchange for it. He looked me over from head to foot, carefully, then grabbed me by the shoulder and hissed in my ear: "I don't want your bread... You can keep your bread... I will give you a piece of string but first I want you... you..."⁵¹

Perl was caught off guard by the man's request. She knew she needed the string as her inadequate shoes were threatening her life. She repeated her request to trade her bread ration for the string and recounts what followed, "[the man replied] 'Hurry up... hurry up...' as his hand, filthy with the human excrement he was working in, reached out for my womanhood, rudely, insistently."⁵² Perl fled the scene without the string. It was at this moment, according to Perl, she suffered the harsh realization that her values had changed as she pondered what she had almost been willing to exchange for a piece of string.⁵³

Perl's experience is not unique, nor even remarkable. The latrines in the camps were known as "love nests" where prisoners would meet clandestinely to have sex and trade goods.⁵⁴ The black market thrived in the latrines and in this location prisoners trade their wares in exchange for sex. About the latrine black market Perl writes, "openly, shamelessly, the dirty, diseased bodies clung together for a minute or two in the fetid atmosphere of the latrine—and the piece of bread, the comb, the little knife wandered

⁵¹ Gisella Perl, "A Doctor in Auschwitz," in *Different Voices*, 109.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 112.

from the pocket of the man into the greedy hands of the woman.”⁵⁵ Perl judges her fellow inmates, as she saw the renegotiation of their values as price she would not have paid. However, Perl, as a camp physician, was in an elevated camp position and privy to slightly better treatment and other “perks” that many of her fellow prisoners could not access. Victims of Nazi persecution made decisions as to which course they would take to keep themselves alive and often this course demanded an acceptance of an unfamiliar value system.

The SS knew what went on in the latrines and generally allowed the behavior. According to Perl, the SS guards amused themselves by observing men and women coupling in the fetid atmosphere. Watching prisoners engaging in sexual acts seemed to hold a particular fascination for some SS guards. Watching others copulate, whether in the latrines or through the peepholes in the brothel doors, most likely reinforced their feelings of power and superiority. It was a self-fulfilling cycle. The camp conditions forced prisoners to live like animals and when the guards witnessed the prisoners acting in an animalistic fashion, whether it was publicly having sex in the latrines or fighting over bread, it served to reinforce their belief that they were policing subhumans.⁵⁶

Male prisoners with access to extra rations or other important items recognized their relative positions of power. In Aushwitz, men in possession of extra food or other useful items could flaunt their wealth and have their “pick” of the women looking to barter. Liana Millu recalls seeing the “privileged” men winking to women and then disappearing with the one they chose. Later, the women would later emerge “all red and

⁵⁵ Perl, *I was a Doctor*, 113.

⁵⁶ Rudolf Hoess discusses how the Russian prisoners turned into animals and began to cannibalize one another, further proving, to him, that the classification of the Russians as *Untermenschen* was correct. He writes, “They were no longer human beings. They had become animals who sought only food.” Hoess, *Commandant of Auschwitz*, 123-124.

disheveled.”⁵⁷ Liana writes about two Polish women coming away from these encounters with bowls of potatoes cooked with onions and margarine. She remembers that the bowls were so full, the women had enough to eat for themselves and still had enough to exchange for different goods.⁵⁸ Although the men and women were separated within the camps, men were allowed, while on work detail, to enter the women’s camp. This is how men came to be in the latrines, or other areas where they could swap goods for food.

Sex with a prisoner-functionary, Kapo, or even possibly an SS guard, in exchange for life-saving goods was part of a survival strategy for many prisoners. I offer first, an example of relationships between men and Kapos in the Flossenbürg camp. When arrested in 1939 by the *Gestapo* for being gay, Heinz Heger was a young university student in Vienna. He was imprisoned first in Sachsenhausen and later in Flossenbürg as a homosexual. Heger’s memoir provides insight into the role sex and sexual experiences played in the camp. He candidly discusses the prevalence of prostitutional relationships and the benefits they often yielded. During the winter of 1940-1941, a group of young Polish boys, referred to as “dolly boys,” arrived in Flossenbürg. Within a few days after their arrival, many of these young men aged 16 to 20, were chosen by the Block Seniors and Kapos to be their “cleaners.” This term was the nickname, or codeword, used to describe a lover or bedmate.⁵⁹ These “dolly-boys,” according to Heger, had a more comfortable life in the camp due to their relationships. They received extra rations and “gladly accepted any proposals that meant both easier work and a full stomach.”⁶⁰ Heger maintains that in addition to the tangible benefits they received, these boys were

⁵⁷ Millu, *Five Chimneys*, 180.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁵⁹ Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, 59.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

“cheeky” and no other prisoners would do anything about their arrogance because they feared reprisal from their masters.⁶¹ These young boys were protected by their sexual relationships with men in privileged positions.

Heger himself had an affair with a Block Senior that had lasted several months. Like the relationships between the “dolly boys” and men in power, his affair also provided him with benefits, including a change in his labor assignment. Heger had been working in the quarry, a torturous job made worse by the SS men forcing the prisoners to play sadistic and dangerous games. His relationship with the Block Senior resulted in his reassignment as a clerk in the building material stores, “an easy and comfortable job that no longer put my life in daily jeopardy,” according to Heger.⁶² Heger writes the reason he was given such a job was due not only to his position as the Block Senior’s lover, but also because the discretion he had showed with their relationship. When this relationship ended, Heger set into motion another plan for survival that centered on entering into another “relationship of convenience:”

In order to keep my good position as a clerk, and to receive additional food that was necessary to stay alive...So there was no other choice to place myself once again under the protection of a block senior or Capo, who would fend off other propositions, provide me with additional rations, and also make sure that I kept my desk job. In return I had to be lover and bed partner at any time when my protector had the desire. Everything has its price.⁶³

Heger had offers from several Kapos and Block seniors, writing,

My new relationship began not without complication. Three Capos, in fact, wanted me as a lover, and spent a lot of time arguing about the matter. Naturally, I had no choice whatsoever, being quite powerless. I was just told: “One of us will be your new friend,” and waited anxiously to see who I would fall to as “booty.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, 60.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Heger discusses these relationships of “convenience” as springing from notions of self-preservation. He credits a large part of his survival to these relationships and the life-saving rations, protection, and jobs they secured for him. Heger, reflecting about his experiences, views his original protector as an “honorable man” and one with whom he formed an emotional and lasting bond.⁶⁵ Heger’s story is significant for several reasons. First, he conveys the pragmatism with which he entered into affairs with men in power. He is well aware of the benefits and the effects these benefits had on his chances of survival. Secondly, Heger’s relationships began as “rational” or pragmatic but then evolved into affairs involving emotions and trust. His account stands as an example of sexual experiences that may, if cursorily examined, appear only abusive or prostitutional. In reality, Heger himself recognized the power he had to influence his own path while in the camp and did so. Every day he was alive was possibly another day closer to his liberation.

The story of Maja, a Slavic Kapo in Auschwitz and her relationship with a German SS guard, further complicates our understanding of how sex was used in the camp by both prisoners and the SS guards in power. Maja’s story tells of not only the practical benefits gained from entering into a “prostitutional” relationship, but also of some of the seemingly incomprehensible outcomes of such relationships. In February 1949, Lucille Eichengreen, a Jewish survivor of Auschwitz, happened to run into a former Auschwitz Kapo, Maja, while shopping on Fifth Avenue in New York City.⁶⁶ Eichengreen remembered Maja as a cruel woman who had “shouted orders, screamed

⁶⁵ Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, 61.

⁶⁶ Eichengreen does not explicitly say that Maja is Jewish; however, the story and her anger pointed at Maja suggests that she was in fact Jewish.

threats, and beaten our bony backs,” and confronted her in the store. Eichengreen tells Maja she remembered how she (Maja) had survived the war, saying to her, “I remember you were well fed. And there was an SS man who came to visit you at night...He must have been the blond, tall one who returned during the day to beat us and laugh with sadistic pleasure at our suffering.”⁶⁷ Eichengreen writes that although she had hated Maja even more than the SS, she “could not condemn her for her will to live.” Eichengreen asked herself, “what would I have done in her place?”⁶⁸ During their meeting, Eichengreen learned that Maja had married the SS man and is incredulous at the news. Maja begs Eichengreen for an opportunity to explain, telling her,

Your memory is accurate...a nameless, faceless SS man came every night. I feared for my life and thought it would ensure my survival in Auschwitz. I loathed him then; I knew he was a criminal and a killer. But as the months went by, I got used to him. He kept me out of the gas chamber. He gave me food. I didn't think of a future then. I lived one day at a time. Whatever I did was my way of surviving.⁶⁹

Maja had not only survived by engaging in this relationship, but through its course she grew fond of the man, and he of her. They married after he found her in a Displaced Persons' camp after the war. One of the reasons Maja married him was that she knew his past, as he knew hers. It was their common understanding that they had both acted in ways they considered amoral, that served to bind them to one another. Maja's story is both remarkable and problematic,⁷⁰ but what is perhaps more telling is Eichengreen's

⁶⁷ Lucille Eichengreen, *From Ashes to Life: My Memories of the Holocaust* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1994), 189.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Eichengreen, *From Ashes*, 190.

⁷⁰ Maja's story bears resemblance to some of the stories told in the Italian *il sadiconazista* films of the 1970s including, *The Night Porter* (*Il portiere di notte*), DVD, directed by Liliana Cavani (1974; Criterion, 2000); *Deported Women of the SS: Special Section* (*Le deportate della sezione speciale SS*), DVD, directed by Rino Di Silvestro (1976; BCI/Eclipse, 2006); *Nazi Love Camp 27* (*La svastica nel ventre*), DVD, directed by Sergio Garrone (1976; Exploitation Digital, 2005)

reaction when she learns the entire story. Eichengreen does not denounce Maja, she writes, “I understood...I forgave her [Maja}, she had done nothing wrong.”⁷¹

Eichengreen grasps, in retrospect, that Maja, like herself, was doing all she could to survive and nothing else needed explanation.

Heger’s decision, like the decisions of Maja and other women, did spring from an innate desire to survive. Lawrence Langer, to exemplify his notion of the “impromptu self,” tells the story of a woman, Hanna F., who has ill-fitting wooden clogs and needs proper shoes. She told Langer, “without shoes, you couldn’t go to work. You were dead.”⁷² Hanna F. saw an opportunity to remedy her predicament when she spotted a woman remove her shoes while delousing her clothes. Hanna F. promptly took the woman’s shoes and left her clogs in their place.⁷³ Langer writes that although Hanna F. is clearly pained by her story, she doesn’t apologize and he asserts that her actions were the actions of an “impromptu self” trying to stay alive.⁷⁴ Are the actions of Hanna F. any different than the decisions made by Heger, or Gerhard Valfer’s girlfriend, Helen to engage in a sexual relationship based on a pragmatic need for life-saving help? Another example of a reconfiguration of one’s reality is the story of a former Polish physics professor deported to Auschwitz and upon arriving in the camp, learns she is the sole survivor from her family. Later, a female prisoner-functionary approached her asking her to have a sexual affair with her and in return, she will provide the professor with food and other benefits. The professor answered that she was not a lesbian and not interested in

⁷¹ Ibid., 191.

⁷² Langer, “Redefining Heroic Behavior,” 232.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

this type of relationship; however, a few weeks later, the professor, closer to starvation and fully aware she was alone in the camp, relented and began the relationship.⁷⁵ The professor's will to survive overrode her initial reaction. In this case, pragmatic needs as well as a yearning for a tie to another human being, motivated the professor.

Prostitutional relationships are mentioned in many survivor memoirs, yet they have generally remained marginal, if mentioned at all, in the historiography of the camps. These situational relationships are another example of Primo Levi's Gray Zone. Camp prisoners were confronted with the task of attempting to survive in an atmosphere created to thwart survival through the omnipresent processes of dehumanization and isolation. The camp atmosphere created a hierarchy where some prisoners, either by their classification or sheer luck, had access to more power to increase their odds of survival. Many prisoners with nothing to trade, except what the human body could do or produce, entered into prostitutional relationships. Those prisoners entering into these "rational," "convenient" or "prostitutional" relationships did so for pragmatic reasons: to ultimately increase their chance of survival.

Simply Business? Relationships in the Brothel

Himmler decided to open prisoners' brothels in the camps so labor incentives, in the form of sex, could be granted in a highly regulated space under the control of the SS. Yet, in the brothel, as in the camps, prisoners found and created both a physical and symbolic space to resist the imposed structures of domination. Despite the peepholes cut into the bedroom doors, some men and women used their 15 to 20 minutes of time to not only have sex, but also to create emotional bonds. The voyeuristic nature of the brothel

⁷⁵ Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, 197.

did not preclude emotional bonding between women and their “clients.” Contrary to Himmler’s intentions, the brothel provided prisoners with a physical space, if they chose, to connect with a fellow human. I argue these brief periods of time allowed prisoners to create their own “hidden transcript.”⁷⁶ The SS had a policy of openly and brutally punishing prisoners blatantly protesting or defying the rules of the camp and this reality prompted prisoners to find more covert means of protest.⁷⁷ The Nazis attempted to create a world with perfect surveillance; however, even in the camp, this was not possible. Resistance did occur in both the physical and symbolic spaces where prisoners were able to reassert their agency. As the Nazis sought to doubly exterminate those without value to the Nazi racial state, the very act of *living* can be understood as an act of resistance.⁷⁸ But certainly, the formation of emotional relationships in the brothel was a counterattack against the Nazi processes of ensuring the social death of camp inmates. By using the brothel to their own benefit, these prisoners committed acts of resistance.

Discussing the presence of emotions and assigning them significance in a historical context is a problematic endeavor. Throughout this chapter, and dissertation, I have shied away from employing psychoanalysis as an interpretive framework. However, my argument that emotional relationships, in addition to physical relationships, developed among the brothel workers and patrons is based upon a discursive analysis of the available sources where prisoners discuss the brothel and their experiences. An

⁷⁶ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

⁷⁷ Protest, or resistance, came in many different forms and does not always refer to armed resistance. Spiritual, or cultural, resistance were other forms of unarmed resistance. See Yehuda Bauer, “Forms of Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust,” in *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications*, ed. John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 136-155; Philip Friedman, “Jewish Resistance to Nazism: Its Various Forms and Aspects,” in *Anthology of Holocaust Literature*, ed. Jacob Glatstein, Israel Knox, and Samuel Margoshes (New York: Atheneum, 1968) 275-90; Werner Rings, *Life With the Enemy: Collaboration and Resistance in Hitler’s Europe* (New York: Doubleday, 1982).

⁷⁸ See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, on the social death of victim of Nazi persecution.

analysis of this nature does tread lightly into the area of psychoanalysis; however, my argument is grounded in an analysis of the written and spoken work of camp prisoners. As argued, the women working in the brothel used the opportunities available to them as part of a greater survival strategy in which they manipulated the established system to their benefit. Behind the brothel door, women were allotted 15-20 minutes in which to have sexual intercourse in the missionary position. Other than this “rule,” there was nothing precluding attachments from forming between the men and women. In spite of the rules, women and men stated conversations occurred, and in some cases, relationships blossomed.

Although the SS attempted to thwart burgeoning relationships by assigning men to a certain woman, it is clear some semblance of courting rituals endured. In June 1944, the Dachau brothel was searched and the SS found the women possessing alcohol, meat, clothing, and shoes. The women in the brothel were only allowed out of their building for supervised walks and thus could not have “organized” the items on their own. Male clients had given these contraband items to the women as tokens of affection or appreciation.⁷⁹ In Sachsenhausen a prisoner known as “*Der Buckel*” gave his girlfriend, brothel “prostitute” Brunhilde S., a watch as a gift. *Der Buckel* was a *Berufsverbrecher* (career criminal), working with the Crematorium battalion. His status as a German prisoner combined with his assigned labor duties enabled him to receive special privileges including visits to the brothel. It is likely he was able to “organize” the watch due to his job with the Crematorium battalion; however, taking a watch put him in danger

⁷⁹ Engelhardt, “Frauen im Konzentrationslager Dachau,” 225. Incidentally, in response to finding contraband items in the Dachau brothel, an order was given stressing only men with written permission were allowed inside the brothel and for only the amount of time allotted. Archiv der Gedenkstätte Dachau (hereafter, AGD) 970. Schutzhaftbefehl Nr. 10/44.

with the SS. *Der Buckel* steals the watch, but not to trade on the black market, but rather to give to Brunhilde as a token of his affection. *Der Buckel*'s generous gift bespeaks his feelings for Brunhilde and how highly he prioritized their relationship.⁸⁰ In turn, Brunhilde gladly accepted the watch and did not barter it for goods. Due to the nature and purpose of the brothel, it is reasonable to assume *Der Buckel* visited the brothel initially for the pleasure of having sex with a woman, but upon meeting and connecting with Brunhilde, he returned to the brothel for reasons that were no longer solely physical.

Male prisoners paid for their brothel visits with the vouchers (*Bordellschein*) they received from the SS after earning their privileges. Since the brothel visits were essentially pre-paid, it was unnecessary to bring additional payment to the women. The women were required to perform their duty based on the voucher program and could not turn away customers. However, prisoner accounts frequently do mention gift giving.⁸¹ The exchange of gift implies not only proof of attachment, but is also a form of mutual assistance. The act of gift giving implies there were relationships at stake; the act of sex was not the only reason men visited the brothel. Walter Christensen, a political prisoner in the Neuengamme camp, was among a group of privileged political prisoners who often visited the brothel. His recollections include the story of two close friends fighting over a woman in the brothel. According to Christensen, one prisoner received a special package for Christmas that included, among its contents, a bottle of perfume. Since he saw no use for the perfume, he generously gave it to his friend to use to his advantage in the camp's

⁸⁰ AGS JD 4/13 Bl. 6-9.

⁸¹ Chaim Feig, interview by Carol Stulberg, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, October 12, 199, Interview Code 34315, Tape 6, Segment 164; Henry Mikols, interview by Jill Greenberg, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Dummer, NH, USA, August 22, 2001, Interview Code 51743, Tape 3, Segment 72.

black market.⁸² What he did not realize was that both he and his friend had formed attachments to the same woman working in the brothel. When the prisoner who had originally received the perfume saw the bottle among his girlfriend's belongings, he became irate. He confronted his friend and from that day forward they were no longer friends, but enemies. Christensen ends this anecdote saying: "again we had this problem among the political prisoners and we had to work it out."⁸³ Christensen not only suggests this infighting was not a singular experience, but also infers it was normal for the men to have relationships with women from the brothel. Also interesting is that in his testimony, Christensen does not refer to the women as a prostitute but as the "girlfriend" of his fellow inmates. His story also refrains from mentioning the pitfalls that would normally be apparent in a relationship between a prostitute and her client. Perhaps this is because he himself did not see the relationship as between his fellow prisoner and a prostitute, but rather as simply a normal male-female relationship.

Heinz Heger's recollections of the brothel in Flossenbürg further proves men were bringing gifts to their "girlfriends" in the brothel. Heger writes that Flossenbürg *Prominenz* regularly patronized the brothel and brought with them gifts of food and clothing. Heger explains that the men would visit the same girls repeatedly and subsequently began to talk about the girls in "terms of a regular relationship."⁸⁴ Heger remarks that discussing the women in this manner was "a bit optimistic, for very often ten or fifteen prisoners would view the same girl as their future bride."⁸⁵ Heger concludes by commenting in amazement the fights over the women did not result in murder.

⁸² AGN NG 2.8/1273, 95.

⁸³ AGN NG 2.8/1273, 95.

⁸⁴ Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, 100.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Brothel receipts further corroborate my claim that a reduction of the brothels' functions to just sex is too simplistic. An analysis of the aggregate of the receipts shows some women entertained roughly the same number of customers on a daily or weekly basis.⁸⁶ Although the brothel receipts and records do not list the names of the male customers, I believe this is due to women having repeat customers.⁸⁷ This information, coupled with the ability of the men to request certain women, points to the conclusion that repeat customers may have formed attachments to the women. In the course of multiple visits, relationships—in many different guises—did form. Anny K., a woman in the Mauthausen brothel, spoke of a man with whom she saw several times a week in the brothel. She referred to the man as a regular customer, saying, "With one man I had something like a friendship—a relationship built on mutual trust."⁸⁸ Anny's relationship began with the knowledge that she and her customer came from the same hometown. She testified, "He also came from Danzig, but I didn't know him before this time."⁸⁹ Seeing the same men time and time again did lead to relationships and these relationships should be considered in the same vein as "sister relationship" and other bonds that fall under the rubric of mutual assistance. In all cases the prisoners were bonding together in an effort to resist the camps. In one remarkable case, a woman in the Neuengamme

⁸⁶ International Tracing Service of the Red Cross Bad Arolsen (hereafter, ITS) KL Dachau Ordner Nr. 284, GCC 3/231, "Kassenanweisungen;" Archiv der Mahn-und Gedenkstätte Buchenwald (hereafter, AMGB) NS 4 Bu/41.

⁸⁷ The Mauthausen Brothel Book also indicates that 4 men visited the brothel on a weekly basis, and sometimes more frequently. It is entirely possible, and even likely, that the men frequented the same female. Mauthausen Bordellbuch Block 3 June 11-December 31, 1942 Mauthausen K 2/1.

⁸⁸ "Armes Kind, du bist so hübsch," 41.

⁸⁹ "Armes Kind, du bist so hübsch," 41.

brothel met her future husband while he was her customer in the brothel. After liberation the two continued their relationship and ultimately married and had a family.⁹⁰

A bit less straightforward is the example of Maria B.'s marriage to a fellow Dachau prisoner. Maria B. was 29 years old when she was sent to the Dachau brothel to work, she remained in the brothel until it was closed and then she was re-assigned to camera works (*Kamerawerke*), a Dachau sub-camp in nearby Munich.⁹¹ Maria survived the camp and was released by the Americans on July 12, 1945.⁹² Of particular interest is the correspondence in Maria's file referring to confusion over her marital status. Maria B. was officially listed as "divorced," but in her prisoner file there is a mention of a marriage to a fellow camp prisoner in Dachau. Although it is impossible to state outright that Maria did have a "camp marriage," it is possible her camp "husband" was someone she met in the brothel.⁹³ The women working in the Dachau brothel were closely supervised and not allowed into the camp without an SS escort. As a result, it would have been very difficult for Maria to meet anyone outside of the brothel patrons. Perhaps Maria's "marriage" in the camp was a result of a relationship that formed in the brothel between her and a regular client.

The existence of peepholes and SS guards was supposed to guarantee sex was supervised while in the brothel. Yet, both women working in the brothel and some of their male patrons report sex did not always transpire. Whether or not sex took place, depended on the motivations of the two individuals as well as the diligence with which the SS patrolled the brothel bedrooms. Several former female prostitutes recounted they

⁹⁰ This information was given during a discussion on July 7th, 2005. I am not able to give names or any further information. The couple had not told their story to their families and must be kept anonymous.

⁹¹ ITS GCC3/IIC/1.

⁹² ITS Häftlingskarten Dachau, M.B.

⁹³ ITS Häftlingskarten Dachau, M.B. Correspondence.

did not always have sex with their clients. Ella, a worker in the Flossenbürg brothel, “volunteered” for the brothel as a means of avoiding conscription into the *Todeskommando*, or punishment battalion. When asked in an interview about her work in the brothel, she replied, “The prisoners only wanted to be held!”⁹⁴ Peter Heigl, the interviewer, remarks her response may have been a protective lie that Ella told herself in order to rationalize her choice. Heigl further points out that the women in the brothel would not have been allowed to only embrace their clients. Certainly Heigl is correct in maintaining the overall the purpose of the brothel was to reward the male prisoners with sex; however, it is also possible, and should be taken into account, that some male prisoners may have been visiting the brothel not for sex, but for human contact and companionship. Many women working in the brothel commented the peepholes were rarely patrolled, and if this was indeed the case, it is possible that the men and women could have intimate moments that did not involve intercourse.⁹⁵ The “official” transcripts would deny any of this possible, but, like Jan Gross has argued, perhaps more is to be learned if we assume that prisoner testimonies are correct and we take them at face value.⁹⁶

The fundamental purpose of a brothel is to offer sex. Certainly, the ten prisoner brothels in the concentration camp system offered sex to the eligible male prisoners. Be that as it may, this was not all they offered. In the camp universe, individuals were separated from their families, friends, and former lives. Men and women lived separately and contact was rare. The Nazi regime took every effort to strip camp prisoners of their

⁹⁴ Heigl, “Zwangsprostitution im KZ-Lagerbordell Flossenbürg.”

⁹⁵ AGN Anna X., Transcription, 18, “Vorschlag zur Reduktion/CW der Autosierung durch Anna X im Hinblick auf die Realisierung einer Hörstation in der Hauptausstellung am 18.9.03.

⁹⁶ Gross, *Neighbors*, 92.

individuality and their dignity. The camps were bastions of disease, starvation, and torture. Yet still, in the midst of this environment, some prisoners came together in the brothel seeking not simply sexual release, but human contact. To be sure, some men used the brothel to satiate their sexual urges, and without question some women were continuously tortured and humiliated by their role as a brothel prostitute. However, not all sexual experiences in the brothel can be characterized by abuse, nor random and anonymous sex. Just as “camp relationships” occurred in the camps, emotional bonds grew between some prisoners in the camp brothels.

Conclusion

Prisoners in the concentration camps had little that they could control; yet, the decision to try to remain alive in the face of Nazi persecution, compelled prisoners to rearrange their priorities and value systems. This renegotiation was a step in the direction of survival. Bravery is a term that many would see as incompatible with the actions of some survivors; however, just as many scholars have written about the insufficiency of language in conveying life in the concentration camp universe, the actions of these women in the brothel as well as the camp prisoners should be considered in this vein.

This chapter has placed sex among prisoners in the historical context of the camp by analyzing the various ways it was used. Sex and sexual relationships often provided the human companionship and closeness that prisoners, separated from families, craved. This intimacy and the emotional support it provided is another dimension of mutual assistance. Furthermore, prisoners took paths as unique as their experiences to help increase their odds of surviving the camps and for some; this included entering into prostitutional relationships. Lastly, this chapter provides further proof that the brothels

operated in ways wholly unintended by the SS. Human spirit, in some cases, challenged horrors of forced prostitution. Sex was a survival tactic both in the camps and in the brothels and should no longer be considered a taboo aspect of everyday life in the concentration camps.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton, "Surviving," in *Genocide: Critical Issues of the Holocaust*, Alex Grobman, Daniel Landes, and Sybil Milton, eds. (Chappaqua, N.Y.: Rossel Books, 1983), 233-235.

Conclusion

SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler's decision to open prisoners' brothels in the Mauthausen and Gusen concentration camps in the spring of 1941 clearly indicated the extent to which the Nazis were committed to harnessing sexuality for the benefit of the state. However, despite these intentions, the brothel morphed into an institution that the regime did not fully control. The brothel functioned in multiple ways and in some cases its functions contradicted both Nazi ideology and its goals. Nazi sexual policy was not straightforward, nor coherent, allowing the use of sexuality to be interpreted both broadly and in a contradictory fashion. What did remain a consistent facet of policy, however, was the use of sex for the needs of the Reich.

When called upon, Germans, even those in the concentration camps, had a sexual duty to perform for the state. The ten prisoner brothels are an outgrowth of ideas about how that duty could be performed shifted. These brothels were to strictly adhere to the Reich's racial laws allowing only privileged "ethnic" German men with outstanding work records to have sex with German women. Neither of these conditions were uniformly applied to the brothels. Non-German women worked within the brothels and non-german men were among their patrons. Nor did Himmler's claim to staff the brothels with former prostitutes come into fruition. The majority of the women working in the ten prisoner brothels were not former sex workers.

The polyvalent functionality of the brothel meant that often times the manner in which it functioned depended upon the agenda of the participant. The goals of the

various parties were often at odds with one another and in the brothel these oppositional courses unfolded. It is for this reason that a reconceptualization of “choice” and agency is central to understanding how the women working in the brothel “volunteered.” Primo Levi wrote, “the deprivations to which they were subjected to led them to a condition of pure survival, a daily struggle against hunger, cold, fatigue, and blows in which the room for choices (especially moral choices) was reduced to zero.”¹ This dissertation problematizes the term “volunteer” which was used by the Nazis and adopted contemporarily and historically. The use of this term implied the women chose their fate and thus were not victims in the same sense as their fellow camp inmates. This notion of complicity resulted in the stigmatization of these women at the time of their “decision” as well as in memoir literature of the camps. “Volunteers” simply did not exist in the concentration camp system—it was a community of forced inhabitants. Although these women did not truly have a “choice,” some were able to exert their limited agency and use the brothel as part of a larger survival strategy.

Himmler used sex as both a reward and as a tool or weapon of power. In either guise, sex was a tool employed for the state for its own benefit. Sex could increase the economic power of the state, it could “teach” homosexuals to be members of the *Volk*, and it could humiliate and exploit the women working in the brothels under the watchful eye of the SS. However, the brothels did not function solely for the benefit of the SS and Nazi leadership. Despite their limited range of “choice,” prisoners used and manipulated sex and sexuality to their advantage. In some instances female prisoners forced into prostitution and the men who earned the privilege of brothel visits used sex and the moments of intimacy the brothel afforded as part of a survival strategy. The brothel, a

¹ Levi, *Drowned and the Saved*, 50.

Nazi institution, became a space of resistance where prisoners worked to assert their goals—namely survival—in the face of the dehumanizing processes of the camp.

Reading all sexual experiences in the brothel as uniformly negative denies the agency of the female and male prisoners instrumentalizing sex for their own needs. Although intended as a labor incentive, the brothels often operated in ways the Nazi leadership had possibly not foreseen.

This dissertation has explored how the camp brothels functioned dispelled myths about the women forced to work in the brothels, and revealed how sex was instrumentalized in the brothel. The history of the brothels is not only about the experiences of the women forced into sexual labor, but also about their male clients. Some men went to the brothel for sexual release to be sure, but some also went to seek out companionship, or to use sex as an exercise in reasserting their masculinity. The men used the opportunity before them to their advantage and in the concentration camp, this meant employing all means available to survive. Some men did not just engage in the act of sexual intercourse, they *instrumentalized* sex. Contact between the sexes was rarely permitted and for some of the men imprisoned in the camps, brothel visits were among the only means of enjoying female company. One male prisoner went to the brothel “just to find out” and after speaking with a woman, he was given “a couple of cookies” and was sent home. This individual did not have intercourse and exclaimed, “they didn’t even have to delouse me!”² Yet another man entered telling the woman, “I don’t want

² Henry Mikols, interview by Jill Greenberg, USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Dummer, NH, USA, August 22, 2001, Interview Code 51743, Tape 3, Segment 74.

any, I just want to know where you come from?”³ Clearly, for these men and others, the brothel was not simply a place where they could go for sexual release. Men used their time in the brothel to best suit their own needs utilizing their time to maximize their ability to survive.

Primo Levi writes, “the greater part of historical and natural phenomena are not simple, or not simple in the way that we would like.”⁴ By viewing the brothel as a place to have sex, or to view sex as simply a reward or punishment, reduces our comprehension of the impact the brothel had on the lives of prisoners. This research transforms and adds to our understanding the role of sex in Nazi policy. It demonstrates how the regime sought to instrumentalize sexuality, but, moreover, shows how even in a closely controlled atmosphere, sexuality proved to be something the regime could not, despite all intentions, control. Furthermore, if the brothel acted as a space of resistance, it is quite possible other spaces in the camp universe need to be reconsidered as spaces where prisoners exercised their agency in effort to survive their persecution.

Epilogue

When I arrived in Berlin, Germany in the fall of 2005 to commence my research on this project, I first headed to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in Oranienburg, a suburb of Berlin. I had been to the camp before as a “tourist,” and decided to get to work in the camp archive and forego another “tour.” Weeks later, eyes bleary from sifting through documents, I decided to spend the afternoon walking through the camp and viewing its exhibits. As I stood in the pathology lab looking at the dissection tables and

³ Arthur Heimberg, interview by Esther Rothfield-St., USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Randwick, NSW, Australia, December 18, 1995, Interview Code 07362, Tape 6, Segment 169.

⁴ Levi, *Drowned and the Saved*, 37.

the “corpse slide,” it occurred to me that I was adjacent to the former brothel, which was located over the corpse cellar. I consulted my map and the various signs and saw no mention of the brothel. It occurred to me that not only was forced prostitution in the concentration camps a subject treated marginally in most historical works, but it may also have been omitted from the commemorations of victims of Nazi persecution. Months later, I was sitting in the archive at Auschwitz when one of the archivists came over and said to me, “You know, you are sitting in the brothel now.” I knew this because I had the documents in front of me discussing the location of the brothel, but the buses full of students and tourists outside would pass through the camp and its exhibits without realizing this aspect of camp life that greatly impacted those involved. I realized my dissertation would insist on the inclusion of forced prostitution in the histories of the Holocaust, sex and sexuality in the Third Reich, and German history. Perhaps, memorialization and commemoration would then follow.

Much has changed since that fall when I began my research. In 2007 the Europäische Sommer-Universität Ravensbrück held a four-day workshop on forced prostitution during the war, which preceded the unveiling of Ravensbrück’s new exhibition of forced prostitution and camp brothels. The exhibition drew the attention of not only German, but worldwide press. In the summer of 2008 I was fortunate enough to be part of the archival team sent into the newly opened Red Cross International Tracing Service Archive in Bad Arolsen, Germany to assess the potential the “secret archive”⁵

⁵ “Nazi Archive in Bad Arolsen Opens Doors to Public,” *Deutsche Welle*, November 28, 2007, <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0..2976227.00.html>; “Revisiting the Horrors of the Holocaust,” *CBS NEWS*, December 17, 2006 and updated June 21, 2007, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/12/14/60minutes/main2267927.shtml>; “The Nazi Chronicles,” *US News and World Report*, May 13, 2007, <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/070513/21archives.htm>; “Long-Secret Archive of the Nazis to be Opened,” *Israel National News*, March 11, 2007,

had for Holocaust history. The sources I found in the archive helped me write this dissertation. These findings garnered the interest of various media outlets and publications, including the Associated Press and Slate magazine.⁶ Forced prostitution was no longer an unknown, or lost, part of Holocaust history. The historical community also now takes seriously the investigation of gendered sexual violence and persecution during the Third Reich. In early 2010, worldwide news media discussed the publication of Robert Sommer's *Das KZ-Bordell*. At the most recent Lessons and Legacies Conference on the Holocaust: Expanding Perspectives on the Holocaust in a Changing World, held in Boca Raton, FL in November 2010 there were two separate panels of the instrumentalization of sex during the Holocaust and sexual violence during World War II. Certainly the stories of the nearly 200 women forced to work as sexual laborers during their incarceration in the concentration camps are no longer left out of the historical record. Perhaps, as studies of sexuality and sexual violence under Nazism expand, their history will cease to be considered a history of the margins. Now, in several camps, visitors see the signs indicating where the brothel once stood, or placards explaining its purpose. By incorporating the histories of these women into the memorialization of the victims of National Socialism, the experiences of these women are now part of the more widely accessed memorial record. This history of forced prostitution tells the compelling story of how the women forced to work in the brothels and their patrons, used

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/121805>; "Archive to Expand Access to Files on The Holocaust," *New York Times*, August 5, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/05/world/europe/05archive.html>; "A Closely Guarded Archive Opens its Doors," *New York Times*, August 5, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/05/world/europe/05iht-archive.1.6986643.html>.

⁶ Sarah Wildman, "Paper Love: Inside the Holocaust Archives," *Slate Magazine*, 5 part series, <http://www.slate.com/id/2207886/entry/2207885>; "Academics Make Startling Finds With Untapped Nazi Records," *USA Today*, June 26, 2008, http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-06-26-Nazi-records_N.htm.

the brothel to forge paths of survival, a hitherto under-explored element of everyday history in the concentration camps. The brothel, as a camp institution, was a physical space where the Nazi ideologies of race, power, and sex intersected. This research transforms and adds to our understanding the role of sex in Nazi policy demonstrating how the regime sought to instrumentalize sexuality, but, moreover, how even in a closely controlled atmosphere, sexuality proved to be something the regime could not, despite all intentions, control.

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