

## The Most Emblematic of All Deviants

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Within the context of the discriminatory practices and ideologies of the Third Reich, the prostitute is "the most emblematic of deviants."[\[1\]](#) The history of prostitutes under Nazi rule constitutes the intersection of a multitude of ethical, sexual, racial, political and historiographical issues. A look to regulation will reveal that, while the Third Reich's policy on prostitution did represent a radical break from Weimar policies of venal sexuality, one need not look far into Germany's pre-democratic past to discover the historical antecedents of the Nazis' "brothelization" of prostitution. What becomes apparent is that the ways in which prostitution was legally encoded in the Nazi state were in no way innovative; rather, it is the motivations behind regulation policy and sexual politics in general in the Third Reich that are horrifically revolutionary. The mobilization of prostitution for the sake of the Nazi war machine and racist and pronatalist policies is but one example of the ways in which sexuality was instrumentalized by Hitler to further the goals of the aggressively expansionist state.

### **Stasis and Dynamism: the Changing Face of Prostitution in the Nazi State**

The era of German history immediately prior to Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in 1933 is known as the Weimar period. Historians, and particularly those scholars writing in the first decades after the end of the Second World War, have traditionally characterized the Weimar government as sexually and socially permissive, particularly for women. For example, the increasingly late age of marriage among couples, combined with the economic instability of Europe in the early twentieth century, necessitated in a new way the presence of working women in the public sphere, and particularly in Germany. Contemporary conservatives decried the rise of the "New Woman" as a cultural icon, a figure whose liberation and self-sufficiency was condemned as "self-serving, promiscuous, and unmotherly."[\[2\]](#) Later, Nazi ideologues depicted the social and sexual politics of the Weimar era in the same light; they heaped contempt on the previous regime for allowing for the physical and sexual corruption of the German population.[\[3\]](#)

Central to discussions of sexuality and prostitution in the Third Reich is the question of continuities between the Weimar government and the Nazi regime in terms of policy on state-regulated prostitution. While earlier historians of sexuality under Nazism argued for the sexually repressive nature of the Third Reich, a radical break from the sexual liberality of the Weimar era, more recent historians have endeavoured to add nuance to this sharp distinction between periods. They advocate a reconceptualization of sexuality in the Reich, and argue that the Nazi period actually continued or even accelerated the Weimar-era loosening of sexual mores. To make their case, they contend that

prostitution policy in the Nazi state was in no way static, but dynamic and ever-evolving. These revisionist historians maintain that it is only in the early years of Hitler's government, in the prewar era, that the National Socialist platform advocated for sexual conservatism and the repression of prostitution in Germany. Scholars who emphasize this early rhetoric as representative of the regime as a whole, however, miss the larger picture. Once the war began, the policing of promiscuity and prostitution was increasingly eclipsed by the state's preoccupation with the war effort. Indeed, this paper will take this argument one step further: in the latter years of the Third Reich, codes of appropriate sexual and even racial conduct were ultimately abandoned, as sexual desire was deliberately harnessed and utilized by the Nazi state as a means of furthering wartime goals. An examination of the various stages of legislation and policy on regulated prostitution and sexuality more broadly reveal an accelerating process of instrumentalization of sex and sex work. More broadly, "lesser" Nazi ideologies, including ideas of sexual propriety, were modified and even sacrificed for the ultimate long-term goal of the National Socialist state: military dominance.

The phases of the development of Nazi-era prostitution policy are best articulated by Annette F. Timm, who summarizes them as follows: "(1) the rhetorical and legal marginalization of prostitutes, (2) the growing acceptance of prostitution in practice; and (3) the subordination of prostitution policy to the war effort."<sup>[4]</sup> These developments in the punishment, control, and ultimate promotion of prostitution in Nazi Germany are revelatory of the ways in which the Third Reich's administrative and legislative policies are both in continuity and disparity with those of the Weimar state. Furthermore, this framework illustrates the way in which shifts in the official position on prostitution were increasingly made to accommodate the sexual "needs of soldiers and workers in the war economy,"<sup>[5]</sup> which speaks to the instrumentalization of sexual politics for the sake of the expansionist agenda of the Nazi state. Timm's stages of prostitution policy are therefore worth exploring in some detail.

The first phase of Nazi prostitution policy, initiated immediately upon Hitler's rise to power, is the only stage that can legitimately be read as sexually repressive and punitive of sexual deviants, a "regression" from Weimar moves toward liberality. Party officials railed against the degradation of the German state and race brought about by the sexual immorality allowed to develop in the Weimar period. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler insisted that "'the fight against the venereal diseases and their pacemaker, prostitution, is not one, but the due of the nation!'"<sup>[6]</sup> An editorial in *Der Angriff*, a newspaper edited by Josef Goebbels, accused the government of Berlin of "supporting the establishment of licensed brothels to 'increase the profits of Jewish businessmen.'"<sup>[7]</sup> In 1933, Hermann Göring issued a decree against "public immorality" and promised to reverse the permissive nature of the 1927 Venereal Disease law, which abolished state-regulated prostitution in the Weimar period. Later that year, street soliciting was made illegal once more, providing the police with the authority and justification for massive round-ups of sex workers. According to Julia Roos, "it has been estimated that 'thousands, even more likely tens of thousands' of prostitutes were arrested during the spring and summer of 1933."<sup>[8]</sup> Police efforts were facilitated by the new Nazi vocabulary of asociality, referring to individuals who, through their deviant behaviour, represented enemies of the German *Volk*. The broad term "asocial" was liberally applied to promiscuous women and prostitutes, as the "primary carriers of fertility-threatening disease thought to damage the future of the nation," in order to justify the incarceration of these women.<sup>[9]</sup> Furthermore,

in 1935, the Nuremberg Laws prohibited sexual contact between Aryans and non-Aryan individuals.<sup>[10]</sup> As the group most frequently and publicly engaged in indiscriminate sex, prostitutes were particularly targeted by this new legislation. In short, in this early period, it appeared that the full force of Nazi eugenicist, racist, and nationalist policy was levelled against the "problem" of prostitution.

However, the government's behaviour surrounding the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin indicates a shift in priorities away from this early tendency toward sexual repression in the name of political expediency. In preparation for the influx of foreign visitors, German police, in addition to temporarily concealing anti-Semitic propaganda in the city, rounded up the "'work-shy' and asocial residents" of Berlin and sent them to Dachau, so that their presence might not offend the sensibilities of international tourists.<sup>[11]</sup> Timm astutely interprets this event as symbolic of the Nazi stance on issues of sexuality and prostitution: the *optics* of morality matter much more than actual moral behaviour.<sup>[12]</sup>

While in the early period of the Third Reich politicians took up sexually conservative rhetoric in order to curry domestic favour and support, this soon came into conflict with the practicalities of the war effort: "by 1936, the Military Supreme Command declared the construction of military brothels 'an urgent necessity' and insisted that health authorities should cooperate."<sup>[13]</sup> As the mobilization for war accelerated, regulated prostitution was increasingly looked to as a solution for VD control among soldiers.<sup>[14]</sup> Timm concludes that, in this second phase of prostitution policy, prostitutes transitioned in status from reviled asocials to critical figures in German wartime culture: they "were suddenly touted as socially necessary, if not exactly social insiders. At the very least, prostitutes began to occupy a more ambivalent position in German society than had ever been the case in the past."<sup>[15]</sup> This stage marks a shift in the enclosure of sex workers from the prison back to the brothel, in a kind of productive incarceration.

Stage three of prostitution policy represents the final abandonment of any pretence of sexual conservatism, as sex was held out by Nazi officials as a reward for soldiers, SS men, camp inmates, and civilians. Timm argues that this final moment in Nazi regulation begins with a secret directive from 9 September 1939, calling for the reconstruction of brothels for the service of soldiers. In 1942, Heinrich Himmler ordered that brothels be established in concentration camps in order "to provide 'productivity incentives for male inmates."<sup>[16]</sup> Interestingly, access to brothels was also provided to foreign workers in Germany, in the hopes that the controlled satisfaction of the labourers' sexual appetites would "protect German women from sexual danger and defilement."<sup>[17]</sup>

Simultaneously, stricter controls were put in place on prostitutes who worked outside the state-run brothel system. On 18 September 1939, the Ministry of the Interior circulated a missive instructing health and police authorities to "be particularly vigilant regarding all 'women who frequent bars and similar facilities for the purpose of stimulating, entertaining, etc.'"<sup>[18]</sup> Significantly, these women were not necessarily selling sex, but merely behaving promiscuously in public. Timm summarizes this hypocritical concealment of sexuality in a state that tolerated prostitution in the following way:

Prostitution stands as an example of the extreme ambiguity of the National Socialists' moral purification project: the regime sought to shield German society from sexual deviancy, yet just past the boundaries of this "cleansed" public sphere lurked officially promoted sexual vice.[\[19\]](#)

Once again, we see the promotion of the illusion of national sexual conservatism occurring simultaneously with the accommodation (perhaps abandonment) of sexual morality to the demands of the war effort. Thus, an analysis of the three phases of prostitution policy in the Third Reich puts the lie to historians' assertions that the Nazi period was a time of sexual repression and conservatism, and in that sense marks a radical break with the relatively permissive nature of the Weimar Republic.

### **The Third Reich: *Sonderweg* or "Spanner in the Works?"**

In spite of Timm's demonstration of the fact that the continuity/discontinuity dichotomy *vis-à-vis* Nazi prostitution policy is, at best, less than instructive, and, at worst, an obfuscation of the dynamic nature of sexual politics in the Third Reich, many historians continue to view the question through this particular lens. Likely, these scholars continue to be influenced by the *Sonderweg* debate, a long-standing historiographical discussion of the development of the Nazi state. Historians of Nazi Germany have traditionally been divided into two ideological camps: those that view the Third Reich as an aberration in German history, and those who reach into the nation's history to unearth the German *Sonderweg*, or "'special path'" of events that led to the rise of National Socialism.[\[20\]](#) Supporters of the latter view contend that "Germany had taken a 'wrong' turning in the later eighteenth century" in rejecting the democratic principles of the Enlightenment, leading to "political 'immaturity' once a democratic system was later established."[\[21\]](#) For example, Richard Bessel, in his article, "Germany from War to Dictatorship," argues that, given its shaky social and political foundations, the parliamentary democracy of the Weimar Republic was doomed to fail.[\[22\]](#) In representing the German population after World War I as a group desperately searching for a return to prewar stability at any cost, together with the inexorable demise of the Weimar government, Bessel depicts the rise of the Nazi party as a historical inevitability.[\[23\]](#) While the *Sonderweg* theory has been critiqued in recent years as an inherently ethnocentric argument (by arguing that deviation from the particularly *Western* ideal led to the rise of the Third Reich), what is significant for this paper is the emphasis it places on ideological and legal continuities between the National Socialist state and previous German governments.

The opposing, and perhaps more diplomatically convenient historical narrative, holds the Nazi state to be an "'industrial accident'—like dropping a spanner in the works" of history.[\[24\]](#) Theorists of this perspective argue that the Third Reich constituted a radical break from preceding regimes, an unprecedented, unexpected and anomalous event. In the words of Comintern agent Karl Radek in reference to the National Socialists, "It is a party without history which suddenly emerges in German political life, just as an island suddenly emerges in the middle of the sea owing to volcanic forces."[\[25\]](#) Historians such as Peter Loewenberg have been quick to frame the Nazi state as an unforeseen by-product of the fallout from World War I, a "catastrophic" and unanticipated conflict that

cannot be blamed on Germany's nature or "special path."<sup>[26]</sup> As with the *Sonderweg* argument, this historiographical theory has proved insufficient to encapsulate the reality of the Third Reich. Proponents of the "spanner" theory have been criticized as German apologists for their refusal to recognize the connection between Nazism and German culture. Collective dissatisfaction with both historiographical approaches to the Nazi period among the academic community reveals that such argumentative dichotomies are far too simplistic and reductionist to address appropriately a notoriously complex, nuanced, and, in some ways, incomprehensible epoch.

Numerous studies of prostitution in the Third Reich have oriented themselves in relation to the *Sonderweg*/spanner debate. As Dagmar Herzog observes, immediate postwar perceptions of sexuality under Nazism among academics regarded the Third Reich as sexually repressive, and therefore discontinuous with the policies of earlier regimes. She writes, "The Nazis, as they worked to consolidate power, sanctimoniously claimed to be restoring law and order and returning marriage and family life to their proper dignity. Many scholars have taken them at their word."<sup>[27]</sup> Legal theorist Edward Ross Dickinson also observes this historiographical trend: "It has sometimes been tempting to see National Socialism in Germany as in some sense the apotheosis of the development of the social-regulatory state."<sup>[28]</sup> Often, the case of historians who argue for a sexually repressed Reich is made by comparing the Nazi state to the Weimar period, generally idealized as a time of relative sexual liberality.<sup>[29]</sup>

With respect to histories of prostitution specifically, those who argue for ideological and administrative discontinuity between the Weimar and Nazi regimes look to the 1927 Law for the Combating of Venereal Diseases, passed by the Weimar parliament, deregulating prostitution. Victoria Harris observes that, not only was regulation abolished, but "'welfare and rescue centres' were established... 'with more human social programs designed to help prostitutes return to normal life.'"<sup>[30]</sup> However, in addition to deregulation, the 1927 legislation criminalized soliciting "in a lewd manner or near schools or churches" and those who "knowingly" endangered the health of others by engaging in sexual contact while infected with venereal disease.<sup>[31]</sup> In spite of these potential legal avenues for the persecution of prostitutes, Julia Roos maintains that the Weimar Republic was indeed a period of sexual and social liberality. She argues that the Venereal Diseases law represented a major victory for feminists and social reformers who campaigned for the abolition of regulation throughout the 1920s.<sup>[32]</sup> These activists argued that state-sanctioned prostitution was not only hypocritical and misogynistic, but ultimately ineffective in controlling the spread of VD among the German population, and that their voices were heard in the Weimar Republic.<sup>[33]</sup> By contrast, Roos outlines the gradual infringements on the rights of prostitutes under Nazi rule, culminating in the reintroduction of regulation policy in 1933 with the Emergency Decree for the Protection of People and the State.<sup>[34]</sup>

In opposition to figures like Roos, more recent German historians (including Annette F. Timm, discussed above) tend to emphasize continuities, rather than administrative breaks, between the Weimar and Nazi regimes by correcting misconceptions about the "liberality" of the Weimar period and by emphasizing the relatively derivative regulationist policies of the Reich. Elizabeth Heineman, for example, takes note of the potentially repressive nature of the 1927 Venereal Disease law. She looks to the

institutionalization of mandatory VD inspections for those individuals "'strongly suspected' of carrying disease" as a kind of *de facto* form of regulation.<sup>[35]</sup> Furthermore, she argues that the new legislation merely brought about a changing of hands of the task of surveillance between state bureaus: "with health and social welfare agencies, not the police, now responsible for work with prostitutes, medical professionals and social workers performed punitive functions formerly reserved for the police."<sup>[36]</sup>

Victoria Harris also takes up Heineman's sceptical assessment of the 1927 "deregulation" law as a mere legislative shift from police to medical and administrative supervision of prostitutes. In making the case for Weimar's less-than-benevolent stance on prostitution, Harris argues that, for the most part, the Third Reich's punitive measures against prostitutes were actually a continuation of Weimar policy. She writes, "the incarceration of prostitution before 1937 often had little to do with *Nazi* policies of detention and exclusion. Instead, bureaucrats took advantage of the changed political climate to incarcerate greater numbers of women using *Weimar* policies."<sup>[37]</sup> Harris maintains that this administrative continuity was facilitated by the simultaneous continuity of personnel in state medical and welfare positions between the two governments.<sup>[38]</sup> As an illustration, she discusses the case of social worker Käthe Petersen, who remained in the same position throughout the Weimar, Nazi, and postwar periods, ultimately retiring in 1978.<sup>[39]</sup> In spite of her roots in the supposedly liberal Weimar administration, Harris observes that Petersen was in fact responsible for the incarceration of scores of prostitutes in concentration camps and welfare homes over the years of Nazi rule.<sup>[40]</sup>

Heineman accounts for the behaviour of welfare workers like Petersen as a kind of small-scale "collective radicalization" of medical and administrative communities under the Third Reich. She describes the phenomenon as "The simultaneous cooperation and competition among" self-interested and opportunistic medical personnel that ultimately "drew sexually errant women into an ever-tightening web" of punitive and regulationist measures.<sup>[41]</sup> However, it is important to note that, until the Nazi concentration camp became "'a universe of horror'" during the latter portion of World War II, the experience of incarceration for deviants and "asocials," including prostitutes, was another site of continuity between the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich.<sup>[42]</sup> Harris notes that (former Weimar) welfare workers and members of the medical administration utilized the newly-minted Nazi concentration and work camps as one space among many for the incarceration of sexually deviant women. She writes, "Camps operated in conjunction with a variety of workhouses, asylums, and rescue homes, most of which had been in use before 1933."<sup>[43]</sup> The fact that Nazi concentration camps were regarded (and experienced) by prostitutes as more or less equivalent to the conventional workhouses and welfare homes of the Weimar Republic bears consideration.

What makes the Reich different from, or, in historiographical language, *discontinuous* with the Weimar period, is the reversal of the deregulation of prostitution in 1927. However, a broader view of German history reveals that Nazi-era regulated prostitution was still in line with Wilhelmine principles of sexual policy, which had far deeper roots in the nation's past than the rather anomalous move to deregulate in the Weimar era. A historical timeline that reaches beyond the Weimar Republic to the German Empire reveals that the Third Reich's institution of regulation represented a return to more traditional methods

of coping with (and mobilizing) prostitution. As Lynn Abrams observes, regulation in the German Empire in the late nineteenth century was intended "to protect innocent (middle-class) women from being harassed" while still meeting the sexual needs of well-to-do gentlemen whose political and financial support was courted by the state.<sup>[44]</sup> Similar goals appear in the Nazi-era implementation of regulation. Timm locates the push for the enclosure of prostitution in the Reich in Wilhelmine desires to conceal the ways in which the government coerced various sectors of the male population through sex: The priority of regulation was the "sanitation of the street scene" in order to "preserve the public façade of idyllic family life, to allow men a private release for their more base sexual needs, and to protect the image of woman as mother from the contradiction of the public whore."<sup>[45]</sup> While the comparison of Nazi and Wilhelmine prostitution policy merits further investigation, it is simply nodded to in this paper in order to illustrate that sexual politics in the Third Reich and Germany generally are too complex to be reduced to the question of continuity or discontinuity with the immediately previous political system.

A new crop of historians make the same point in their analyses of sexuality and sexual politics in the Third Reich. In opposition to those who argue that the Nazi period was a time of unprecedented sexual conservatism and violent repression, scholars such as Dagmar Herzog contend that, in fact, there were many opportunities for Germans to engage in pre- and extra-marital sex in the Nazi state. To say otherwise, Herzog contends, is to take Nazi rhetoric and propaganda at face value.<sup>[46]</sup> In agreement with Herzog, Annette Timm writes, with respect to prostitution in particular,

The *appearance* of sexual purity was uppermost in the minds of health authorities and their political superiors... Image, needless to say, had little to do with reality and a pragmatic tolerance for prostitution as a practice always hid behind the public demonization and legal marginalization of prostitutes as individuals.<sup>[47]</sup>

Looking to the observation of Herbert Marcuse that the "'inducement' to sexual desire was pervasive," Herzog contends that the sexual permissiveness of the Nazi state had a particular political bent.<sup>[48]</sup> As we will see, tolerated prostitution represents a critical aspect of a broader process of sexual *Gleichschaltung*, through which the promise of sexual rewards and freedom was used to coerce the German population (as well as the military and party members) into the wholesale acceptance of Nazism.<sup>[49]</sup>

### **Sex in the Service of the State: Miscegenation, the Camps, and the Military**

What becomes apparent upon studying regulated prostitution in the Third Reich in comparison with earlier German political regimes is that the distinction to be made concerning prostitution under Nazism is not the actual policies, but the ideological and political motivations behind them. This section will explore the horrifically revolutionary ways in which the German state under Nazism overtly instrumentalized sexuality, and prostitution in particular, not for financial gain, but to further political agendas. As Elizabeth Heineman observes, the shift in the priorities, not the policies or practices of the state, was dramatic: "Rather than a woman's exchange of sex for a client's money or goods, we might see this as an exchange in which the state—not the woman—offers sex in exchange for men's labour and loyalty."<sup>[50]</sup>

In order to fully understand the nature and implications of regulation and sexuality in the Third Reich, this new definition of the goals of prostitution must be borne in mind. Some historians have legitimately raised the question as whether this form of sexual exchange, which is really "An exchange between the state and men," in which prostituted women are particularly "unfree," can really be referred to as prostitution. Others have more bluntly, and, perhaps appropriately, referred to Nazi regulation practices as a kind of institutionalized rape.<sup>[51]</sup> However, this paper will continue to refer to this group of women as prostitutes, and this group of behaviours as prostitution. It can be argued that, even when prostitutes receive money personally and directly for sexual favours, they are no less 'unfree,' nor have they ultimately materially profited from the interaction. Furthermore, on the most fundamental level, Nazi brothels were utilized as an exchange of sexual services for material gain, if not always financial, and in that sense represent a form of commercial sexual exchange.

Within the context of the infamous Nazi labour camps, prostitution was utilized as a means of reinforcing racial policy by preventing sexual contact between foreign (and, therefore, mostly non-Aryan) workers and ethnically desirable Germans. In 1935, the Nuremberg laws prohibited marriage and sexual contact between Aryans and non-Aryans.<sup>[52]</sup> Later, in 1942, "the death penalty was officially adopted to punish any foreign worker from the East who had sexual intercourse with a German."<sup>[53]</sup> Condemnations of miscegenation, or "race defilement," abounded in political rhetoric under the Third Reich, on the grounds that interracial sex led to the "physical degeneration of the 'European' individual, race, and nation."<sup>[54]</sup> These racist beliefs, which had been rooted in European culture since the nineteenth century, were compounded by the desire of the German state to overcome the nation's declining birthrate by producing a population of genetically and racially "viable" Germans.<sup>[55]</sup> Accordingly, any sexual contact between Aryans and non-Aryans was interpreted as a threat to the future of the nation, already under siege by the influx of "foreigners" corrupting and diluting the German gene pool.

In spite of the Nuremberg prohibitions against interracial sexual contact, reports of affairs between ethnic Germans and foreign labourers and POWs flooded the Nazi state. Jeffrey Burds notes that the prevalence of romantic relationships between German women and foreign men was such that, in 1944, the SD circulated a "secret report lambasting the 'immoral conduct of German women,' among whom 'a significant proportion of women and girls' had showed an alarming inclination to 'exploit the situation sexually.'"<sup>[56]</sup> Objections were also made among bureaucrats and political leaders concerning the frequency of illicit sexual contact between foreign women working in Germany and German soldiers and male youths.<sup>[57]</sup> In one publicized incident in Stuttgart, four German youths had intercourse with several French women, two of whom had venereal disease that was passed on to the boys.<sup>[58]</sup> Such incidents were not only a source of public humiliation for Germany, but also represented a considerable threat to the health of a nation (and, importantly, its fighting forces) already rife with cases of VD.

Nonetheless, foreign and forced labour service was considered by many German officials to be the solution to the nation's labour shortage, and increasingly large numbers of workers were brought into Germany. By 1940, for example, 700,000 Poles alone were engaged in forced labour in

Germany.<sup>[59]</sup> Such valuable assets to the state (and the war effort) could not be rejected for the sake of sexual morality, or even to preserve the genetic purity of the German population. The resolution to this issue, initiated in 1940 at the Reichswerke factory of Hermann Göring in Linz, was the introduction of brothels for foreign workers and POWs, intended to diminish the need among foreign men for sexual contact with German women. In theory, each brothel was to be staffed by women of the same race or nationality as their clients. According to one memo, "It is to be strictly enforced that no Germans go to the houses staffed with foreign girls, and that no foreign workers get into the German houses existing in the city."<sup>[60]</sup> This communication speaks to the ways in which prostitution policy was, in an ideal scenario, subjugated to and brought into conformity with Nazi racial ideologies and principles. In confirmation, Timm writes, "The official justification was that providing foreign workers with prostitutes (particularly when these women were themselves foreigners or 'Gypsies') would protect German women from sexual danger and defilement."<sup>[61]</sup> In this way, prostitution was mobilized by the Nazi state as a bulwark against miscegenation and as a means of maintaining the racial policies of the state.

Outside of Germany proper, similar sites of prostitution were established in order to prevent sexual contact between German soldiers and occupied populations. Heineman challenges the assumption of some historians that Wehrmacht soldiers blindly "accepted propagandists' insistence that Jews [and other foreign groups] were unthinkable as sexual partners."<sup>[62]</sup> Indeed, it is now a commonly acknowledged fact that rape in German-occupied territory, particularly on the Eastern front, was widespread.<sup>[63]</sup> Once more, in the hopes of discouraging such behaviour, prostitution was looked to as the solution to the sexual issues raised by Nazi racial policy. In an internationally unprecedented initiative, Germany introduced the *Einsatzfrauen*, a chilling parallel to the *Einsatzgruppen* of the SS. These travelling brothels followed the Wehrmacht on campaigns, catering to "the sexual needs of German soldiers."<sup>[64]</sup> In line with the racial policies applied to the POW and foreign labour brothels in Germany, military brothels were to be staffed with Aryan women, so that soldiers could slake their lust while still adhering to the Nuremberg laws.

However, when "the Wehrmacht's huge demand far outstripped the supply of available women," recruits from local populations were often blonde-haired and blue-eyed, to preserve the illusion of conformity with race regulations.<sup>[65]</sup> In lieu of providing the fighting forces with access to their actual racial "equals," Nazi officials endeavoured to preserve the illusion of maintaining racial policy, while covertly prioritizing the sexual satisfaction of their soldiers over preserving their racial and sexual purity. Such measures of expediency are revelatory. Initially, state-sanctioned prostitution was taken up in the Third Reich in order to facilitate the implementation of racial ideology. However, once wartime demand on the sex trade became too great, even much-touted racial ideals were sacrificed in the name of (anticipated) military success. Here, we see how the shifting policies on prostitution participated in a larger trend in the Third Reich: the subordination of other political and ideological agendas to the exigencies of war.

In addition to bolstering (at least the optics of) racial policy, regulated prostitution was also deployed in concentration camps in the Third Reich in order to maintain order and morale. In response to a

perceived epidemic of sexual violence against inmates (both men and women) by camp guards,[\[66\]](#) the construction of camp brothels began in 1942 on Himmler's orders. By 1944, brothels had been opened in eight concentration camps, including Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen and Dachau.[\[67\]](#) Female inmates imprisoned for prostitution were the first to be conscripted into brothel work. Other women volunteered, in the hopes that living conditions within the brothel would be an improvement upon normal camp life.[\[68\]](#) While camp prostitutes did indeed benefit from more food and shorter work hours,[\[69\]](#) life was far from pleasant. In Ravensbrück concentration camp, Burds estimates that women working in brothels were "each responsible for servicing seven or more men a day."[\[70\]](#) In reflecting on her time as a brothel inmate, one woman informed historian Christa Paul that "It was nothing personal, one felt like a robot. They did not take notice of us; we were the lowest of the low. We were only good for this... Everything was so mechanical and indifferent... They finished their business and left."[\[71\]](#)

Given the typical treatment of camp sex workers, one may well draw the conclusion that concerns over sexual violence in the camps was not the primary motivation behind the introduction of brothels. As Heineman observes, "Despite postwar assertions that hunger and overwork caused male prisoners to lose their sexual appetites, camp administrators evidently knew otherwise when they calculated that passes to brothels would motivate inmates to good work and obedience."[\[72\]](#) While some historians may wish to minimize this distasteful aspect of camp life, the fact that prostitution was utilized in order to motivate male inmates is undeniable. In confirmation of Heineman's contention that "sex was a key incentive to stimulate productivity among prisoners," Heinrich Himmler is quoted as saying, "This whole issue is not particularly pretty, but it is natural, and if I can use nature as an incentive for higher performance, then I think we have to take advantage of this incentive."[\[73\]](#) Once more, we see how sexuality (and prostitution in particular) is harnessed, controlled, and channelled in directions that are beneficial to the goals of the Nazi state.

Still more disturbing than the practice of holding out commercial sex as proverbial "carrot" for concentration camp inmates is the suggestion, introduced by several historians, that sex within the brothels was used to further demoralize inmates. As peepholes were installed in many bedroom doors, sexual interactions between inmates (and their fellow-inmate prostitutes) was often a voyeuristic spectacle for camp guards. Heineman also points out that sexual performance on the part of the men "gifted" with brothel passes may have been, in a bizarre way, tied to survival: "inmate visitors may have feared that they risked punishment if they did not perform... Camp authorities thus extended the general atmosphere of danger into the brothels.[\[74\]](#) Still other historians, such as George Mosse, have suggested that men imprisoned for their homosexuality were forced to prove their capacity for heterosexual sex through public intercourse with camp prostitutes.[\[75\]](#) Postwar memoirs written by camp inmates also reveal feelings of contempt and revulsion directed at women who worked in the brothels, suggesting that prostitutes were also "tainted" by their roles in the camps.[\[76\]](#) Camp brothels were used not only to reward inmates, but the institution was also drawn into the horrific machinery through which individuals "undesirable" to the German state were dehumanized and, subsequently, exterminated.

Though he was responsible for the promotion of regulated prostitution in the concentration camps, in Himmler's eyes, the most important way in which prostitution was deployed in the service of the Nazi war machine was through the military brothel. His insistence on the necessity of regular sexual contact for young German soldiers was premised on the long-standing popular conception of male sexuality as an irrepressible force that must be channelled productively.<sup>[77]</sup> Anxious discussions of the insatiability of German youths over the course of the Third Reich demonstrate the prevalence of this belief. Often, it was believed, sexual desire led to acts of sexual violence among young men. Robert G. Waite observes that some Nazi "authorities maintained that the jokes of teenage males told among themselves, the erotic sketches or pictures they liked to view, the games they played, or the taunting of an older youth about masturbation arouse their sexual drives to a point where they could no longer control them."<sup>[78]</sup> Once more, brothels were turned to by the Nazi state as a safety-valve to control the disorderly sexual drives of the *Männerbund*.

While health and administrative authorities claimed that military brothels were necessary in order to stop the spread of venereal disease among the troops, the outcry from the medical community objecting that regulation had time and time again proven itself ineffective in disease control has led many historians to conclude that other motivations were at work.<sup>[79]</sup> In addition to keeping the destructive sexual energies of the Wehrmacht in check, Timm contends that military brothels, like camp brothels, were held out as rewards for service to the state.<sup>[80]</sup> While German soldiers were entitled to five or six brothel visits per month, "commands could also reward... special services by issuing passes for supplementary sex."<sup>[81]</sup> Not only were brothel visits treated as *a posteriori* recognition of military prowess, Timm suggests that it was a belief among the Wehrmacht that sexual intercourse made men better soldiers: "The view that male sexual urges were basically uncontrollable had long been a feature of anti-VD policies in Germany, but National Socialism took this belief one step further, equating sexual gratification with masculine power...Soldiers, it was thought, drew strength from their sexual encounters with prostitutes."<sup>[82]</sup> In summary, within the context of the Nazi military brothel, women (and their sexuality) were subjugated in order to bolster the military prowess of men.

Perhaps most significantly for Himmler, prostitution was utilized in order to discourage homosexual contact between men of the Wehrmacht. From the beginning of the Reich in 1933, homosexuality (almost exclusively between men) was punished with increasing virulence, on the grounds that sexual interaction between men was inconsistent with the pronatalist goals of the nation.<sup>[83]</sup> Additionally, the prevalence of homosexuality within the Wehrmacht was considered to be a point of humiliation for Germany, a potential sign, or even cause of the weakness of the fighting forces. It was also something, officials feared, that could potentially be exploited in Allied propaganda.<sup>[84]</sup> Accordingly, soldiers convicted of homosexuality were punished much more severely than civilian men, up to and including the death sentence.<sup>[85]</sup> In addition to such punitive measures, Himmler hoped that the availability of women in brothels would put an end to homosexuality in the Wehrmacht. According to Himmler, "every barred opportunity to get together with girls... --even if it is for money--will motivate a large contingent to join the other side."<sup>[86]</sup> Such beliefs were reinforced by military studies that discovered men of the Wehrmacht were most inclined to homosexual activity immediately upon return from leave, indicating that the transition to celibacy prompted the "deviant" behaviour.<sup>[87]</sup> In this way, Nazi officials

hoped to undermine the inherent homoeroticism of the *Männerbund* with the introduction of military prostitution.<sup>[88]</sup>

## Conclusion

As we have seen, engaging the question of the historical continuities and disparities of Nazism, even from the perspective of a small-scale case study of tolerated prostitution in the Third Reich, quickly exposes the complexities and contradictions that must be addressed in the historiographical *Sonderweg*/spanner debate. While historians and West-Germans in the immediate postwar era regarded Nazism as radically different from earlier German political regimes, an examination of the continuity of policies on prostitution between Weimar and the Third Reich reveals a much more complicated picture of the relationship between the Nazism and German history. Indeed, a close analysis of the values reflected by regulation under the Reich speak to further commonalities between the Nazi state and the Wilhelmine empire: both regimes demonstrate a willingness to compromise sexual morality in order to curry political support from social elites. Ultimately, what becomes apparent in explorations of prostitution under the Third Reich is that Nazism's radical break from Germany's history is not derived from policy; it is the motivations, both ideological and mercenary, behind these policies that represent National Socialism's fundamental difference from the past. With respect to prostitution, the introduction of brothels to various sites of internment in Germany, as well as military brothels, demonstrate the revolutionary ways in which prostitution was harnessed, controlled, and productively channelled for the betterment of the Nazi state. In this way, the age-old instrumentalization of sexuality represented by prostitution itself was brought to new and terrible heights.

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[1] Victoria Harris, "The Role of the Concentration Camps in the Nazi Repression of Prostitutes, 1933-9," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45:3 (2010): 677. SAGE Publications (accessed 27 September 2012).

[2] Annette F. Timm, *The Politics of Fertility: Population Politics and Health Care in Berlin, 1919-1972*. (PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 1998). (Chicago: UMI Microfilm, 1999), 49.

[3] *Ibid.*, 377.

[4] 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: Princeton University Press, 2001), 192.

[5] Timm, *The Politics of Fertility*, 382.

[6] *Ibid.*, 377.

[7] Julia Roos, "Backlash against Prostitutes' Rights," in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, ed., Dagmar Herzog (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 79.

[8] Ibid., 81-82.

[9] Timm, "Ambivalent Outsider," 192.

[10] Annette F. Timm, "Sex with a Purpose" in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, ed., Dagmar Herzog (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005): 234.

[11] Ibid., 236.

[12] Ibid., 237.

[13] Timm, "Ambivalent Outsider," 195.

[14] Ibid., 198.

[15] Ibid., 197.

[16] Ibid., 201.

[17] Nazi legislation stipulated that women working in brothels serving foreign workers should be staffed exclusively by non-Aryan women, in order to preserve the purity of the Aryan race. The distance between this legislative ideal and historical reality will be discussed in greater detail subsequently in this paper. Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 202.

[19] Ibid., 204.

[20] Jürgen Kocka, "Asymmetrical Historical Comparison: The Case of the German *Sonderweg*," *History and Theory* 38:1(February 1999): 40. JSTOR (accessed 3 September 2012).

[21] Jill Stephenson, "The Rise of the Nazis: *Sonderweg* or spanner in the works?" in *Twentieth Century Germany*, ed., Martin Fulbrook (Arnold, 2001), 79-80.

[22] Richard Bessel, "Germany from war to dictatorship," in *Twentieth Century Germany*, ed., Martin Fulbrook (Arnold, 2001), 14.

[23] Ibid., 33.

[24] Stephenson, "The Rise of the Nazis," 79.

[25] Karl Radek quoted in Stephenson, "The rise of the Nazis," 77.

[26] Peter Loewenberg, "The Appeal to Youth," in *The Nazi Revolution*, ed., Allan Mitchell (DC Heath, 1990), 79.

[27] Dagmar Herzog, "Hubris and Hypocrisy, Incitement and Disavowal: Sexuality and German Fascism," in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, ed., Dagmar Herzog (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 3.

[28] Edward Ross Dickinson, "Policing Sex in Germany, 1882-1982: A Preliminary Statistical Analysis," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16:2 (May 2007): 205. JSTOR (accessed 7 November 2012).

[29] Roos, "Backlash," 68.

- [30] Victoria Harris, "The Role of the Concentration Camps," 680.
- [31] Ross Dickinson, "Policing Sex," 18.
- [32] Roos, "Backlash," 68.
- [33] Ibid., 70.
- [34] Ibid., 82.
- [35] Elizabeth D. Heineman, "Sexuality and Nazism: The Doubly Unspeakable?" in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, ed., Dagmar Herzog (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005): 53.
- [36] Ibid.
- [37] Harris, "The Role of the Concentration Camps," 684.
- [38] Ibid., 689.
- [39] Ibid., 697.
- [40] Ibid., 689.
- [41] Heineman, "Sexuality and Nazism," 51.
- [42] Harris, "The Role of the Concentration Camps," 675.
- [43] Ibid., 688.
- [44] Lynn Abrams, "Prostitutes in Imperial Germany, 1870-1918: Working Girls or Social Outcasts?" *The German Underworld: Deviants and Outcasts in German History* ed., Richard J Evans (London: Routledge, 1988), 192.
- [45] Timm, "Ambivalent Outsider," 200.
- [46] Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 5.
- [47] Timm, "Sex with a Purpose," 228.
- [48] Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 28
- [49] Ibid., 26-27.
- [50] Heineman, "Sexuality and Nazism," 54.
- [51] Ibid.
- [52] Patricia Szobar, "Telling Sexual Stories in Nazi Courts of Law: Race Defilement in Germany, 1933-1945," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11:1/2 (Jan-Apr 2002): 132. JSTOR (accessed 7 November, 2012).
- [53] Timm, *Politics of Fertility*, 404.
- [54] Ibid., 131.

[55] Cornelia Osborne, "'Pregnancy is the woman's active service.' Pronatalism in Germany during the First World War," in *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918*, eds., Richard Wall and Jay Winter (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 389-390.

[56] Jeffrey Burds, "Sexual Violence in Europe in World War II, 1939-1945," *Politics & Society* 37:1 (March 2009): 38. SAGE Publications (accessed 27 September, 2012).

[57] Robert G. Waite, "Teenage Sexuality in Nazi Germany," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8:3 (Jan 1998): 454-456. JSTOR (accessed November 7, 2012).

[58] *Ibid.*, 457.

[59] Roos, "Backlash," 92.

[60] *Ibid.*

[61] Timm, "Ambivalent Outsider," 200.

[62] Heineman, "Sexuality and Nazism," 60.

[63] Burds, "Sexual Violence," 38.

[64] *Ibid.*, 38-39.

[65] *Ibid.*, 39.

[66] *Ibid.*, 43.

[67] Roos, "Backlash," 94.

[68] Heineman, "Sexuality and Nazism," 56-57.

[69] *Ibid.*, 57.

[70] Burds, "Sexual Violence," 43.

[71] Roos, "Backlash," 94.

[72] Heineman, "Sexuality and Nazism," 59.

[73] Roos, "Backlash," 94.

[74] Heineman, "Sexuality and Nazism," 59.

[75] George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), 198.

[76] Heineman, "Sexuality and Nazism," 56-57.

[77] Annette F. Timm, *The Politics of Fertility in Twentieth-Century Berlin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 39.

[78] Waite, "Teenage Sexuality," 438.

[79] Heineman, "Sexuality and Nazism," 46-47.

[80] Timm, "Sex with a Purpose," 227.

[81] Burds, "Sexual Violence," 40.

[82] Timm, "Sex with a Purpose," 227.

[83] Waite, "Teenage Sexuality," 472.

[84] *Ibid.*, 473.

[85] *Ibid.*, 450.

[86] Roos, "Backlash," 90.

[87] Waite, "Teenage Sexuality," 472.

[88] George Mosse writes at length about homosexuality and homoeroticism in the German military in his book, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe*.

Interestingly, Mosse argues that the homosocial nature of the German military and society exacerbated and promoted contempt for women. See bibliography below.

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