

In the Absence of Tears:

Female Prostitution in the Holocaust

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Background



- Conservative estimate of over 13 million deaths
- Sexual assault was experienced by many women causing lifelong trauma

Figure 1: Nazi guards round up arriving prisoners at the Auschwitz concentration camp's unloading ramp
(Masses of people getting off the trains at Auschwitz, n.d., <https://en.historylapse.org/the-holocaust>)

Historiography

- Anna Hájková
 - “Sexual Bartering”
- Lawrence Langer
 - “Choiceless Choices”
- Arguments against :
Nomi Levenkron
 - It diminishes the magnitude of the intended outcome



Figure 2: Käthe Leichter Lecture 2020: Anna Hájková, (Käthe Leichter Lecture 2020: Anna Hájková n.a., [https://kalender.univie.ac.at/einzelansicht/?tx_univieevents_pi1\[id\]=27252](https://kalender.univie.ac.at/einzelansicht/?tx_univieevents_pi1[id]=27252))

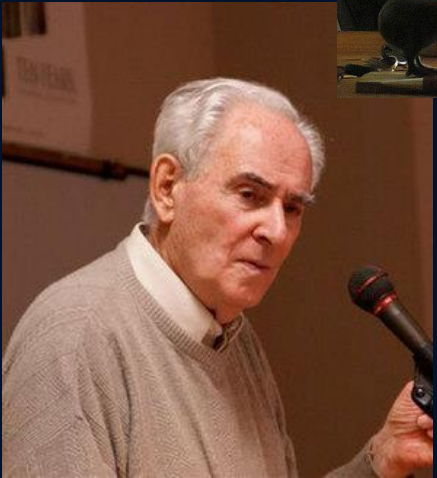


Figure 3: Lawrence Langer, (LAWRENCE LANGER, n.a., <https://teachtheholocaust.weebly.com/lawrence-langer.html>)

Founding and Establishment

- General Walther von Brauchitsch
 - July 1940 decree
- Occupational Authorities
 - “Sex with a prostitute was not a ‘social’ act but rather of the ‘functional-economic type.’”
- Henrich Himmler
 - Adopted the model to a militaristic reward system



Figure 5: Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch (1881-1948), commander in chief of the German Army. (Portrait of Brauchitsch, n.d., <https://collections.usmm.org/search/catalog/pa1041255>)



Figure 6: Portrait of Reichsfuehrer-SS Heinrich Himmler. (Portrait of Himmler, n.d., <https://collections.usmm.org/search/catalog/pa1151323>)



Figure 4: Himmler standing on the steps of the Mauthausen concentration camp brothel in October 1941 (Himmler at the barracks, n.d., <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4976754/The-Auschwitz-BROTHEL-prisoners-rewarded.html>)

Life in the Bordellos

- Often presented as a “volunteer” position
- Typically promised better living conditions as well as freedom after a set period of time
 - They would never be freed
- Frequently used as a reward system for fellow male prisoners and pleasure for guards
 - Occasionally used as a “cure for gay men”



Figure 7: An armed Nazi searches a woman by pulling down her underwear. (An armed Nazi searches a woman by pulling down her underwear, n.d., <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1180296>)

Differentiation in Bordellos

- Varied from camp to camp
 - “nur fur ofitserin”, “Only for the officers,” tattooed across their stomachs
 - Selected vs. volunteering
 - Clothed in bright colors
- Confusion among the camps
 - The ages of girls in Mauthausen
 - Separate brothels for prisoners and officers



Figure 8: Female prisoners in Auschwitz, walking in lines with their heads shaven (Bald women walking in order, n.d., <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4976754/The-Auschwitz-BROTHEL-prisoners-rewarded.html>)

Sexual Bartering

- Women bargained their bodies for necessities to survive
- Beatrix Sachs
 - Brought food for her and her children
 - The “sensible thing to do”
- They exchanged sex for many things
 - Clothes, food, protection, medicine, ect.
- Alice Haberland
 - Saved four people including her sick sister



Figure 9: Prisoners of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp cheerfully collect bread rations upon their liberation by British forces in April 1945. (Women receiving bread rations after liberation, n.d., <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2018/january/29/180129-holocaust-memorial-day>)

Victims After Liberation

- The worry of their families knowing and going through Shanda
 - Extreme shame or pity
- An attempt to keep Kiddushin
 - Holiness of marriage
- Lost of status as a state recognized victim status
 - Could have been seen as a collaborator
- The “Hierarchy of Suffering”
 - “Is molestation important?”



Figure 10: Liberated female prisoners in the womens' camp at Woebbelin. (Women smiling now that they have been liberated, n.d., <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1039411>)

Conclusion

- Women would not speak out for many reasons
- In 2007, the 1st conference was held to talk about the “sexual violation” women endured
- In 2017, the #MeToo movement allowed for the conversation around sexual assault to be normalized
- Historians have avoided the subject due to its sensitive subject matter
- All were victims, whether it be with the bordello system or scattered throughout the camp

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