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### **“I don’t think so that people know about it even”: Camp Forced Sex Labour In the Memory Of Holocaust Survivors**

While research on Nazi camp brothels has traditionally focused on SS registration documents, this paper will explore the dynamics of Holocaust-related forced sex labour and sexualized violence through a study of testimonies by Holocaust survivors. The interviews form part of the Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive (VHA) whose aim it is to document the life stories of genocide survivors. The testimonies were recorded over a period of six years in the mid to late 1990s with survivors aged between seventy and eighty years at that time.

Tracing the lines of personal memory, the challenges of using ego-documents for scientific research will be discussed. A critique of the VHA-specific source forming is at the heart of this paper, as its indexing process lays the normative framework of the research. The memory of forced sex labour is already determined by the VHA definition of “camp brothels”, creating tensions between individual memory and historiographically established fact. It will be shown that gender aspects form an integral part of the politics of Holocaust memory that neglects certain motifs for the benefit of other seemingly universal ones.

Since sex work is a socially heavily tabooed topic, there is no VHA testimony from the personal perspective of a former forced sex worker of a Nazi camp brothel. The actual subject of this study is elusive. Therefore, the analysis of forced sex labour has to focus on testimonies by beneficiaries, confidants, and former inmates who escaped this field of work last-minute. While memory itself is a (re)construction of events, this study examines sex work and sex workers as constructions of the “other”.

Whilst a majority of male survivors mentions camp brothels in the context of anecdotes about camp life, the additional suffering of female former inmates forced to work there is recognized by but a small percentage of these interviewees. This circumstance is amplified by the overall imbalance of male and female survivors testifying to their experiences, which translates roughly to a one-in-five quota. By critically discussing the survivors’ testimonies, the paper shows how male survivors hold a prerogative of interpretation that female survivors’ struggles and experience of pain is still subjected to.

The paper argues that female prisoners of Ravensbrück and Auschwitz-Birkenau resorted to forced sex work as part of their individual survival strategy. Both worker and vendor will be compared with regard to their depiction in post-war society and historiography. The paper will discuss why in the case of female survivors this strategy of survival has been used to shame them and deny their claims of compensation, and how this created a hierarchy of victims both within and beyond the concentration camps.

Keywords: gender history, sex work, forced labour, oral history, memory studies, Holocaust studies