

Forced Prostitution in Times of War and Peace

**Sexual Violence
against Women and Girls**

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Robert Sommer

Forced Prostitution in National Socialist Concentration Camps—The Example of Auschwitz

In the early summer of 1941, Heinrich Himmler, the Reich Leader of the SS, visited Mauthausen Concentration Camp near Linz, Austria, and its quarries. Following this visit, he ordered two brothels to be set up for prisoners, in Mauthausen and the sub-camp Gusen. His idea was that the total exploitation of the male prisoners might be further forced by permitting them to visit a brothel as a bonus and incentive. In the early years of the concentration camps, prisoners had been forced to carry out pointless tasks. However, from the mid-1930s onwards, the SS systematically built up the concentration camps as production sites. The prisoners were made to produce equipment and uniforms for the SS, provide Hitler's megalomaniac construction projects such as Berlin and Nuremberg with building materials, and also make up an army of forced construction workers for erecting housing to "Germanize the East." After war broke out, these prisoners were put to particular use in arms production. However, the concentration camp inmates were subject to continuous violence, and suffered from hunger and catastrophic hygienic conditions in the camps. Their productivity was therefore low, particularly as intensive labor was a radical contradiction to the prisoners' logic of survival, which entailed moving as little as possible.

Now these prisoners were to be permitted sex "in its freest form" with women in brothels, as a special privilege, embedded in a Regulation for Granting Benefits to Prisoners.¹ This, according to Himmler, "is not excessively tasteful, but (...) natural and if I have this natural thing as an incentive for better work, I feel that we are obliged to make use of this encouragement."² The SS thus introduced a bonus system across the entire system of the concentration camps, in which the male prisoners were permitted a military haircut, cigarettes, more frequent letters, allowed to buy products in the canteen, and also granted visits to the camp brothel, as payment for extra work.³ In the following years, the SS then set up brothels for prisoners in most large concentration camps, which it referred to as "Special Prisoners' Buildings." Brothels were built in the concentration camps Flossenbürg, Auschwitz main camp, Auschwitz-Monowitz, and Buchenwald in 1943, and in Neuengamme, Dachau, and

1 See "Dienstvorschrift für die Gewährung von Vergünstigungen an Häftlinge. Prämienvorschrift" dated May 13, 1943, in: BArch NS 3/426, pp. 61–64.

2 Letter from Himmler to Pohl dated March 5, 1943, in: Archive, Institute of Contemporary History Munich (IfZ), MA 304/0812.

3 See the regulation referred to above.

Sachsenhausen in 1944. The SS continued to believe in the benefits of forced prostitution, even at the end of the war. In early 1945, it set up a final camp brothel at Mittelbau-Dora, where prisoners were forced to work on the production lines of the V2 rocket in underground shafts.

The SS began setting up brothels for male prisoners in the concentration camp and annihilation complex Auschwitz in mid-1943. Alongside its significance as the central location for the murder of European Jews, this system of camps was also intended as a “model project” for the “resettlement” of Eastern Europe. Thousands of concentration camp inmates had to work on the construction of the giant *IG Farben* production facility in Monowitz, and others on farms or in the organization and extension of the multi-functional camp complex, which consisted of three main camps—Auschwitz main camp (I), Birkenau (II), and Monowitz (III). The SS killed women, children, and older people in the Birkenau gas chambers, while forcing women and men classified as “capable of labor” to work. As Auschwitz was of economic significance both for *IG Farben* and for the SS, both parties were interested in introducing piecework systems to encourage prisoners to work harder.⁴ When the Nazis’ mass murder reached its apex in the summer of 1943 with the opening of Crematoria 2 and 3 in Birkenau, the SS granted some of the non-Jewish male prisoners in Auschwitz the “privilege” of visiting a camp brothel as a reward for good work.⁵ On April 20, 1943, the concentration camp inspector, Richard Glücks, who was also responsible for the construction of the gas chambers, ordered the building of a brothel barracks in Auschwitz I (main camp). It was to be erected behind the feared camp prison (Block 11). On 29 June 1943, the Auschwitz central construction department applied for the special barracks “B.” as construction project No. 95.⁶ The project was never carried out, however, possibly due to shortages in building materials because of the war. Instead, the SS had the first floor of Block 24a, next to the gate with the legend *Arbeit macht frei* (work makes us free), rebuilt as a camp brothel from June 1943.⁷ They appear to have used the construction plans of

4 See Setkiewicz 1998, pp. 588 f.; on the *IG-Farben* piecework system, see “Aktennotiz der IG Farben von Besprechung vom 14. Mai 1942,” in: *Working Group of Former Prisoners of the Auschwitz Concentration Camp of the Committee of Anti-Fascist Resistance Fighters in the German Democratic Republic 1964*, p. 18.

5 To date, it has been assumed that the brothel was opened on July 30, 1943. This date is based on that of a note from the resistance movement, which does not, however, state the date of the brothel opening. See: note dated June 30, 1943, in: *Archiwum Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Owięcimiu* (hereafter: APMO), Mat. RO., vol. I, fol. 36, and Czech 1989, p. 535.

6 See “Bauantrag BW 95,” in: AUSHMM, RG 11.001M, Reel 23.

7 Various former prisoners report that they were involved in the building work. See statements of the former prisoners Wehle and Szwajnoch in: APMO Ow./Wehle/2078, p. 2, and Ow./Szwajnoch/2080, p. 8.

the camp prison as a guideline, since the size and layout of its rooms are very similar to those of the camp brothel.⁸ The SS set up nineteen small rooms for prostitution purposes, a group dormitory for the women, a doctor's room, a payment room, a waiting room, and sanitary facilities including showers. At the same time, the SS equipped a barracks building between the entrance and the prisoners' kitchen in Buna camp in Monowitz as a brothel for ten sexual slave workers, divided from the rest of the camp by a fence.⁹ There was no brothel in Birkenau. Male prisoners held there were permitted to visit the brothel in the nearby main camp.¹⁰

The SS selected the women for the two brothels in Monowitz and the main camp in the Birkenau women's camp. As had previously been the case in Ravensbrück, they attempted to give the forced prostitution the appearance of voluntary recruitment.¹¹ They presumably thought that this would break women's possible resistance to forced prostitution, encourage the male prisoners to visit the brothels, and also shift their own responsibility to the victims.¹² The Polish Auschwitz survivor Krystyna Zywulska describes such a recruitment. According to her account, the prisoner-overseer and a guard came into her barracks by night and went from one bunk to the next. The female guard asked loudly: "'Who wants to go to Auschwitz, to the town, to the men's camp? There's easy work, civilian clothing and good food.' She gave an evil and deceitful smile. 'Well, where are the volunteers?'"¹³ The infamous head of the protective custody camp, Franz Hössler, also personally recruited women for the camp brothels. He ordered young girls who had to carry out hard physical labor in the open air to report to him and told them that those who volunteered would get their own rooms, clean clothing, sufficient food and cigarettes, and a daily bath. The women were also promised their release after six months in the brothel—although this promise was never honored.¹⁴ Bearing in mind the catastrophic conditions in the women's camps, it is easy to imagine how attractive the promise of sufficient food and hygiene must have been

8 See evacuation plan of Block 24, in: APMO, no signature; construction draft of the basement floor of Block 11, in: Brol/Wloch/Pilecki 1959.

9 See Plan of Monowitz, in: Frankenthal 1999, pp. 150 f; sketch of Monowitz brothel rooms, in: APMO Häftlingsberichte/No. 1097/Makowski, p. 34.

10 See Interview Sommer 2003–04–30 Długoborski, p. 4; statement by Tkocz, in: APMO, Ow./Tkocz/2009, p. 10.

11 See Langbein 1995, p. 595.

12 See also the article by Christa Paul in this volume.

13 Zygustra 1980, pp. 58 f.

14 Langbein quoting Ella Lingens in: Langbein 1995, p. 595. The former prisoner and camp fireman Romek Dubitzki (pseudonym) found out about this promise from a friend who had to interpret for Hössler. See Interview 2004–04–06 D., pt. 2, min 01.00; cf. Tanenbaum 1998, p. 44.

for the starving, dirty, and sick women, and particularly the false promise of release. Many prisoners would have done anything to escape the hell of the concentration camps and their inevitable deaths.¹⁵ In her novel *Smoke over Birkenau*, the Italian writer Liana Millu depicts a girl who volunteered for a brothel and said: “Well, I refused to be consumed and vanish like a cloud. I wanted to return to my house. I’m eighteen years old—I don’t want to die . . . 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?”¹⁶

Once the SS had found sufficient women for the brothel commandos, the women were transferred to the prisoners’ sickbay and examined, for example, for venereal diseases such as gonorrhea and syphilis.¹⁷ Next the director of the Political Department, Maximilian Grabner, selected some of the women at his own discretion, and had them transferred to Block 10 of the main camp, where the gynecologist Prof. Carl Clauberg carried out sterilization experiments on Jewish women.¹⁸ A further selection was then made by the SS camp doctor Fritz Klein, and the women were then sent to the brothels in Block 24 and Monowitz.¹⁹

The history of the two brothels in the Auschwitz complex and the women imprisoned in them can be reconstructed on the basis of surviving “accompanying certificates,” which were kept along with test tubes containing pap smears and blood samples of women from the brothels. The SS regularly examined the women for sexually transmitted diseases and took blood samples and smears, which were then analyzed either in the *Waffen-SS* State Hygiene Institute in nearby Rajsko or, from mid-1944, in the gynecological department of the prisoners’ sickbay in Monowitz Concentration Camp.²⁰ On the basis of these “regular examinations in the brothel,” we can make statements on how

15 For example, the case of a young Polish woman from Auschwitz-Birkenau is recorded, who justified “volunteering” for a brothel with the words: “Winter is coming and I work in the fields!” Interview Sommer 2004-04-06 D., pt. 1, 00.44.00. The former Auschwitz inmate Sigmund Sobolewski formulated this as follows: “Look, if you were in Birkenau, I bet, if they asked you: cut yourself four fingers and you’ll be free, you would do it.” Interview Sommer 2005-01-28 Sobolewski, min 00.24.00.

16 Millu 1999, pp. 171 f.

17 The first of these examinations began in Auschwitz at the end of September 1943. See, for example, “Begleitscheine” for “Go.-Abstriche” of the Rajsko institute for Ms I. S., who was in Block 24a from October 4, 1943, from September 22 and 24, 1943, in: APMO Akta HI 324/20 and 485/20.

18 The experiments did not take place during the period when the future sexual slave workers were there. See Minney 1966, pp. 118–121; Spritzer 1980, p. 117.

19 See Langbein 1995, p. 596.

20 On Monowitz, see Niedojadło 1970, p. 51.

long the prisoners' brothels existed, how many women worked in them and how long they had to remain in the brothels. Thus, it emerges that the camp brothels in the main camp and in Monowitz existed from early October 1943 until a few days before the evacuation of the camps in January 1945.²¹ The length of time women stayed in a brothel commando varied widely. Some women only spent a few days there, possibly because the SS found them "unsuitable" and exchanged them for other women. Others had to carry out forced sexual labor in the brothels of Auschwitz for several months. Three women spent fifteen months in a camp brothel, the entire period of its existence. Some of the sexual slave workers had to work first in Block 24a, and then in the Monowitz camp brothel, or vice versa.²² Six women were taken to the Mittelbau-Dora Concentration Camp brothel after Auschwitz was evacuated (this brothel was not opened until early 1945).²³ The "accompanying certificates" also afford conclusions on the number of sexual slave workers in Auschwitz and the women's nationalities. According to this evidence, seventy women were forced to work as prostitutes in the Auschwitz and Monowitz prisoners' brothels.²⁴ The overwhelming majority (42) of them were Reich Germans, and the others were of Polish (22) and Ukrainian (6) national-

21 The first examinations of 21 women allocated to Block 24a began on October 4, 1943 (see: APMO Akta HI 391/20a). In Monowitz, the first documented examination of the eight women in the brothel is dated November 15, 1943 (see: Akta HI 1201/23). The examinations in Monowitz ceased in mid-1944, and the women were thereafter examined in the skin and STD ward of the Monowitz prisoners' sickbay. See "Regelmäßige Untersuchung des Bordells vom 6. Juni 1944," in: APMO file HI 184/9; Niedojadło 1970, p. 51. A former Monowitz inmate stated that the women from the camp brothel were evacuated along with the other prisoners in January 1945. See: statement by Stopka in: APMO/Ow/Stopka/951, p. 7. The former senior prisoner in the sickbay block, Hermann Leonhardt, was present at the opening and dates it to "the end of October 1943," see statement Leonhardt, in: APMO/Ow/Leonhardt/69, p. 65.

22 Five women were first in the Monowitz brothel and later in Block 24a. See Sommer, database of sexual slave workers in Auschwitz.

23 See "Überstellung nach Mittelbau-Dora vom 18. Februar 1945", in: Mittelbau-Dora Memorial Archive, DMD D1b, vol.5, fol. 113.

24 We can also identify a "madam" who was a prisoner herself. See: APMO Akta HI 57/5a. See also Sommer, database of sexual slave workers in Auschwitz. In the cases of two women, forced prostitution in a camp brothel cannot be proved on the basis of surviving documents, but is very likely. This means the earlier total of 65 women must be raised. Cf: Robert Sommer. "Die Häftlingsbordelle im KZ-Komplex Auschwitz-Birkenau. Sexzwangsarbeit im Spannungsfeld von NS-'Rassenpolitik' und der Bekämpfung von Geschlechtskrankheiten," in: Jah, Kopke, Korb, Stiller (eds.): *Nationalsozialistische Lager. Neue Beiträge zur Geschichte der Verfolgungs- und Vernichtungspolitik und zur Theorie und Praxis von Gedenkstättenarbeit*. Münster 2006.

ity.²⁵ We can assume that the total number of victims forced to work in the Auschwitz brothels was only marginally above seventy.²⁶

Although we can find indications of the names and nationalities of sexual slave workers on the basis of concentration camp files, little can be said about the women's actual situation in the Auschwitz brothels. There are no reports by women from these brothels. Although one former Polish sexual slave worker in Monowitz did talk about her past several months after the war, she refused to speak about her time in the concentration camp sixty years later, and denied ever having been in the brothel.²⁷ Alongside the mental strain and trauma, the reason for her silence is particularly the fear of a possible accusation of collaboration with the enemy on the part of other former prisoners, and the possible loss of her status as a state-recognized victim.²⁸ The situation of former sexual slave workers from the Ukraine is even more dramatic. Generally, people returning home to the Soviet Union after being released from concentration camps were subject to renewed persecution because Soviet law rendered them guilty of treason due to their (forced) labor in the arms factories. Many of them were sent to gulags. Nor are there any witnesses from among the German women forced to work in the Auschwitz brothels. There is a statement from the German Auschwitz survivor Hanna Nordfeld,²⁹ who came to Auschwitz with the first women's transport of March 26, 1942. She was one of the first women selected for the brothel in the main camp by the SS, and she was there until early January 1945. Although she did testify about her time in Ravensbrück Concentration Camp as a witness in a case against former female SS wardens, she did not mention the camp brothel in Auschwitz.³⁰ The main

25 Conclusions on nationality can be made on the basis of names. The name of one woman from Block 24a indicates French origin. However, this woman may have come from Alsace or Lorraine. One woman from Lorraine can be proved in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp brothel. This woman was of German nationality. See Ravensbrück Memorial Museum Archive (AGR)/AGB 03005301. The Ukrainian women were generally classified as Russians.

26 The entire period is documented for the brothel in the main camp, but only up to mid-1944 for Monowitz. We can assume that no more than 80 women were in the two camp brothels in Auschwitz in total.

27 See letter Setkiewicz (director of APMO) to Robert Sommer, July 5, 2005.

28 Polish former prisoners have defended their decision to visit the camp brothel in interviews. For instance, the former Auschwitz prisoner Stanisław Hantz commented: "Did good, because survived." Interview Sommer 2003-05-01 Hantz II, p. 2. On the problem of Poland's national and Catholic memorial culture regarding Auschwitz, cf: van Pelt/Dwork1998, pp. 392-417.

29 This name is a pseudonym.

30 However, the victim was not questioned on her time in Auschwitz. See Aussage der Zeugin H.N. im Verfahren gegen dem Landgericht Frankfurt/Main am 9. März 1974, BArch Ludwigsburg, Sign. 162-9808.

reason was most likely to have been the practice of state rehabilitation of concentration camp victims in the two postwar German states. Most German women in the Auschwitz brothels were incarcerated in the concentration camp as “asocial elements,” bearing the black triangle. In contrast to the political prisoners, this group of victims was neither rehabilitated nor compensated after the war, and in some cases suffered further persecution. The former sexual slave workers thus did not generally reveal their imprisonment in concentration camps, because they feared further repressions from the state and of a social nature.³¹

The only way to find more detailed information on women from the camp brothels is from other prisoners. Many of them never came into contact with the women, as they seldom left the brothels.³² Sofia Bator, for example, describes how she saw a woman who seemed to come from a different world in the prisoners’ sickbay block in Birkenau Women’s Camp. She was a young girl with well-cut hair, eyes made up with henna and plucked eyebrows. She was dressed in a blue shirt with black lace, a sky-blue dressing gown and high-heeled slippers. She had been brought to the sick bay from the brothel in the main camp.³³ In her memoirs written directly after the war, *Smoke over Birkenau*, Liana Millu describes how the first-person narrator of her novel fled from an air raid to Block 24a of the main camp, was given hot soup there by the women in the prisoners’ brothel, and talked to a young woman whom she knew from Birkenau. It is hard to say to what extent truth and fiction are mixed in these reports. However, they do make it clear how incredibly different the world of the brothel appeared to the authors from Birkenau.³⁴

31 See Eschebach, Insa: “Das Stigma des Asozialen. Drei Urteile der DDR-Justiz gegen ehemalige Funktionshäftlinge des Frauenkonzentrationslagers Ravensbrück.” In: KZ- Gedenkstätte Neuengamme (ed.). *Abgeleitete Macht—Funktionshäftlinge zwischen Widerstand und Kollaboration (Beiträge zur Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung in Norddeutschland*, Vol. 4). Bremen 1998; Paul, Christa/Sommer, Robert: “SS-Bordelle und Oral History. Problematische Quellen und die Existenz von Bordellen für die SS in Konzentrationslagern,” in: BIOS, Year 19 (1/2006).

32 There are very few reports on the women in Monowitz. Adam K. mentioned that the women had to gather herbs in the meadows during the day. See: Interview by Sommer with Adam K., 2.5.2004, p. 2.

33 See: statement by Bator, pp. 27–30.

34 See: Millu 1999, pp. 137–147. It is always difficult to use literary writing as a historical source. However, in the introduction to the Italian editions of “Il Fumo di Birkenau”, Primo Levi classifies Millu’s stories as one of the “più intense testimonanze europee”—most intensive European testimonies. See: Millu 2001, p. 7. I was unable to interview the author on her writing due to her illness. See: letter from Millu to Sommer.

Despite these superior living conditions in comparison to Birkenau, everyday life in the “Special Prisoners’ Buildings” was strictly regulated. The women had to carry out various tasks such as sewing or gathering herbs during the day, and “receive” the male prisoners in the evenings. The SS kept the women strictly isolated from the rest of the camp. An SS man guarded the entrance to the brothels. Any form of contact with other prisoners—other than the official brothel visits controlled by the SS—was prevented. In Auschwitz main camp, the women were therefore locked in a dormitory. Whereas women in Birkenau had at least partial freedom of movement within the camp, the women in the brothels were under constant surveillance by the SS or a female guard. The similarities between the camp brothel and a prison did not stop at the layout of the rooms.

The SS was particularly strict in its attempts to monitor what went on inside the camp brothels. Everything had to take place according to a set procedure. Initially, the Nazis only allowed German, Polish, and other “Aryan” prisoners to visit the “Special Prisoners’ Buildings.” Jews, Russians, Sinti, and Roma were banned. German prisoners had to visit German women and Slavic prisoners Slavic women.³⁵ Prisoners had to file an application for a visit to the brothel with the camp authorities, which was then either approved or rejected. If an application was approved, the prisoner reported to the brothel after the evening roll call, was examined by a doctor for visible sexually transmitted diseases, and then had to report to an SS man in the corridor outside the rooms, who then allocated the men to the women, observing the racial regulations. The men were allowed to spend fifteen minutes in the rooms. Only “normal sex” in the missionary position was allowed. The SS guard kept watch through a spy-hole in the door to ensure that the rules were observed.³⁶ This type of control makes the element of force in the sexual exploitation particularly clear. The SS allocated the men to the women, attempting to eliminate any aspect of individual control. The women had no choice but to do as they were told and accept the men. They became part of a conveyor belt of sexual exploitation, as Margarete W. described in an interview with Christa Paul in the 1990s.³⁷

Paul’s interviews with former sexual slave workers clearly show how few chances women had to stand up to these mechanisms. There was often nothing

35 See: Interview by Sommer 2005–01–28 S., pt.1, 00.57.00; Interview by Sommer 2003–05–01 Hantz 1, pt.1,00.28.00.

36 See: Statements by the former brothel visitors Romek Dubitzki and Stephan Szymanski (both pseudonyms), in: Interview by Sommer 2005–01–28 S., pt.1, 00.47.00; Interview by Sommer 2004–04–06 D., pt.1, 00.52.00.

37 Source “Fließband” in: *Sign.* 294T, S.; Interview with Margarete W. in narrative-cited form in: Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, pp. 48–57.

they could do but bear their fate, as they were already mentally broken by their long imprisonment in concentration camps. For example, another woman who was abducted to the Mittelbau-Dora camp brothel in 1945 reported:

We put up with our fate. We always said: it's still better than in Ravensbrück or Bergen-Belsen. What can you do? Do you want to stand up against it? We did so much. Well, deep down, of course, it was a shock, that's understandable, isn't it? You know, we were so deadened by the whole thing and everything. We practically had—you know, even in Ravensbrück, when you woke up in the morning, you were lying next to a dead body. You know, it's all so. And if you said to the senior prisoner, there's a dead body here, then she just said: yes, throw it down. You see? And you know—you only look out for yourself. I never thought I'd survive or anything. I was so deadened by the whole thing, and I'd practically said goodbye to my life.³⁸

In an attempt to escape the omnipotence and control of the SS at least in part, some women from the camp brothels maintained personal relationships with a male, normally privileged prisoner.³⁹ This type of relationship, which the historian Anna Hajkóvá analyzes using the example of Theresienstadt and refers to as “rational relationships,”⁴⁰ was a common survival strategy in camps where contact between men and women could take place despite separate imprisonment. Food and protection were exchanged for sexual services. However, these relationships could also easily be of a forced or exploitative nature. In the case of the camp brothels, the women rarely had a choice or any chance of rejecting a male prisoner who wanted to form such a relationship.⁴¹ The SS attempted to prevent these uncontrolled and individual relationships in the camp brothels. They made the women move rooms so that the male prisoners did not know which women they were going to.⁴² If uncontrolled relationships were discovered, they meant imprisonment in the bunker or even death for the woman and the man.⁴³ As such punishments were unable

38 Interview Christa Paul/Reinhild Kassing with L.B., in: Werkstatt der Erinnerung (Hamburg), *Sign.* 294T, p. 21.

39 See: Statement Bator, p. 30.; on Buchenwald and Dora see: Interview Christa Paul with Frau B. and W., in: Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, pp. 48 ff.

40 On the term “rational relationships,” see Hájková 2005, pp. 202–219.

41 Exchanging sexual services for bread was also widespread in other parts of the Auschwitz complex. The body was often the only and last capital in the fight for survival. Langbein 1995, pp. 591–593; Amesberger et al. 2007, pp. 141–157.

42 Male prisoners attempted to bribe the guards to let them visit certain women, or exchanged places with other prisoners in the waiting line. See also: Statement by Bator, p. 30; Interview by Sommer 2005–01–28 S., min 00.55.00.

43 See: Statement by Max Beulig dated April 24, 1947, in: AUSHMM RG.06.005.05M, Reel 1 (for Buchenwald); Interview by Sommer 2005–01–28 S., min 01.08.00 (for Auschwitz).

to prevent these relationships, the SS repeatedly exchanged the women in the Auschwitz camp brothels.⁴⁴

The question remains as to how many men actually visited the camp brothels. Male prisoners initially had to pay two reichsmarks for a visit to a brothel; from mid-1944, this was reduced to one reichsmark, in the form of bonus vouchers (camp currency).⁴⁵ However, few prisoners in Auschwitz actually possessed camp currency. Even fewer were physically capable of any form of sexual activity, or found it morally acceptable to visit a camp brothel. A further factor is that only a minority of the camp inmates were eligible. The number of brothel visitors in Auschwitz and Monowitz was minimal.⁴⁶ The former Polish prisoner Stanisław Hantz estimates that the number of brothel “customers” in the Auschwitz main camp, which had 30,000 prisoners, was approximately one to two hundred.⁴⁷ Most of these were so-called “functional prisoners,” that is, prisoners from privileged commandos such as the kitchens, barber-shop, butchery or camp fire brigade.⁴⁸ Visiting the prisoners’ brothel was frowned upon by many “political” prisoners, as it meant both becoming an actor in the process of sexual exploitation and supporting the Nazis’ piecemeal system. However, one must bear in mind that prisoners had various motivations for visiting the brothels. Along with a few prisoners at the top of the camp hierarchy such as the senior prisoner or the high-ranking prisoner guards, regular visits to the brothel were a sign of (sexual) power and thus of prestige. Other prisoners only went to a brothel once, and in many cases did not have sexual intercourse with the woman. These men had been in concen-

44 See “Accompanying certificates”; Statement Bator, p. 30.

45 See: “Prämien-Vorschrift”, p. 64 and “1. Nachtrag zur Dienstvorschrift für die Gewährung von Vergünstigungen an Häftlinge” dated February 14, 1944, in: Barch NS 3/427. Bonus vouchers were apparently issued on a broad basis, according to the administrative lists. There is evidence, for example, that prisoners in the textile industry received up to 6 RM per week in bonuses. See: Prämienlisten Auschwitz-Birkenau, in: AUSHMM, RG 04.065M, Reel 8. Many prisoners in the construction commandos i.a., however, very rarely received bonus vouchers.

46 A study by the Psychiatric Clinic of the Krakow Medical Academy from 1959 provides an insight into the sexuality of prisoners in Auschwitz: of 77 former prisoners in the study (60 men and 17 women), 44 stated they had never had sexual intercourse. 3 of those in the study admitted to having masturbated, although only when they were not hungry. 4 prisoners had sexual intercourse in the camp and 2 of those for the first time—both of them in the camp brothel. See: Roman Lesniak et al.: “Einige psychiatrische Probleme des KZ-Lagers Auschwitz im Lichte eigener Untersuchungen,” in: *Przegląd Lekarski*, 1960, pp. 46 f. One former brothel-user from Auschwitz admitted to the author that he had not been able to have an erection in the brothel.

47 See: Interview by Sommer 2003-02-01 Hantz 1, min. 00.22.00.

48 See: Interview by Sommer 2003-03-30 P., 1., p. 26.

tration camps for up to ten years, and simply wanted to see a woman. There were also very young male prisoners who had not yet had any sexual experiences in their lives, and wanted to do so at least once before their looming deaths. There are also cases in which men had fallen in love with one of the women.⁴⁹

Conclusions

Setting up prisoners' brothels in concentration camps and recruiting women for these brothels brought the violence in the concentration camps to a new, shocking dimension. Not only did the Nazis exploit prisoners up to their deaths (and beyond), they now also forced women to make their bodies available to maximize this exploitation. The SS consciously tried to find women who "volunteered" for the brothels, in order to conceal the element of force behind the prostitution, shifting the blame for their own actions to the victims, and thus away from themselves.⁵⁰ However, the brothels did not operate on a voluntary basis by any means. The French philosopher Norbert Campagna defines the element of force in prostitution by the exclusion of three points: a.) the decision in favor of prostitution, b) the choice of practices and customers, and c) the freedom to give up prostitution.⁵¹ Even the indirect element of force through the inhumane conditions in the women's camp and the false promises of release show that women's decisions to join the brothels were not made voluntarily. Additionally, the forced character is particularly clear in the organization of the brothels: the SS had absolute power over the women, determining their daily routine and the men with whom they were forced to have intercourse. The sexual slave workers could not reject these

49 Take, for example, the reports by the former Polish Auschwitz prisoners and brothel visitors: Romek Dubitzki and Stephan Szymanski (pseudonyms) (See: Interview by Sommer 2005-01-28 S.; Interview by Sommer 2004-04-06 D.) On brothel users, see: Robert Sommer. "Camp Brothels: Sexual Slavery in Nazi Concentration Camps," in: Dagmar Herzog, Henrik Lundtofte and Anette Warring (eds.), *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan (forthcoming); Herbert Weidlich: *Der Sonderbau (Bordell) im ehemaligen Schutzhaftlager Buchenwald*. Berlin 1978. Unpublished, Buchenwald Memorial Museum Archive (AGB), Sign. 56-8-4, p. 6.

50 For example, the former camp commander Franz Hössler stated: "The girls for these brothels were chosen by doctors in the camp. To the best of my knowledge, Dr. Klein and Dr. Mengele carried out this selection from volunteers whom I had chosen." Statement by Franz Hössler in: APMO/Ow./Hössler/329/p. 152.

51 See Norbert Campagna. *Prostitution. Eine philosophische Untersuchung*, Parerga Verlag, Berlin 2005, pp. 176 f.

men. Nor could women leave the brothels voluntarily. The SS alone determined how long each woman spent working in a brothel.

It is also apparent that women in camp brothels had higher chances of survival than women in the outdoor commandos in Birkenau. In the case of Auschwitz, there is no evidence of a single death of a woman in the camp brothels.⁵² Contrary to previous assumptions, the women were not gassed by the SS after leaving the "brothel commando," but returned to Birkenau, where they often worked in better commandos.⁵³ This sexual forced labor in a concentration camp brothel can certainly be described as a survival strategy. Yet the price for this survival was high. Not only did it require accepting one's own sexual exploitation and violence, but camp brothels also meant a lifelong stigma. The sexual slave workers were subject to multiple victimization, like very few other groups of concentration camp victims. Their survival in concentration camps by giving up their own sexual self-determination and accepting sexual exploitation has been excluded from the canon of memorial. German former sexual slave workers in the camps were not rehabilitated in the postwar German states. The situation for Ukrainian and Polish women was particularly dramatic. They had to hide their past to avoid renewed persecution. It is due to the great work of researchers such as Christa Paul that we are now aware of these women's situations. The subject of concentration camp brothels is now openly discussed in Germany, yet very few of these women have received public recognition or rehabilitation, over sixty years after the end of the war. And they are unlikely to do so in future, as we can assume that almost all of them are now dead.

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52 Both former prisoners' statements and SS documents confirm this.

53 Statement by Zofia Bator, in: APMO: Häftlingsberichte Vol. 68, translation JBS, pp. 29 f. This was not due to benevolence on the part of the SS, but rather the possibility of using contacts to privileged prisoners who visited the camp brothel.

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tence. The words sound carefree and harmonious. They speak to me of the will not to lose hope, despite a terrible past.

It was the women's harmony that freed us from a terrible conspiracy. The idea that "our pure daughters were raped!" was expressed again and again in outbreaks of rage and protest actions, but at the same time this conspiracy dulled our senses, so that we only directed our aggression at Japan, which prevented us from turning our eyes to ourselves. That harmony is surely founded on the successes of the "comfort women" movement.

I go down another flight of stairs and walk towards the exit. Here is the "Place of the Oath." This is where the clay models of the hands of the *halmeonis* are exhibited, along with a panel of signatures against the civilian fund used by the Japanese government to evade accepting state responsibility.

The history museum always closes with a testimony. Today we hear Ok-seon Yi. The Japanese guests have knelt down in a row to listen to her voice. She describes the military brothel in Taiwan where she worked. She talks about her abduction and rape, the endless tortures every day. How people stabbed her with knives, how she was tortured with fire and electric shocks.

Ms Yi learned Japanese again to help her explain her innermost feelings and hidden memories. She can now talk to Japanese people in their own language, as she has so much to say and so much to tell them.

In the middle of the interview, Ms Yi sings a few verses of a Japanese song, which the Japanese people here today do not know. It is the "Song of the Imperial Army." In her song, I can clearly hear the physical suffering of her sad history in the colonial period. I see in this song of the imperial soldiers how they use the bodies of these women as waste pipes, moment for moment, and how deeply this memory is engraved in their hearts.

As we listen to Ms Yi, we recognize that these events cannot be trivialized as individual tragedies of the past. By experiencing this tragedy, you and I become "we," and we accept responsibility for our mutual share in history.

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Ok-cha Soh has served as president of the Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues, Inc. (WCCW) since 2001. She is also a professor in the Department of Psychology and Counseling at Washington Bible College of Maryland. She received her PhD in Social Psychology from the Union Institute and University. She has been honored with numerous awards for her leadership on and commitment to "comfort women" issues: recognition from the Senate of Maryland, January 2007, Person of the Year 2006 by the Korean-American Association of Washington, citation from Paris Glendening, the governor of Maryland, for outstanding accomplishment and leadership for the minority's human rights, 2001.

Robert Sommer is a graduate in Cultural Studies and currently working on a freelance basis for the Ravensbrück Memorial Center and as Head of the Conference Office for the European Summer University 2007 on Forced Prostitution and War in the 20th and Early 21st Centuries. He has worked as a translator and taken care of eyewitnesses at the Flossenbürg Concentration Camp Memorial since 2004. His publications include: "Camp Brothels. Sexual Slavery in Nazi Concentration Camps." In: Barbara Herzog (ed.), *Brutality and Desire* (forthcoming) and *Der Sonderbau. Die Errichtung von Bordellen in den nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern*. He was academic advisor for the 1994 BBC documentary *Auschwitz. The Nazis and the 'Final Solution.'*

Mi-gang Yang is Head of Research at the Christian Women's Institute for Peace Studies in Seoul. She gained a doctorate in Theology from the University of San Francisco in 1997. She was Secretary-General of the Korean Council for four years. In 2001, she co-organized the Movement for the Correction of Japanese History Books, and is now Chair of the Asian Association for Peace and History Studies.

Mee-hyang Yoon obtained a Master's degree in Theological Education, and is the Manager of the women's committee of the Central Association of International Reformed

Churches. She has held various roles on the Committee on Reparation for the Victims of the Japanese Military Crime of Forced Prostitution, and co-chaired the Korean War & Women's Human Rights Museum Foundation. She has also been awarded the I-U Jeong Peace Prize and the Women's Future Leader Prize in Korea.

Myung-sook Youn graduated from the University of Foreign Languages in Tokyo. She gained her PhD from Hitotsubashi University in Japan, and now researches into sociological and regional issues there. In 2003, she published a study on the organizational system of Japanese military brothels in Japan. She also works for the South Korean Truth Commission (homepage: http://www.gangje.go.kr/en_index.asp).

Chung-ok Yune is a pioneering researcher into the "comfort women" issue. Until her retirement, she was a professor at the Ewha Women's University in Seoul, from 1958 to 1991. She gained her BA and MA in the History of English Literature at Ewha University, and graduated in Biblical Literature from Scarrit College Nashville, USA. She also studied English Literature at the University of Iowa City, USA, and the University of Exeter, Great Britain. From 1990 to 2001, she was a co-founder and co-representative of the Korean Council for Women Drafted for Sexual Slavery by Japan. Her publications deal with the writing of Charles Dickens, the biography of the priest Seong-Nyeol Yun, and editions of lectures on human rights for the victims of Japanese sexual slavery. She has won various awards in Korea for her peace activities and dedication to women's rights: in 1991 the Olheu-i-Yeoseong-Donga Prize, 1994 the Human Rights Award, 1999 the Manhae Prize, 2001 the Feminist Activity Award, 2002 the Peace Prize, and in 2003 the Yu-Gwan-Sun Prize.

About the Artist (title picture)

Hyun-sook Song was born in the South Korean province of Cholla in 1952, and came to Germany in 1972. From 1976 to 1981, she studied at the Hamburg School of Art, where she was encouraged to develop her Asian aesthetic style. She studied Asian Art and Calligraphy in Korea from 1984 to 1985. Song received the Hesse Film Prize for her autobiographical document, the film *My Heart is a Bottle*. In 1996, she received the Edwin Scharf Prize from the city of Hamburg. She is now a freelance artist and lives in Hamburg.