

Robert Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell: Sexuelle Zwangsarbeit in nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern*, Paderborn: Schöningh Verlag 2009, 445 S., 38,- €, ISBN 978-3-506-76524-6

The existence of brothels in Nazi concentration camps, where female prisoners were forced to provide sexual gratification for male prisoners, is almost too sordid and cynical as to be believed. It is certainly not coincidental that this history could only be written after the majority of perpetrators and victims have passed on. Although Robert Sommer was still able to interview some survivors (male and female), the bulk of his dissertation, completed in Cultural Studies at the Humboldt University in Berlin, is based on written records. For the most part, neither the women, who did not receive post-war recognition or compensation as victims of National Socialism, nor their “clients” saw any benefit in talking about their experiences in concentration camp brothels. Common post-war assumptions held that sexuality simply ceased in the concentration camps, because starvation, fear, hard physical labor and violence took their toll on the bodies, minds and souls of prisoners. In a methodical and dispassionate manner, Sommer corrects some of the assumptions about sexual life in concentration camps.

Beginning in October 1941, the SS-leadership set out to construct brothels for male prisoners as a means to reward productivity and to discourage the spread of homosexual behavior typical of prison life. Although Adolf Hitler had ranted against prostitution as a sign of cultural and racial decline of the Volk and had moved quickly to criminalize prostitutes, the regime changed its tune nine days after the invasion of Poland, when Heinrich Himmler, leader of the SS, concluded that brothels, supervised and controlled by medical SS-personnel, would prevent “mixed race” sexual contact and venereal disease. Male sexuality, Himmler reasoned, required periodic release, a biologic reasoning he would eventually extend to concentration camps. In chronological order of their

constructions, Sommer documents the architectural design and administration of brothels in Mauthausen, Gusen, Flossenbürg, Buchenwald, Auschwitz/I and III, Dachau, Neuengamme, Sachsenhausen and Mittelbau/Dora.

The idea for brothel visits as a “bonus system” for privileged prisoners grows organically out of the National Socialist cynical claim to total control over human beings, including their sexuality. Concentration camps, in which 11 million people had lost their lives by May of 1945, were designed to dehumanize: those who entered were stripped of their name, professional, national and social identity, their clothing, hair and control over their basic physical survival needs, such as food, hygiene and rest. Men and women were always kept strictly segregated, and homosexual behavior was punishable by death. But the concentration camps were also supposed to provide cheap and abundant slave labor, which conflicted with their atrocious living conditions. Hence, the idea for brothel visits as an alternate reward structure emerged. The women were recruited from the women’s camp Ravensbrück and informed of their assignment to the “brothel commando.” Contrary to previous suppositions, Sommer asserts that sex slaves did not face higher mortality rates. Women who became pregnant or infected with STDs were not gassed as previously maintained, but forced to undergo abortions and treated medically. Overall, Sommer concludes, the women were better fed and housed than other prisoners and were able to use their relationships with privileged prisoners to negotiate better positions in the prison hierarchy when they were transferred into other camps. The longest stay of women in a brothel was 21 months; the majority stayed between 8 and 17 months before they were transferred back to Ravensbrück or other concentration camps.

In an extensive appendix (167 pages, including footnotes), Sommer provides detailed tables on the length of stay, prior professional status, reason for arrest and the ages of the women (ranging between 17-30 years). The Nazis had an elaborate color-coded classification system (red: *political*; green:

criminal; black: *asocial*; purple: *Jehova's Witness*, pink: *homosexual*), and most of the women forced into brothel service had been arrested as *asocials*, which included prostitution or sexual relations with non-German men. The Nazi racial taxonomy was strictly maintained: German women serviced German prisoners, Polish women were assigned to Ukrainian and Polish prisoners, while Jewish women were generally excluded from brothel assignments.

Sommer also provides statistics on male visitors including the frequency of visits and reasons for arrest (for Mauthausen), as well as the numbers of daily visits (for Buchenwald). The majority of clients wore the green triangle (*criminals*), the second largest group was categorized as *asocials*, but 12% of the visitors wore the red triangle of political prisoners. The trip to the brothel does not sound very appealing: the men who had earned the privilege were walked to the designated prison block, deposited their permission slip to a clerk in the entrance hall, were forced to expose their genitals, received a preventive injection, were assigned a room number, waited in the hallway, entered the small cell, and were allowed 15 minutes of missionary sex with the prisoner, while a SS-man observed the proceedings through a peep hole in the door. Clearly this process served not only to degrade the women but also to humiliate the men. Although Sommer sides with the women, he sympathetically assesses the men's motivations, ranging from those who proudly asserted their rank in the prison hierarchy to those who wanted (re)establish their vitality despite starvation and the constant threat of death. Others craved for some semblance of emotional contact with women. While the process was designed to prevent emotional attachment, both men and women reported occasional bonds, which the women could and did use to improve their lot.

Sommer situates the camp brothels within the Nazi regime's massive enslavement of millions of human beings who were systematically dehumanized and used as a dispensable labor force. The use of male sexual gratification as an alternate reward system and the exploitation of women as sex slaves are

seen as further confirmation of the institutionalized contempt for humanity associated with National Socialism. But this history is not as unique as we may want to believe. What is missing from Sommer's study is a feminist analysis that places camp brothels into the larger frame of patriarchal contempt for women, in which even the least among men enjoys the privilege of degrading those who must lie below him by virtue of their gender. The tenuous bonds of patriarchal solidarity prevailed even in the camp universe. Despite profound dehumanization and contempt, male privilege that grants sexual dominance and access to the female body remained unbroken. Although the number of men who took advantage was always less than one percent of the camp population, the enslavement of women for sexual ab/use is neither restricted to Nazi Germany nor did it end with the liberation of the Nazi camps.

In countless warzones across the globe, the casual as well as systematic rape and sexual enslavement of women is a routine practice that unites the feuding militarized parties as well as the third-party UN peace keepers. The sexual enslavement of women, however, is not restricted to wartimes. It is a rapidly growing phenomenon in many countries at peace. The current numbers of sexual slaves are astounding. In *Half the Sky*, Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn cite the British medical journal *The Lancet's* calculation that "1 million **children** are forced into prostitution every year and the total number of prostituted **children** could be as high as 10 million" (New York: Knopf, 2009, 9). Currently, anti-slavery campaigners estimate as many as 27 million slaves worldwide, the majority of whom are women who have been kidnapped, trafficked and are being kept as prisoners in brothels. Their living conditions are not significantly different from those in the brothels in concentration camps. They not only endure daily violence from their captors (including murder) and sexual violation by their clients but face criminalization and ostracism by their families and communities. They are permanently stigmatized and blamed for their own victimization. This was also the fate of the surviving camp sex slaves who faced charges

of prostitution and were sometimes re-arrested upon liberation. Their enforced postwar silence and defamation testifies to the ongoing reality of patriarchal male domination, acted out and inscribed sexually. For men, the brothel—in and out of the concentration camps—marks the place to prove virility and sexual dominance. Certainly, the Nazi system must be held accountable for the establishment of these brothels. But each individual male who participated in the male privilege of violating the female body is culpable. This moral imperative seems especially important in light of the fact that “in the last few decades, sex slavery has actually worsened,” (Kristof, 11). Without male demand, the slave trade in female flesh could never have turned into one of the most lucrative world markets, rivaled only by weapons and drugs. Women’s sexual enslavement is far from restricted to the history of National Socialism but constitutes a pressing contemporary reality that requires a feminist analysis of gender and sexual domination.

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Tanja Hetzer, „Deutsche Stunde“. Volksgemeinschaft und Antisemitismus in der politischen Theologie bei Paul Althaus (Beiträge zur Geschichtswissenschaft), München: Allitera Verlag 2009, 296 S., 28,- €, ISBN 978-3-86520-328-1

Tanja Hetzer wurde mit der vorliegenden Arbeit 2007 an der University of Sussex / England Sussex promoviert. Sie will unter Einbezug der Biographie von Paul Althaus und unter Zugrundelegung des sozialwissenschaftlichen Modells der „politischen Kohorte“ zeigen, wie sich sein Weltbild incl. des tief religiös verwurzelten Antisemitismus schon längst vor 1933 festigte (11), und will einen Beitrag zur Erforschung derjenigen bislang vernachlässigten Deutschen Christen leisten, die als gemäßigt galten (17).