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## Sexual Barter in Times of Genocide: Negotiating the Sexual Economy of the Theresienstadt Ghetto

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In 1949 in Melbourne, former Berliner Otto Bernstein set out to tell his friends about his experience in the Theresienstadt ghetto. Bernstein, who was seventy-six years old, had recently come to Australia to live with his son, who had emigrated there in 1940. During the war, Bernstein spent nearly three years in Theresienstadt, where he worked as a house elder and managed the living conditions and accommodations of nearly two hundred people. At one point, he reminisced about romantic and sexual life in Theresienstadt: “Many a passionate love began with a double portion of potatoes.”<sup>1</sup> Bernstein’s pragmatic take on love life in Holocaust society comes as a surprise; love stories are usually told beyond a give-and-take mentality (Cyra 1987; Bielecki 2009). Yet romantic and sexual relationships in Theresienstadt were closely connected with the economy and social hierarchy of the ghetto. The range of sexual barter was wide and varied, from bringing dainties to a virginal teenage girlfriend, to being a functionary’s lover for protection from transports, to the straightforward exchange of intercourse for food. This article examines the sexual economy of the prisoner society, focusing on the role of heterosexual sexuality in the ghetto’s economic system and the impact of sexual barter on gender and power relationships. Every society develops its own form of sexual economy, depen-

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<sup>1</sup> Otto Bernstein, letter to Gerd (Memoirs), 1949, O33, 1549, Yad Vashem Archives (hereafter YVA), Jerusalem.

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dent on structural conditions, culture, and the male-to-female ratio; in order to do justice to an examination of sexual barter in a place, we need to understand this place and its rules in depth. This article is a case study of sexual barter in Theresienstadt.

By examining sexual barter in Theresienstadt, I seek not only to enrich our perception of commercial sex but also to expand our understanding of the significance of sexuality in the Holocaust. I suggest that studying victims' sexuality enables a deeper comprehension of other mechanisms in their society. I argue that sexuality, especially bartered sexuality, allows us to identify shifted gender values as well as social hierarchies. I also demonstrate how sexuality served as a platform for encounters between the largest and youngest group—Czech Jews, who had access to most resources—and German, Dutch, Danish, and other prisoner groups. I suggest, moreover, that sexual barter helps us recognize the power mechanisms and underlying structures of the prisoners' society.

In addition, I make a case for analyzing the prisoner society as a society in its own right, rather than understanding it as a deviant form of social organization. The latter view tends to reduce sexual barter to the stigmatizing discursive construct of prostitution. Understanding ghetto society as a “real” society enables us to recognize the victims' agency; only thus can we understand the complicated gendered social structure of the ghetto. Furthermore, I argue for the importance of master narratives as an additional level of information: to focus not only on what sources tell us about sexual barter but how they tell us and in which context they emerged. Narratives reflect dominant master narratives and, with them, (gendered) power structures.

Few authors have examined prostitution and consensual, pragmatically motivated sex in Nazi-occupied Europe (Meinen 2002; Mühlhäuser 2010). Nothing at all has been written about sexual barter among Holocaust victims. This article, then, is organized in three parts. The first section explores the conceptual and methodological terrain: I contextualize my analysis within the research on prostitution, suggesting that sexual barter is a more suitable concept. I then examine and clarify issues of agency, consent, and sexual violence in relation to the available sources. The second and longest section looks at the types of sexual barter, stressing the fluid boundaries between them. I argue that, rather than differentiating between sexual barter that includes the sex act and everything else, we should analyze them together. Paying attention to a larger picture shows that while sexual barter often was motivated at first by sheer necessity (many women or their close relatives were extremely hungry or desperate to escape transports), the barter often developed a snowball dynamic, coloring many interactions and expectations. The subject of the third section is the postwar narratives of sexual barter. I show

that, just as men controlled power in the ghetto, they also controlled the production of postwar memory, labeling women who engaged in sexual barter as deviant while leaving the men who bartered with them out of the picture.

The difficulties in addressing issues of gender and the Holocaust as well as sexual barter go beyond the obvious predicament of how to discuss these matters without making moral judgments (Heineman 2002). Only in the last generation has gender history been accepted into the canon of Holocaust studies.<sup>2</sup> The study of prostitution faced similar obstacles: it was assumed that prostitution was irrelevant to the bigger picture of the historical period.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of prostitution does not capture the nature of sexual exchange in Theresienstadt. Prostitution can be defined as the barter of cash or material resources for some form of sex; it does not have to be consensual; it usually is systematic, even institutionalized; and it does not include long-term relations or dependencies (see Walkowitz 1980; Corbin 1990; White 1990). In her analysis of prostitution in colonial Kenya, Luise White shows that men visited prostitutes not only for sex but also for cooked meals, baths, and companionship. Sex in this setting was a part of one-time commercial, domestic care, adding to the complexity of our understanding of prostitution (White 1990).

Several of the instances of sexual barter in Theresienstadt can be defined as prostitution, but many more do not fit this concept. For one, many of the forms of sexual barter did not include sex or sexual activities. For instance, countervalue could consist in flirting or spending time together. In other cases, sex took place, but within the context of a relationship. And then there was the direct repeated exchange of food for coitus. This last item is indeed prostitution, but it is simultaneously sexual barter. Sexual barter is the umbrella concept, and one of its forms is prostitution. The second reason for not defining the sexual barter in Theresienstadt as prostitution is the deeply stigmatizing meaning it has as a category of praxis. In the context of Holocaust victims, such a term could easily be explosive and misunderstood. In this context, we should refrain from using the term “prostitution” for pragmatic reasons. It is preferable to speak of “sexual barter” in general, and “instrumental sex” and “rational relationships” in particular (Hájková 2005; Grossmann 2007).

“Rational relationships” describes any instance or combination of social, sexual, and romantic relationships in which one or both of the partners en-

<sup>2</sup> See the bibliographical information in Heineman (2002) and Mühlhäuser (2010).

<sup>3</sup> See Walkowitz and Walkowitz (1973), Corbin (1990), Stauter-Halsted (2011), and Wingfield (2011).

gaged for at least partly pragmatic reasons. Instrumental sex, however, is a short-duration sexual encounter lacking, or possessing much less of, the social dimension. Instrumental sex can be periodic or one-time; unlike a relationship, it does not include social knowledge, networks, care, trust, or affection.

The setting of these exchanges necessitates a reevaluation of our understanding of consent. No individual was deported to Theresienstadt (or elsewhere) voluntarily. The conditions in Theresienstadt pressured people into activities they might never have considered in the “normal world.” Lawrence Langer has argued that, in the life-threatening conditions of the camps, the victims could make only “choiceless choices”: “because whatever you choose—somebody loses, shorn of dignity and any of the spiritual renown we normally associate with moral effort” (Langer 1995, 46). As influential as Langer’s notion has become, it is also inherently problematic. His view is a version of the assumption that society in the ghettos and camps was a deviation while the external society was the norm. Rather, we should see both as variations of the many forms human society takes. The inmates in Theresienstadt still had choices, even if they were limited; in refusing them the possibility of choice, we refuse them agency.

A great deal, indeed a majority, of recent scholarship on the Holocaust and sexuality has addressed sexual and sexualized violence.<sup>4</sup> One form of sexual violence was forced prostitution in brothels set up by the SS in concentration camps (Sommer 2009; Anderson Hughes 2011). We need to pay attention to the differences between concentration camps and ghettos; Theresienstadt was a ghetto (Klein 2005). Some ghettos, like Vilna, had a brothel, but Theresienstadt never had one (Kruk 2002, 190, 220; Engelking and Grabowski 2010). It is also vital to differentiate between sexual(ized) violence and sexual barter. Barter always has an element of choice; rape, even if the rapist (such as a prisoner-functionary, or *kapo*) chose to “reward” the victim after the assault with food, does not have the element of choice and hence is not barter. Therefore, describing rapes in the concentration camps as rational relationships is misleading.<sup>5</sup>

A tangible disadvantage of research regarding sexual barter that took place outside of state-controlled institutions is the obvious lack of documents, caused in part by the sensitive, even taboo, nature of matters concerning sexuality in the Holocaust. We find no trace of sexual barter in any of the documents from the Theresienstadt self-administration, nor

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Heineman (2002), Amesberger, Auer, and Halbmayr (2004), Bergen (2006), Herzog (2009), Hedgepath and Saidel (2010), and Mühlhäuser (2010).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Sommer (2010) has argued this point, expressly invoking the concept of “rational relationships.”

in the trials of the SS. Therefore, this article is based on various self-testimonies: interviews, letters, memoirs (both published and unpublished), drawings, and diaries. Marion Kaplan has shown how memoirs can enable us to grasp mentalities, emotions, and values, but also larger underlying narratives (Kaplan 2005).

Self-testimonies also reflect the reluctance to address topics that have been considered shameful, such as sexual barter and homosexuality.<sup>6</sup> Joan Ringelheim, a pioneer in the oral history of the Holocaust, has summarized this tendency: “We avoid listening to stories we do not want to hear” (Ringelheim 1998, 342). First-person accounts of love and sexuality in Theresienstadt are conventionally narrated within the framework of romantic love. When survivors mention pragmatic motives in relationships or sexual encounters, they are typically describing other people’s actions, seldom their own. There are no first-person testimonies from women who engaged in instrumental sex. Most of the testimonies at our disposal originate from interviewing projects. In the largest Czech interview project, conducted by the Jewish Museum in Prague beginning in the early 1990s, the two (female) interviewers, both historians, never raised any questions about sexual barter. As one of them said when I asked her: “It simply did not occur to us that it was important.”<sup>7</sup>

What some sources lack, others offer in excess. The problem is that the more a source explicitly and substantially addresses the topic of sexual barter, the less reliable it usually is. When a topic is taboo, any conspicuous or explicit reference to it is suspicious. Authors who have written on survivor testimonies, most prominently Ulrike Jureit, point out the ways in which one’s contemporary cultural background (where a witness lives) influences

<sup>6</sup> I have not been able to locate any noteworthy material about homosexuality in Theresienstadt and therefore do not deal with it in this article. In spite of extensive search, I did not find enough first-person testimonies by gays or lesbians in Theresienstadt. This lack of sources is caused by an explicit bias in collecting: for instance, among all the Yale Fortunoff and University of Southern California Visual History Foundation (hereafter VHF) interviews on Theresienstadt (over 2,200 for the latter collection), there are no interviews with Jewish survivors who were gay (i.e., people who were persecuted for racial reasons and happened to be homosexual). Monika Flaschka, who looked for homosexual Jews in the USC VHF collection, did not find any either. Thanks to Monika for her insights. While I do know for a fact that there were homosexual Theresienstadt survivors, I strongly suspect that the homosexuality taboo continued well into the 1990s and biased the interviewers into a heteronormative, family-oriented, success-pressured conclusion. Single, childless homosexuals lived a lifestyle that was not accessible to the snowball method of interview collecting, and hence they were not “found.” Another partial reason for the omission is probably based in the homophobia of many inmates, which was continued in visceral homophobic memories of homosexuality in the camps. See Eschebach (2011).

<sup>7</sup> Anna Lorencová, personal communication with the author, April 3, 2009, Prague.

his or her narrative about the past (Jureit 1999). Compared with accounts from east-central Europe, sexuality and sexual violence have become much more common topics for survivors living in North America. The question that must be raised here is how far these witnesses unknowingly project or superimpose their contemporary lives onto their memories. A well-known example is found in the novels of Arnošt Lustig. In his works, we can trace the development of a central, sexualized thread that thickens over the course of fifty years.<sup>8</sup> Lustig, who merged his authorial profession with his survivor past, incorporated the motif of the “innocent whore” and continued to develop and nurture this theme. Lustig’s novels are a highly unreliable source on Theresienstadt, though they are significant documents regarding the society and culture of Czechoslovakia in the 1960s.

Every narrator (subconsciously) aims to make his or her story palatable to the public, the surrounding social field, as Lisa Peschel has shown for Theresienstadt memoirs published in the early postwar period in Czechoslovakia (Peschel 2009). Later narratives can be immensely useful because they address topics that would not have been addressed earlier. For some survivors, it was only after they had reestablished a “safe,” “normal” life that they could revisit some of the disruptive intimate events of their past (Hájková 2005; Browning 2010). But when we employ such accounts, we should be aware of the methodological difficulties, especially the influence of their context. For instance, published memoirs often address their audience with something of a journalistic effect: anecdotes are made more interesting, stories more titillating, and many details that do not fit into the narrative framework (but may be particularly telling for the researcher) are omitted. However, diaries, a genre written closest to the events, often do not deal with the obvious and quotidian and instead concentrate on the exceptional (Garbarini 2006). Thus, it is useful to utilize both published and unpublished, early and late, sources and, most important, testimonies from individuals produced in different countries—in this case, Theresienstadt survivors’ narratives from Czechoslovakia, Israel, Germany, Denmark, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and the United States.

The Theresienstadt ghetto (Terezín is its Czech name) was founded in the eponymous garrison town in November 1941 as a transit camp for Jews from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Theresienstadt functioned as a holding space between the place of origin and the killing sites; most inmates were eventually sent to their deaths. In June 1942, when

<sup>8</sup> One can follow the development particularly well in works by Lustig (1958, 1962, 1979, 1992, 2000a, and 2000b). Most of them were also published in English. See also Ka-tzetnik 135633 (1961) and *Night Porter* (1974).

the German and Austrian Jews started arriving, its function changed to that of a ghetto for the elderly and a “privilege camp,” a destination described as preferential, where exception groups could be deported.<sup>9</sup> Over the course of 1943 and 1944, the Nazis fashioned Theresienstadt into a propaganda camp to be exhibited to an international delegation from the Red Cross. This is sometimes overemphasized in the public perception; what is ignored, however, is the rather minor impact that the Red Cross visit and the subsequent propaganda film had on daily life in the ghetto. Throughout the existence of the camp, prisoners died of malnutrition, were surrounded by dirt and insects, and lived with the ever-present threat of deportation to the east, which they feared to be deadly.

Transports left on a regular basis, at first for Riga, later for labor camps, ghettos, and annihilation camps in the Lublin district, Maly Trostinets, and Raasiku in Estonia, and from October 1942 onward to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Altogether, nearly 90,000 inmates were deported from Theresienstadt to the east, of whom only about 3,500 survived. The SS made the self-administration write up the deportation lists according to particular guidelines, which incorporated special demands or categories for protection. Such groups included, for instance, German Jews, those suffering from tuberculosis, and orphans. Sometimes these categories were protected, but at other times they would be used to mark people for deportation. When transport quotas were filled, the numbers were divided among each nationality group and labor department, which reported its “dispensable” and “indispensable” workers.<sup>10</sup>

Of the 148,000 Jews transported to Theresienstadt, almost 74,000 came from the Protectorate, over 42,000 from Germany, and over 15,000 from Austria. These large groups were followed by smaller groups of Jews from the Netherlands and Denmark. Over 33,000 people died in Theresienstadt of disease and malnutrition, the overwhelming majority of them elderly. Theresienstadt fell under the administration of the SS, but with only thirty members present, the SS was thinly represented; Czech gendarmes did the actual guarding (Fedorovič 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Exception groups included German Jews over sixty-five years of age (sixty for women), war invalids and those with military distinctions from the First World War, “Geltungsjuden” (people with mixed background who were members of the Jewish community or married to a Jew), and functionaries of the Reich Association of German Jews.

<sup>10</sup> Testimony of Bedřich Hoffenreich, interviewed on June 11 and August 22, 1973, 1095, *sbírka vzpomínek* [collection of testimonies], Archive of the Terezín Memorial (hereafter APT), Terezín. Thanks to Elena Makarova for drawing my attention to it. Testimony of Vilém Cantor, 1946, and Jan Grauer, January 5, 1946, investigations against Benjamin Murrelstein, 305-633-1, Archive of the Ministry of Interior, Prague.



The ghetto had a Jewish self-administration directed by an elder of the Jews and a Jewish council, the Council of Elders. This administration created a complex system that governed every aspect of life in the ghetto: there was an economics department, a legal department, a central registry, and many others.<sup>11</sup> Unlike Lodz and other places, Theresienstadt never became a labor ghetto. Due to the run-down conditions of the town and high percentage of elderly, 90 percent of the labor was used to maintain the town's infrastructure (Kárný 1989). There was general labor duty for everyone between sixteen and sixty years of age, though the age boundaries shifted throughout the duration of the ghetto.

People in Theresienstadt feared the transports more than anything else. The inmates did not know what would happen at the destination, but they sensed that it would be worse than the present. Therefore, being protected from transports was probably the single most desired status in the ghetto. For most of the ghetto's existence, members of the Council of Elders and high-ranking functionaries were protected. Because families were deported as units, if the parents were protected, their children would stay as well, and vice versa. Members of first and third transports that arrived in Theresienstadt, the so-called *Aufbaukommando* (installation/assembling commando), comprising 1,341 young men, were also spared. A man's status protected his wife, whereas the reverse was not the case. For instance, when a nurse who was marked as indispensable married a clerk who was dispensable, she lost her protection.

Two other items were almost as important as protected status: food and housing. The food supply in Theresienstadt was insufficient and almost never included fruit, vegetables, or proteins: the majority of those who died succumbed to diseases caused by starvation. The complicated food categorization system in Theresienstadt divided workers into roughly three categories: hard workers (often those who did jobs considered indispensable) were entitled to more food rations than either normal workers or nonworkers. Both men and women could be categorized as hard laborers.<sup>12</sup> Nonworkers, mainly people over sixty, received 60 percent less food than hard workers and a much smaller variety; it was too little to live on, and the elderly made up 92 percent of the entire mortality count.<sup>13</sup> Almost all of the elderly who were not sent to the east died in the ghetto.

<sup>11</sup> Organizational structure of the ghetto, August 1944, O64, 24, YVA.

<sup>12</sup> Circular of the Labor Center, January 28, 1944, O64, 34, YVA.

<sup>13</sup> Food tables, Terezín, 52, 115, 116, Jewish Museum Prague (hereafter ŽMP); O64, 34, YVA; Benjamin Murmelstein, *Geschichtlicher Überblick, 1945–46*, 1073, 3, Wiener Library (hereafter WL), London, p. 19. Of the 33,600 people who passed away in Theresienstadt, over 92 percent were sixty and older (counted at the point of liberation).

Most younger people also lost weight, but as long as they stayed in Theresienstadt, the majority of them were in no immediate danger of starvation.

Living space in the overcrowded ghetto was another coveted asset. Families lived apart, with men and women sleeping in different rooms with bunk beds for eight to sixty inhabitants. People longed for private lodgings: to have a quiet place to be alone, to be able to live with one's family members in a single room, and to have a space where one could be intimate with one's partner and enjoy privacy. Some fortunate inmates, usually those with connections and sufficient resources for barter, built themselves so-called *kumbáls* (in Czech, cubbyholes),<sup>14</sup> usually built from wood in an attic. As with the departments responsible for food and deportation lists, civil servants working in the Space Management Department assigned and organized housing.<sup>15</sup>

Theresienstadt had a lively sexual and romantic life: intimacy and attachment were important coping mechanisms in a place where everyone was surrounded by hunger, filth, insects, and fear of deportation. Finding a romantic or sexual partner, be it for a long or short period, offered a sense of solace. People dated, fell in love, and sought protection and emotional comfort; they did not want to be alone in the ghetto. This free take on sexual mores was somewhat continuous with prewar Czech practices; Czech Jews, who were the first to arrive in Theresienstadt and remained the largest group, set most of the behavioral patterns in the inmate community.

It would be easier to establish continuity and change more precisely if we had scholarship on the social, cultural, and gender history of Czech Jews from the 1920s and 1930s. Unfortunately, there is very little, with the exception of the work of Melissa Feinberg (2006) on the women's movement and Karla Huebner's articles (2010, 2011) on young women and perceptions of sexuality and sex education. Hence, my conclusions can only be preliminary. Interwar Czech society favored mixed-sex schools and youth movements, young people hiked and traveled together, and many people had premarital sexual experience (Waic and Kössl 1992; Jirásek 1999; Huebner 2010, 2011). Nevertheless, when a middle-class woman had a sexual relationship, it was almost always with a man whom she later married, and many women did not have sex before marriage. The propensity for sexual experience seems to have intensified in the years after the

<sup>14</sup> Malka Zimet to her brother, November 1, 1945, O7, 381, YVA.

<sup>15</sup> "Space management" is the translation of *Raumwirtschaft*. For English translations of the Terezín institutions, I follow Belinda Cooper's translation of H. G. Adler's *Theresienstadt: Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft*, forthcoming from Cambridge University Press and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Thanks to Belinda for allowing me to read the draft translation.

occupation and before the deportations, possibly serving as an escape mechanism and a way to spend the increased amount of free time that arose when other options, such as cinema, theater, sports, and dancing, were prohibited for Jews.<sup>16</sup> After arrival in Theresienstadt, the tendency to seek sex intensified, especially among the people who were in privileged positions, were better fed, and had private quarters. Sexual norms shifted accordingly; sexual activity was seen as an acceptable, meaningful way to pass the time. Otto Bernstein noted benevolently how young people tried to be intimate with each other.<sup>17</sup> Those men who were fortunate enough to have secured a *kumbál* usually had a more lively sexual life (Troller 1991, chap. 11; Kosta 2001, 83). People who were sexually active in Theresienstadt were mostly younger or middle aged; among women, it was mainly single mothers, childless women, or women with older children. Sexual barter developed against this backdrop.

A pragmatic take on sexuality gained in prominence. Women who were extremely hungry, or whose relatives were, sought “rich” partners who would help them and their families, be it to start a relationship or for instrumental sex. Female inmates often assessed potential partners based on what they had to offer, meaning better food, better accommodations, or protection from transports. Others initiated instrumental sex, the exchange of goods for a sexual encounter. Bedřich Hoffenreich, a Czech carpenter, outlined the topic of sexual barter with unusual frankness in his interview: “People did it for three cigarettes, for a dish of potatoes. When a woman saw that someone is receiving a package, she went.”<sup>18</sup>

The exchange in the barter went in only one direction: men purchased sex from women, not women from men. Such an exclusive direction of exchange is striking, since the majority of people in Theresienstadt were women. Very few women in the ghetto held positions of power. In the entire self-administration, only one minor department had a female head, namely women’s labor. And only in the last nine months of the much-reduced Theresienstadt was the Department of Space Management headed by a woman, Emma Goldscheiderová.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, jobs securing preferred access to food were frequently staffed by men. It was men who headed the potato storeroom and the butcher group; men employed in these areas were considered among the richest people in the ghetto. Many

<sup>16</sup> Cernyak-Spatz (2005); interview of Edita P.-S., May 31, 1994, 320, *vzpomínky* [testimonies], ŽMP.

<sup>17</sup> Otto Bernstein, letter to Gerd (Memoirs), 1949, O33, 1549, YVA.

<sup>18</sup> Testimony of Bedřich Hoffenreich, interviewed on June 11 and August 22, 1973, *sbírka vzpomínek*, 1095, APT.

<sup>19</sup> Organizational overview, February 7, 1945, O64, 24, YVA.

of the positions in the kitchens and bakeries were also reserved for men: kitchen staff were classed as hard laborers (entitling workers to extra rations that they could take home with them), as was everyone in the butcher group.<sup>20</sup> Some women did work on the kitchen staff, albeit not in the hard labor jobs.<sup>21</sup> However, women, especially young ones, composed the majority of the workers in the agriculture department, growing produce for the SS. Up to a thousand inmates worked in agriculture, and during the harvest season they smuggled out fruit and vegetables.<sup>22</sup> Thus, men were not the only ones who could access additional food, but they were the ones who had good and regular access to it; men were, moreover, in unique positions of influence and more often able to provide protection.

Perhaps the most conspicuous exchange was the propositioning of cooks and bakers for instrumental sex. Vlasta Schönová, an actress who was deported to Theresienstadt at age twenty-three, claimed that “every cook had ten girlfriends” and that “women slept with men for a loaf of bread.”<sup>23</sup> A baker in Theresienstadt, Šimon Kopolovič, shared a similar account. He recalled how after work, each baker was issued one loaf per day as a reward. In the courtyard of the house where his bakery was located, when leaving the shift, he and his colleagues were periodically propositioned by previously unknown women who would offer sex in exchange for food. Kopolovič remembered a Dutch woman who told him where she lived and invited him to come and sleep with her in exchange for bread. He claimed that he refused because he had a girlfriend, whom he adored, and because of his formerly Orthodox Jewish upbringing. His colleagues, however, often would say, “I can have a girlfriend and I can manage this on the side, too.”<sup>24</sup>

Kopolovič’s employment as a baker was not accidental. One of three brothers from a formerly religious background, he left his native eastern Slovakia in 1938 for Ostrava, where he became involved with the center-left

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Ota K., January 12, 1992, *vzpomínky*, 103, ŽMP; Malka Zimet to her brother, November 1, 1945, O7, 381, YVA; Friesová (1997, 150); Šimon Kopolovič, today Kolský, interview with the author, January 16, 2009, Haifa. Pseudonym at the request of the witness.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Eliška K., June 12, 1991, *vzpomínky*, 40, ŽMP; Karolína H. on her friend Ilsa Kohnová, who was one of the few to obtain a job in the pastry bakery, June 4 and 11, 1992, and March 3 and 26, 1993, *vzpomínky*, 135, ŽMP.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Věra G.-L., *vzpomínky*, 249, ŽMP; interview with Hans Gaertner (pseudonym), May 9, 2003, 863, Forschungstelle für Zeitgeschichte, Werkstatt der Erinnerung, Hamburg; notes of Charlota Verešová, 174, Beit Terezin Archives (hereafter BTA), Givat Haim Ihud.

<sup>23</sup> Nava Shan (the postwar name of Vlasta Schönová), interview with the author, October 3, 1999, Telstone.

<sup>24</sup> Šimon Kolský, interview with the author, January 16, 2009, Haifa.

Maccabi Hatzair, a youth Zionist movement. Maccabi, together with the Hashomer Hatzair, became the core of the Zionist youth movement in the ghetto, the Hechalutz. Young Zionist men formed a social elite with high prestige and status, using their close ties with the Zionist establishment on the Council of Elders to gain advantageous positions, such as cooks. Similarly, members of the Aufbaupolizei and their friends also had a good chance of obtaining one of these coveted jobs. These jobs usually meant better access to food and transport protection, and with these factors, additional prestige (Hájková 2009). The privileged position of these young men is reflected in a statement by Ursula Naumann-Maschkowski, a teenager from Berlin: “This existed everywhere . . . ! All those who worked, like in the bakery and in the kitchen, they obviously . . . they could have any woman, they could have anything. Everyone wanted to eat. Naturally, I did not, I was 17. But to have a something to eat . . . a gal already had a boyfriend, he was a cook. For God’s sake.”<sup>25</sup>

There were also cases of more regular instrumental sex. Though sources about this are scarce, it seems that several women earned income by routinely offering sex in exchange for food; these cases are the closest match to the definition of prostitution. These cases were also more institutionalized because the women were known to the inmates’ community and were visited in their lodgings. Zdeněk Ornest recalled that before he was deported to Auschwitz, he and his friends visited a woman who they knew offered sex in exchange for goods so that they could lose their virginity before his deportation.<sup>26</sup> These more established cases were probably rare because there was a general duty to work. Being outside the labor process would not only result in the loss of food rations but would also make one eligible for deportation. Everyone knew only too well—whether they were from Berlin or Prague—that “social” and “criminal” cases were usually the first names on a deportation list.<sup>27</sup> Living in crowded rooms with dozens of roommates and a curfew of eight in the evening would have made moonlighting in addition to one’s job nearly impossible. Finally, roommates were often uncomfortable with another couple having intercourse, and when couples

<sup>25</sup> Robert Sommer’s interview with Gerhard and Ursula Maschkowski, March 19, 2004. Thanks to Robert for the copy. Similar note in Heumann (2007, 105).

<sup>26</sup> Elena Makarova’s interview of Zdeněk Ornest, ca. 1989. Thanks to Elena for sharing this material. Arnošt Lustig, who visited the woman together with Ornest, told this story repeatedly in differing versions, both in his novels and in interviews.

<sup>27</sup> Transport list of the deportation transport F (Brno-Minsk), November 1941, fond Okupační vězeňské spisy, National Archives, Prague. The list indicates the professions of the deportees. Thanks to Jaroslava Milotová for the information. See Milotová (1998) and Gruner (2002, 299–300).

could only be intimate in the presence of others, the habit was usually to meet in the man's quarters (Friesová 1997, 130; Oppenheim 1998, 91).

While such a straightforward exchange was rare, the practice of exchanging sexual favors was a typical, if not expected, occurrence in the ghetto. The SS allowed the inmates to receive packages only within an allotted time period and only after having applied for and received a corresponding form. This process was not altogether easy: in order to receive these packages, one had to have Gentile friends or relatives who were willing to send them; moreover, packages were often thoroughly searched for possible forbidden items and sometimes withheld for an extensive period of time. Inmates who received packages on a regular basis were often envied. Some postal clerks propositioned attractive women who came to pick up their parcels and, if spurned, would refuse to hand over the mail.<sup>28</sup>

Often women propositioned men into sexual barter. The form of this propositioning varied by situation. At times, by flirting, young women could get cooks to give them more food.<sup>29</sup> Ema from Prostějov in Moravia worked as a nurse, and one of her tasks was fetching food for her patients. She asked the cook for an extra ladle of coffee, using the dialect expression *šufánek*. The cook, František Kollman, from Plzeň, was not familiar with the expression and asked Ema what it meant. In a coquettish manner and using what was seen as her particular Moravian charm, Ema was able to get Kollman to give her more food.<sup>30</sup>

On other occasions, the solicitation was apparently more explicit. One Danish former publisher worked in an office of the housing department. His son witnessed an applicant, "a young Czech beauty," making aggressive passes at the clerk; she hoped that her flirtation would help take care of her housing application. The young woman did not realize that the clerk was a father of two—his son was standing at her side (Oppenheim 1961, 230). The understanding of sexual barter was also rooted in the individual's cultural and habitual background. A young Dutchman, Norbert Buxbaum, worked in a woodshop and started producing wooden sandals under the table. He intended to sell them, and when he was offered instrumental sex in return, he refused (Buchsbaum 1991, 100). In both of the above cases, the different attitudes toward sexual barter were linked to national and cultural factors in the individuals' backgrounds. Dutch Jews usually came to the ghetto after a longer period of imprisonment in the

<sup>28</sup> Testimony of Else Dormitzer, 1946, 250d, box 25, the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (hereafter NIOD), Amsterdam.

<sup>29</sup> Renate van Hinte Kamp, interview with the author, July 15, 2001, Bloemendaal.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Ema D., April 2, 1994, *vzpomínky*, 119, ŽMP.

Westerbork transit camp. Here, due to the high level of stress and the periodic, often weekly, transports of thousands of people from the small camp with a population of several thousand, many inmates engaged in frequent sexual activity with numerous partners as an escape mechanism.<sup>31</sup> Buxbaum did not understand why he should swap for something he could get for free.

Sexual barter was part of a larger system of commerce in the ghetto. Everything was bartered: tickets for cultural events, clothing, bread, lard, jewelry, cigarettes, makeup. The basic swapping unit remained bread, as well as the Protectorate currency. Young people working in the agriculture department were quite wealthy because inmates, starved for fruits and green vegetables, paid well for tomatoes, plums, and cucumbers.<sup>32</sup> Other prisoners bartered the contents of parcels they received.<sup>33</sup> Old German Jews were creative in finding ways to earn extra food: some produced felt flowers, while others provided services such as pedicures.<sup>34</sup> There was an active trade in Theresienstadt-made medallions. One man produced little wooden lions that became extremely popular among prisoners; a double-tailed lion is the Bohemian coat of arms.<sup>35</sup>

The Czech Jews had their own cultural rituals, helping to secure their sense of place. For them, an important mode of dealing with the new reality was humor and satire. The July 1943 issue of the satirical Czech journal *Šalom na pátek* (Shalom for Friday), or *Šnap* for short, dealt with the difficulties of housing. “How can I get a little *kumbál* of my own? You can find the answer to this delicate question in this issue!” The journal then provided a mock application, offering the different characteristics of “young,” “pretty,” and “striking type” and requested that the applicant “please underline the appropriate category” on the form. The final page had a photograph of the upper body of a glamorous young woman dressed only in a string of pearls, with the comment: “In case of a positive answer, the *kumbál* and its living inventory is at your disposal, and you can be certain of the gratitude of a young and spirited heart.” A note from the person processing the application demanded to know whether the photograph could be taken to show twenty inches lower.<sup>36</sup> A controller’s notation com-

<sup>31</sup> N. N., report on Westerbork, August 20, 1943, 250i, 527, NIOD.


<sup>32</sup> Eva Roubíčková’s diary, entry for October 17, 1943, Archive of the Terezín Initiative Institute, Prague.

<sup>33</sup> Hulda Schickler’s diary, entry for July 14, 1944, 512, Leo Baeck Institute, Jerusalem.

<sup>34</sup> Diary letters of Hedwig Ostwaldt to her children, summer and fall 1944, AR 11029, Leo Baeck Institute (hereafter LBI), New York; testimony of Beate Jacoby, ca. 1953, 1267, 5, WL.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Jaroslav B., October 12, 15, and 19, 1991, *vzpomínky*, 64, ŽMP.

<sup>36</sup> *Šnap*, July 2, 1943, Nr. 9, O64, 64, YVA.



Mensch. Sie sind und wie gern  
 Sie *heißeren, jüngeren*  
*Mädchen*. helfen und  
 beistehen.

Dies gibt mir  
 den Mut, Ihnen ~~meine~~  
~~unsere~~ Bit-  
 te vorzulegen.

*Im Falle einer*  
*günstigen Erledigung*  
*steht Ihnen der Kumbál*  
*inches. Lebendens In-*  
*ventar jederzeit zur Ver-*  
*fügung und der Dank*  
*eines warmen, tempera-*  
*mentvollen Herzens ist*  
 *Ihnen sicher.*

*Eva Vogel*

1 Beilage: *Meine Photographie*

Eingeht:	21. VI. 1943
Zahl:	G 12759
Refer:	85
Erliegt:	

Erledigung:

Ein Lichtbild des Frl. Vogel um einen halben Meter tiefer ist anzufordern.

24.6.1943.

Kontrollbericht: Haare schwarz, Augen braun, Temperament lebhaft, wenig zurückhaltend. Weitere Erhebungen wurden durch meine Frau vereitelt. Eine Photographie der unteren Partien in Theresienstadt nicht angefertigt.

25.6.1943.

Da das angeforderte Lichtbild nicht beigeleitet werden konnte, ist die Antragstellerin Eva Vogel, AAU 311, dem Herrn Dr. Smulinger in seinem Kumbál BV, Erdgeschoss, vorstellig zu machen.

27. VI. 1943

27. Juni 1943.

REFERAT R.W.

*Smulinger*

*Myat*

Figure 1 Application for a *kumbál*, *Šalom na pátek*, July 2, 1943, Nr. 9, O64, 64, YVA. Thanks to Yad Vashem for the permission to reprint.

mented that the applicant's "hair is black, eyes brown, temperament lively, not reserved; further investigations were frustrated by my wife." Figure 1 is the second page of the mock application.

*Šnap* was a mock samizdat journal, dealing openly with issues in the inmates' community. The satire derives from the fact that this young and attractive woman is explicitly offering sexual favors in exchange for her own room via a bureaucratic application and questionnaire, which bear a bu-



reaucrat's notations. These notations in particular negotiate the act of barter, exploring the value of the applicant—her looks and the sincerity of the offer. The process of applying for housing was only one of many examples of how sexual barter had become a fact of everyday life. In this society, the connections of young male Czechs and the attractiveness of women became, in Pierre Bourdieu's terms, versions of social capital (Bourdieu 1990).

In the same way that sex became a type of currency, sexual and romantic relationships usually had an economic undertone. Cooks and bakers brought their sweethearts dainty morsels or extra food rations (Friesová 1997, 173–75). Apart from being an expression of affection, these items also reinforced the men's status as providers. A man's ability to "feed his woman" became expected within the ghetto population. Norbert Troller, a forty-six-year-old architect from Brno, described the nature of sexual encounters with a lover in the men's *kumbál*. The lady visitor would first receive a snack, after which the couple proceeded to the erotic part of the visit.<sup>37</sup>

Beyond the social elites, a group that consisted almost exclusively of young male Czechs, Danish Jews also became an elite group, their prestige founded in economic capital. The smallest group in the ghetto, they began to receive regular food packages from Denmark in February 1944, five months after their arrival. Moreover, all Danish Jews were protected from the transports to the east. These attributes made them relatively fortunate among the ghetto inmates and often the objects of envy, thus also influencing their desirability as partners.<sup>38</sup>

Though the Danish inmates were few in number—too few to have a sustained impact on the community—many young non-Danish women sought relationships with young Danish men (Oppenheim 1961, 230). Gerhard Valfer, a young German Jewish man who had arrived in Denmark on one of the youth aliyah transports and was subsequently taken to Theresienstadt, remembered the ways in which his access to extra food affected his sex life:<sup>39</sup>

At first, when I was grossly hungry, perhaps I was not so interested in physical relationships, but once our food packages came from Denmark and I was better fed, my interest in sex grew. My first girlfriend was Helen, who was from Holland. She weighed about 80 to 90 pounds.

<sup>37</sup> Troller (1991, 119–21). See also similar stories in his papers, AR 7268, box 3, folder 4, LBI.

<sup>38</sup> Fracapane (forthcoming); Irena Rieselová, July 28, 1966, A, 129, APT.

<sup>39</sup> Youth aliyah transports brought Zionist teenagers from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia to, among other states, Denmark. The Danish group of youth aliyah children was small, fewer than 200 persons. In Denmark, many of them worked in farms as agricultural training, preparing for later emigration to Palestine.

She would do anything for food. When I had extra food, I would bring it to her. She was starving and I suppose it could be said that I took advantage of her, as she was skin and bones and hungry. I was stronger, and not so hungry, so I could obtain extra food. (Valfer 2000, 56)

Valfer's is one of the very few testimonies in which the speaker directly references his participation in a rational relationship. Valfer knew he was taking advantage of Helen, but for him, sexuality was a means to reestablish his masculinity. He described himself using the classic gender-role model: he is "strong," not hungry, sexually active with a passive female, and simultaneously able to fulfill the classic social role of provider.

Relationships between partners from different national groups usually followed the same pattern: the man came from the dominant group and the woman from one of lower status. Several young German and Austrian women were romantically connected to Czech men; they are usually described as sweet, somewhat passive, attractive women who were taken care of by their strong partners who knew their way around.<sup>40</sup> The women were usually expected to enter into their Czech partner's circle of friends and learn (some) Czech. Some men, especially when their partners were not very young, pushed the women quickly into sex or made the sexual dimension of the relationship prominent.<sup>41</sup>

One of core functions of family, providing material and emotional support, shifted function and importance in Theresienstadt. Grown sons and daughters who, in normal society, would have lived independent lives, often spent a great deal of free time with their parents; meeting points were in the quarters of the family member with the best accommodations or, if all were equally unsuitable, in the mother's room.<sup>42</sup> Whoever had the best access to food tried to provide for everyone else. This way, a young woman working in agriculture could feed a family of seven.<sup>43</sup> However, Theresienstadt society was strongly generationally segmented: young people, especially Czech Jews, were considered the "jeunesse dorée," and the elderly occupied the lowest rung of the social hierarchy.<sup>44</sup> When couples became

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Arnold M., September 5, 1995, Moses Mendelsohn Zentrum, Potsdam, 16; Herskovits-Gutmann (2002, 133).

<sup>41</sup> Testimony of Jiří Borský, BTA, 66; diary of Willy Mahler, *passim* on his relationships, A, 5704, APT.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Gerta S.-T., February 16, 1994, *vzpomínky*, 277, ŽMP. See also video interview of Miloš Povondra, September 26, 1997, 36907, VHF.

<sup>43</sup> Eva Roubíčková's diary, entry for August 15, 1943.

<sup>44</sup> *Šnap*, no. 4; Hana W., ŽMP, interviews, 679; Herškovič (2000). The grandparents of Czech Jews were only rarely considered a part of the kinship unit; elderly Czech Jews died in Theresienstadt in the same proportion as their German and Austrian counterparts, suggesting that their offspring did not support them.

established, the pragmatic undertone weakened, and gendered expectations shifted. Just as Bernstein described in the opening quotation, many rational relationships developed with time into relationships that were more romantic, with less pronounced, or changed, pragmatic tones. Nurse Ema fell deeply in love with cook František; they were married in an elaborate ceremony paid for by Ema. In May 1944, the couple was deported to Auschwitz; from there he was sent to Schwarzheide and she to Christianstadt. They were able to keep in contact, and when Ema found out her husband was starving, she contacted his former girlfriend, a Gentile, in Plzeň, asking her to send parcels. After the war, František was so grateful that he married the ex-girlfriend.<sup>45</sup> A story that started out with a pretty nurse taking advantage of a cook came to an elegiac, bitter end.

Often, couples wished to formalize their relationships in case one of them was deported; the deportations honored the nuclear family unit. For a married couple, this meant that they would be deported together rather than with their parents. In Theresienstadt, couples usually got married for this reason. In addition to members of the Aufbaukommando, some of the specialized craftsmen conducting work for the SS, such as electricians, were protected from the transports for the entire duration of the ghetto. Little wonder that these men were highly desired as spouses. Bedřich Hoffenreich, a carpenter who survived in the ghetto, received a number of offers: “They [the transport commission of the self-administration] protected us, because they received work assignments [from the SS] and it was in their interest that they be finished. In Ostrava, [there was a] ‘Breda-Mannstein’ [a popular department store]. Mannstein came to me and begged me in the name of mercy to marry his daughter. He would bring me handfuls of gold, showed me pictures of the store. However, I already had a relationship with a Gentile woman and we promised each other that we would reunite. I did not marry her.”<sup>46</sup> But many people did get married. Erich Lichtblau, a graphic artist chronicling life in the ghetto, captured a typical scene in a watercolor, *Cook and Cleaning Staff* (fig. 2): an attractive young couple at their wedding, she feminine and delicate, he an athletic cook.<sup>47</sup> The comment reads “*Die Glanzpartie im Ghetto!*” (The splendid match in the

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Ema D., April 2, 1994, *vzpomínky*, 119, ŽMP; see also the diary of Willy Mahler, entry for January 23, 1944, A, 5704, APT. František was able to marry his ex-girlfriend because after the war, the Czechoslovak state did not recognize marriages performed in Theresienstadt.

<sup>46</sup> Testimony of Bedřich Hoffenreich, interviewed on June 11 and August 22, 1973, *sbírka vzpomínek*, 1095, APT.

<sup>47</sup> Erich Lichtblau (after the war, Erik Lesklý), catalog of artworks, Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust, available at <http://www.lamoth.org/archives-library/special-collec>



**Figure 2** Erich Lichtblau's *Cook and Cleaning Staff*. Thanks to the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust and Mira Oren for the permission to reprint. Color version available online.

ghetto!). The watercolor reflects the pragmatic tone of ghetto marriages: the woman employed her good looks, a form of social capital, the man his job, economic and symbolic capital. This perception was further alluded to in the caption: the woman is *Putzkolonne*, cleaning staff. *Putzen*, to clean, carries a secondary meaning in the phrase *sich herausputzen*, to prink oneself up. But there is another layer of meaning: in the Theresienstadt social hierarchy, cooks were at the very top, while cleaning staff was a lowly position; virtually everyone who cleaned as a main job was female.<sup>48</sup> The gendered division of labor, with women cleaning and men doing the hard labor, thus has an additional significance of status. Finally, in a subtitle, Lichtblau quoted a well-known proverb on the prosaic negotiation of love, “Ja, Liebe geht durch den Magen” (Yes, the way to man’s heart is through his stomach). The proverb signifies a husband’s love being born out of his wife’s cooking skills. In Theresienstadt, cooking and access to food in general gained in importance and was considered hard labor and thus became

tions/. The drawing reproduced here is probably an early postwar copy. Lesklý redrew his drawings from the ghetto period after the war. The original of this sketch apparently did not survive. See also Melamed (2010).

<sup>48</sup> Testimony of Max Berger, 1945, O7, 222, YVA.

largely a male-coded domain. In Lichtblau's sketch, a woman's love is born out of her partner's delivery of food.

Similar deals, though public in a different way, were the basis for rational relationships with some high-ranking functionaries, such as some members of the Council of Elders. While these people were frequently married (and hence could not offer spousal protection), the SS allowed each of them to have a protection list, with which they could protect twenty people from transports. The second elder of the Jews, Paul Eppstein, had several lovers whom he protected.<sup>49</sup> Other members behaved similarly (Friesová 1997, 149–50). These men constituted a political, not a social, elite, and they were no longer young, athletic, or physically desirable. Being seen with a young, attractive female—especially when not one's spouse—raises one's status in many societies. This mechanism also held true in Theresienstadt, as it boosted a man's status and strengthened the perception of his virility and masculinity in the eyes of the community.

The ubiquitous intersection of romantic relationships with economics is well illustrated by the affair between the actress Vlasta Schönová and Benjamin Murrelstein, the last (and only surviving) elder of the Jews. Schönová, fifteen years Murrelstein's junior, was an emancipated, strong-willed, attractive woman and a leading actress and theater director in Theresienstadt.<sup>50</sup> Schönová and Murrelstein became lovers sometime in 1943. She had been raised in an assimilationist, atheist household; it was only as a result of the persecution of the Jews that she developed an interest in Judaism. Murrelstein, a former Viennese rabbi, originally from the Lemberg region, was intelligent and spoke many languages, including Czech; he was short and chubby and generally disliked. Everyone was surprised: Schönová did not need him, as she was well known for her independent spirit. Why would the tall, beautiful, assimilated Czech Jewess sleep with an unappealing, short, religious, older, married functionary, who was allegedly a collaborator to boot?

Schönová entered the relationship precisely because of who she was: obstreperous and strong-willed. Rejecting the unwritten rules of the community, she stayed behind in Theresienstadt to continue her theater work after her parents were deported. Murrelstein was similar in this respect; he too prized his independence and cared little for the opinions of others. Schönová proclaimed after the war that she had loved him and extolled

<sup>49</sup> List for the Ev transport with Viktor Kende's handwritten remarks, October/November 1944, Kende papers, A, 7854, APT.

<sup>50</sup> Interview of Nava Shan, August 2, 1965, 34, 13, Hebrew University Institute for Contemporary History, Oral History Division (hereafter ICJ OHD), Jerusalem; Šormová (1973); Shan (1992); Nava Shan, interview with the author, October 3, 1999.

Murmelstein's gentle nature.<sup>51</sup> Murmelstein, who later fashioned himself into a loner living in Italian exile, never spoke of her but left tender hints in his memoirs and interviews about the "beautiful Czech women."<sup>52</sup> Though their relationship was a romantic one, people spread rumors about Schönová and Murmelstein.<sup>53</sup> She supposedly slept with him because of the protection he provided. He was alleged to be sexually obsessive.<sup>54</sup> The ghetto society was so used to understanding relationships in terms of give-and-take that they could not conceive of an emotional dimension to this improbable relationship.

On the one hand, sexual barter enabled women to develop their own agency in securing material resources; on the other hand, the system demonstrates how women prisoners were in many ways dependent on men. The ways in which this dark side manifested itself in the ghetto varied. Ota R., for example, was active in Theresienstadt as a theater director. In an interview for the Terezín Memorial in 1972, he mentioned to his interviewer, Miroslav Kryl, that he once had a liking for an aspiring actress who wanted to perform in a play he was preparing. Ota R. made it clear to Kryl that being a director gave him many advantages, which he believed he would have had in the outside world, too. He took the new actress to one of the attics and "pushed her onto the ground." The quote does not make clear whether the act was rape (Kryl understood it as such), or rather R.'s brutish description of his taking what he thought was his due. In the crowded ghetto, there were always people nearby who would have come if they had heard screams for help. But it is possible that the woman was ashamed to be found in a position of sexual assault and did not want to jeopardize her position among her colleagues on stage. The crucial point here is the matter-of-fact manner in which Ota R. spoke of both the actress and intercourse with her. He believed that his position as director entitled him to have sex with the female cast as a reward for their being allowed to act—a casting-couch privilege.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Anna Lorencová, interview with the author, April 17, 2009; Elena Makarova, interview with the author, March 14, 2009 (Lorencová and Makarova talked to their friend Schönová shortly after the war, and in the 1980s, respectively).

<sup>52</sup> Benjamin Murmelstein interviewed by Claude Lanzmann, Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive, 1975, RG-60.5009, tape 3158-90, tapes 3169 and 3188, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Irena S., February 13, 1995, *vzpomínky*, 407, ŽMP.

<sup>54</sup> Fritz Fabian, *Erinnerungen an die Hitlerzeit*, July 1965, AR 7234, LBI; Karl Loewenstein to General State Attorney, October 18, 1948, *Volksgerichte*, Vg 41/54 gg Prochnik, Viennese Municipal and State Archive, Vienna.

<sup>55</sup> Significantly, Ota R. refused to have this detail written down in the transcript. Miroslav Kryl, personal communication with the author, April 23, 2009, Litoměřice. See also testimony of Otakar R., August 17, 1972, *vzpomínky*, 834, APT.

Because of the relatively free sexual atmosphere in the ghetto, sexual extortion did not occur very often. On the contrary, men in positions of power usually received propositions from women. There is, however, evidence that extortion occurred, albeit rarely (Redlich 1995, 230). Extortion here is defined as an instance in which a male inmate coerced a woman into providing sexual favors or a relationship; while it is an act of abuse, it is not rape, since it still includes an element of choice, however weak. Arnoštka Frischmannová, who was threatened two months after her arrival in Theresienstadt in June 1942, offers one such example:

Well, one particular day I went home accompanied by a colleague from the *Arbeitseinsatz* [labor department] . . . and well, he said, that he would like to sleep with me and described what we could do together. Well, and I told him that he had his wife there whom I knew or saw and that I had my fiancé, in short, no interest, thank you very much, and he said, well, and do you know that in fourteen days another transport is going to the east? And we were in this transport. That was pretty awful, when we received that order, first all my family came to Theresienstadt to be there with me together, and my dad was quite pale, as a piece of paper, and my Mum . . . well, and then I went to this guy and said, is this your work, and he said, yes. But if you want to accept my condition, I could get you out of the transport, but not your parents. Well, I told him thank you very much, and so we were in the transport.<sup>56</sup>

Frischmannová's testimony is exceptional, in part because she survived, and moreover because she remembered the incident throughout her years in the camps. Most women who were coerced into sexual relations, if they did not give in, and if the man fulfilled his threats, did not survive—almost certainly not if they were deported before December 1943.<sup>57</sup> If the man failed to carry out his threat, the horrors that were to come (given that most of the Theresienstadt inmates were eventually sent to the camps in the east) were usually worse than an incident of sexual blackmail, which may have faded from their memory. Finally, if the woman

<sup>56</sup> Arnoštka was deported to Raasiku in Estonia and survived nearly three years in various camps. Interview by Lukáš Přebyl with Erna Frischmannová-M., 2001, London. Thanks to Lukáš for a copy. See also her other interview, where she mentioned the blackmailer's name, Jacques Schallinger: August 29, 1989, Sound Archive, C410, 55, British Library, London. Schallinger was a functionary in the Brno Maccabi table tennis section and husband of the champion Traute Kleinová-Schallingerová, who, unlike him, survived.

<sup>57</sup> The probability of survival for those deported before December 1943 was extremely low. After this date, young childless women had about a 20–40 percent chance of survival. See also the interview with Robert R. about his sister, April 1, 1997, *vzpomínky*, 645, ŽMP.

yielded to the threat, it was in her best interest not to disclose the episode later. In the postwar public discourse, it was frequently alleged that Jewish women survived because they prostituted themselves. People tended to fault the victim rather than her blackmailer.

How did the ghetto community react to sexual barter, and how was it seen by the survivors in retrospect, after the war? As in any society under pressure, the limits of acceptable behavior had shifted. Mary-Louise Roberts (1994), Elizabeth Heineman (1999), Maria Höhn (2002), and Atina Grossmann (2007) have outlined the transformation of values and everyday behavior in early postwar France and Germany. They have illustrated the gendered nature of the moral assessment, the social corrective, that occurs once society starts returning to “normal”: it is most often women who are punished for behaving differently or having different values.

This kind of social gardening (to use a concept of Zygmunt Bauman’s [1991], though in this case the correcting entity is the society, rather than the state) occurs at two points: during the exceptional circumstances and afterward. The corrective of social critique is first applied during the time of exception—be it in the postwar German chaos or, in this case, in Theresienstadt. During the state of exception, the corrective is applied sparingly, to keep order in the community and, more importantly, to “weed out” disruptive elements who violate crucial societal codes. The second point comes when the society is returning from the state of exception to normalcy—Germany in the late 1940s, or survivors several months after the liberation. At the second point, the goal is larger; the social corrective is exerted more frequently, often in order to demonstrate that the state of exception is over by making a negative example of inappropriate gender behavior.

Within Theresienstadt, the social criticism was aimed at women who violated social expectations. For instance, the ghetto community marked Vlasta Schönová as “promiscuous,” pointing to the fact that she was in a relationship with a despised functionary. A strong, outspoken female figure in Theresienstadt society, Schönová actually violated gender norms that in Theresienstadt cast women as submissive and nurturing.<sup>58</sup> The critique by the inmates’ society did not focus on women who engaged in one of the more explicit forms of sex barter. The playful portrayal in *Šnap* and Lichtblau’s sketch indicate that the community observed the emergence of sexual barter in terms similar to those in which it observed the intensified sexual life in the ghetto. Theresienstadt society developed a master narra-

<sup>58</sup> Irena S., *ŽMP, vzpomínky*, 407; for a similar case of a Dutch woman who dated outside of her group, Ellen D., see the author’s interviews with Kitty Nijstad Kok de Wijze on May 4, 2001, in Lochem, and with Anny Wafelman Morpurgo on July 10, 2001, in Amsterdam.



tive of its experience, depicting the inmates' community as relatively equal and cooperative, with the people taking care of the youngest and producing a vibrant cultural life, a place where humanity was preserved in spite of Nazi barbarism. Love and sexuality were components of this discourse, seen as meaningful and valid ways to spend time, components of Theresienstadt's humanism. Sexual barter was not a part of the master narrative, but it was at least accepted.

The treatment of sexual barter in the survivor community shifted starkly after the war. In Theresienstadt, women and men were together. But most long-term inmates of Theresienstadt who survived were eventually sent to Auschwitz, where they were separated and sent to different, monosexual labor camps. If they survived, men and women only met again after liberation, back in the normal (or normalizing) society. The postwar public (including some male survivors) frequently assumed that returning female survivors had compromised themselves, surviving by cooperating in their own sexual exploitation—significantly with the Germans, guards, or *kapos*.<sup>59</sup> This narrative became a staple of public perception of women in the camps. In the eyes of the public, female survival was sexually purchased. We can only wonder about how far the male survivors who participated in this assumption were influenced by their experience of the recurrent sexual barter in Theresienstadt.

The public perception of women who slept their way to liberation influenced the master narrative of the survivors. This notion changed the assessment of sexual barter in Theresienstadt, which now dishonored the women. One part of the impact was that for several decades, sexual barter was barely touched upon in memoirs. Rare mentions described the participating women (never men) as young, naive girls who gave up on themselves and did not know what they were doing, or who “prostituted themselves” as a consequence of their loss of status as Jews (Oppenheim 1961, 230; Baker 1978, 294).

Sex workers have been labeled by society as social outcasts, people without social value who can be used and disposed of.<sup>60</sup> Survivors employed the notion of social death, losing social value as a citizen and human being, as if to apologize or account for these women—but in doing so, they defined the women as exceptions, utterly uncharacteristic of the overall behavior in the ghetto. The postwar master narrative of Theresienstadt

<sup>59</sup> Moshe Leshem to Alena Hájková, 1990, about their mutual acquaintance Dina G., reprinted in Čelovský (2004, 33). Otherwise, there is a rich literature on these accusations; see, e.g., Bartov (1997), Friesová (1997, 206), and *Stalags* (2007).

<sup>60</sup> For thinking on social death, loss of social status, and prostitutes, Giorgio Agamben's (1998) concept of *homo sacer* is very useful.

toned down the component of sex and love and now had no accommodation whatsoever for instances of sexual commodification. This remarkably tight-knit master narrative, with its main points (culture, children, solidarity, humanity), does not accommodate memories of conflicts, stratification, or absent solidarity. Inmates who behaved differently had to be fit into the overarching narrative. Here the traditional notion of sex workers was applied.

In the postwar decades, sexualized portrayals became a frequent trope in art, such as in Arnošt Lustig's novels or Liliana Cavani's films (see also Brask 2007); this trope later found its way into some survivors' narratives. Many of the later first-person testimonies, especially published ones, that explicitly address the issue of sexual abuse or barter are to be read with great caution (Schiff 2002; Pollak 2010, 72–78). Narratives are social constructions; they are framed and informed by social expectations. Tertiary or postwar socialization (where primary or “normal” socialization took place before the period of persecution, and secondary socialization occurred in the ghetto and/or camps) had an impact on both the form and content of survivor testimony. For example, survivors living in Israel incorporated into their recollections of Theresienstadt a Zionist trope, whereas Czechs spoke of humor and team spirit. (All groups incorporated the key points of the Theresienstadt master narrative, namely children, culture, solidarity, humanity.) Survivors who emigrated to North America, in particular, women who published their memoirs from the 1970s on (after the establishment of feminism in the mainstream), frequently included stories of sexuality and sexual violence, as they became staple topics in North American discussions.

### Conclusion

How did the pragmatization of sexual life alter gender roles and relationships in Theresienstadt? In the first place, sexual barter in Theresienstadt improved women's positions, thereby strengthening their sense of agency. Women could take the initiative and they had something to offer, a specifically female form of capital that men did not have. This is one of the reasons that young women, especially when they were attractive and Czech, constituted part of the elite group of young Czech Jews. Indeed, sexual barter in its many subtle forms became so ingrained into the structure of society that people often did not acknowledge its existence, just as we do not necessarily pay attention to the myriad ongoing social contracts in our “normal” world. Bourdieu described this condition when talking about sociological lines of inquiry: “The particular difficulty of sociology comes from the fact that it teaches things that everybody knows in a way, but which they do not

want to know or cannot know because the law of the system is to hide those things from them” (Bourdieu 1993, 133).

There is one significant difference between the “normal” world and the ghetto that emerges in retrospective accounts: while we live in a society that encourages construing partnership as romantic, the framework of romantic love is even more forceful in postwar Holocaust narratives. Relationships between Holocaust victims have been imagined and depicted as romantic, nonmaterial, great love stories. Love in the camps has been understood as a refuge, without a connection to one’s social status. This essay has argued that relationships in the ghetto were very much a social and political statement about one’s position in the social hierarchy. Genuine romantic feelings were the luxury of a small elite.<sup>61</sup>

Sexual barter was so prevalent in Theresienstadt that economy became sexualized and sexuality commodified: much of the barter was expressed in sexualized terms, and love and relationships in economized terms. This thinking was so ingrained in the inmates that after liberation, some of them assumed that women had survived the camps after Theresienstadt through instrumental sex. It is revealing that men assumed this about women, but the opposite was not assumed. Women were the sexualized part of the gender binary, and after the war they were assumed to be at fault. Sexual barter reveals the gender hierarchies in the ghetto: men purchased sex from women, and male prisoners were in charge of the administration, organized the outgoing transports, or could, through their position, offer transport protection. This asymmetry of power was one of the factors in the development of the postwar narrative with its strong gender bias regarding women who were sexually at fault. Analyzing sexual barter is so important because it illuminates the dynamics of social and political elites, access to power, and how power is negotiated, as well as the position of women in the ghetto society. This is also why the dismissive postwar narrative of sexual barter is relevant: it shows again that the political power in Theresienstadt was held by men.

Is society in extremis more prone to triggering sexual barter? The answer is yes. The economic chain is simple, and a ghetto society is bound to be more corrupt than the “normal” world. However temporary, sex, intimacy, attachment, and affection gain a new dimension in the prisoner community. Many of the patterns described here are also present in the normal world; however, relationships there are less explicit in their rationality. In Theresienstadt, where people acted from similar motivations, their actions had radically different consequences: the location was a transit ghetto,

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Anna B., December 9, 2006, *vzpomínky*, 1090, ŽMP.

where the overwhelming majority of prisoners were eventually shipped to their death.

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