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Dachau And Ravensbrück:

A Comparative Analysis of Concentration Camps From 1933 to 1945

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Dachau and Ravensbrück:
A Comparative Analysis of Concentration Camps from 1933 to 1945

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Abstract

Comparing and contrasting the two infamous camps, Dachau and Ravensbrück, is fundamental in understanding the true nature of the two camps. Additionally, this research indirectly focuses on the question of ‘what defines a death camp versus a concentration camp?’ Using primary source material, specifically concentration camp survivors’ memoirs and Google Earth imagery, this comparative study of Dachau and Ravensbrück addresses key distinctions between the two camps in Nazi Germany. Although Dachau was built in 1933 and Ravensbrück in 1939, the two camps shared a characteristic of imprisoning only a single sex: Dachau imprisoned males, while Ravensbrück imprisoned females. By investigating geographical differences of concentration camps, this study brings forth new evidence pertaining to a camp’s proximity to the death camp system in Poland and their respective mortality rate. Examples of gender-oriented topics such as women as guards, women as sexual assailants, and homosexual relationships between prisoners and camp staff are explored and make up a large portion of this work.

Introduction

In February of 1933, a new political party took the reign of Germany, the National Socialist German Workers Party (Nazis). Within a month of coming to power, Nazi officials embarked on a twelve-year path of destruction reinforced with brutality and dehumanization on such a scale it trumped the atrocities in global living memory. The elaborate system of concentration camps established under the Nazi regime spanned continents; German concentration camps were built in locations such as Germany, Poland, as well as North Africa. With the concentration camp system having such an encompassing nature, an analysis of the Nazi concentration camp system through the lens of gender studies is integral for future Holocaust research and studies.

In the realm of the concentration camp system, which was undeniably a physical representation of Nazi power and oppression, gender and the privileges ascribed to gender-roles were omnipresent. Interdependent on prisoners' identities, e.g. political, religious, or class, gender was a determining factor for a plethora of activities and consequences within the camp. For that reason and others, the following material presents two concentration camps—Dachau and Ravensbrück—due to each camp being focused on imprisoning a specific biological sex. Additionally, a significant correlation between the two camps was their categorization as concentration camps instead of labor or death camps. Differentiating the camps for concentration, labor, and death is crucial in obtaining a limited view of the concentration camp system and its victims.

Concentration camps are camps that focused on consolidating people who were affiliated with specific groups of people considered to be 'undesirable' by Nazi leadership. Labor camps,

such as Mauthausen and Flossenbürg, are designated to work prisoners to death, mainly in quarries. Death camps, such as Treblinka and Majdanek, focused their attention on murdering or in other terms ‘liquidating’ Jewish populations via gas chambers and mass shootings. Both labor and concentration camps were located throughout conquered Europe (France, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, and other nearby countries) while death camps were only found in Poland. Despite that, killing centers—Hartheim Castle and the Euthanasia Centers at Bernburg, Brandenburg, and Hadamar—were located in Germany and facilitated the murder of thousands of disabled (mentally and physically) and concentration camp prisoners. The centers were part of either Aktion T4 (Hadamar, Brandenburg, Hartheim Castle, and Bernburg) or Aktion 14f13 (Hartheim Castle and Bernburg).¹

Throughout this study the use of primary sources such as diaries and memoirs will be essential to understanding the key differences as well as similarities of Dachau and Ravensbrück. The primary source material is exclusively from former prisoners of each camp; source material directly from members of the Schutzstaffel (SS) who worked within the camps is currently unavailable due to multiple reasons. First, innumerable documents relating to camp organization, payroll, and activities were destroyed during the Allies’ approach. Second, diaries of SS members have rarely come to light since past SS guards seldom want to acknowledge and admit to perpetrating atrocities. If and when SS diaries are found, most—if not all—are lacking historical integrity and intentionally misleading. This leaves us to rely on the prisoners’ testimonies of the occurrences in the camps, which also should be under critical historical analysis. Although former prisoners personally experienced the camps and their brutalities,

¹ Aktion T4 was a program for murdering German citizens who were disabled (physically and mentally). Aktion 14f13 was a program that utilized concentration camps by selecting specific prisoners to be gassed at nearby euthanasia centers.

keeping in mind the biases formed by prisoners is exceptionally significant when using their testimonies to understand historical fact versus historical embellishment. This is not an attempt to criticize the victims and survivors of the camps, but an attempt to gain accurate analyses of the events historically. Eyewitness testimonies, written immediately or years after an event are fraught with minute inaccuracies. Regardless if the inaccuracies are accidental rather than intentional the fallibility of memory needs to be accounted for. Additional primary sources involved in this study will be photographs of the camps from numerous angles and taken by multiple photographers (Allies, the SS, and citizens).

This study on Dachau and Ravensbrück is broken up into three chapters. Chapter one will cover key differences between Dachau and Ravensbrück namely construction dates, length of construction, builders of the camps, aerial photograph comparisons, Dachau being exclusively for male inmates, and Ravensbrück being exclusively for women inmates. Chapter two details the importance gender played in the experiences of inmates in Dachau and Ravensbrück; the second chapter utilizes prisoner memoirs to explain differences in concentration camp experiences through a gendered lens. Chapter three examines religious resistance to Nazism, which subsequently resulted in the imprisonment of members of the Catholic Church such as priests, nuns, and parishioners.

Chapter One: Dachau and Ravensbrück

By the middle of March 1933, the Nazis already had one concentration camp established: the Dachau concentration camp.² Located in the Germany's Southern state of Bavaria and only a forty-minute train ride from downtown Munich, Dachau's presence and purpose was not hidden from the German population. From Dachau's onset, SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler boasted about its purpose of imprisoning political enemies of the Reich and 5,000-inmate capacity in the *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten*.³ Additionally, Dachau became a training ground for SS officials who were not only extremely prominent in the Nazi hierarchy, but also deeply entrenched in the concentration camp system. Outlined extensively by King's College (London) professor Christopher Dillon, Dachau and the SS had a relationship unlike any other; as Dillon argues in his work on Dachau and the SS, Dachau became 'a school of violence' for members of the SS.⁴ Dillon is a leading historian when it comes to Dachau, the SS in Dachau, masculinity, the Nazi racial state, and militarism; five out of his eight publications are on Dachau specifically.

On March 22nd, 1933, the first prisoners—around “200 prisoners from Stadelheim prison Munich and the Landsberg fortress”—were delivered to Dachau.⁵ Most if not all of the prisoners were detained due to their allegiances to oppositional political parties, i.e. allegiances with any political parties besides the NSDAP. However, the majority of the inmates arriving on March 22nd were members of the two leading forces against the Nazis, the German Communist Party (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands/KPD) and Social Democratic Party of Germany

² Although Dachau is the town in which the camp resided, in this text “Dachau” will be in place of “the Dachau concentration camp” unless stated otherwise.

³ “Ein Konzentrationslager für politische Gegner: in der Nähe von Dachau,” *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten* March 21, 1933.

⁴ Christopher Dillon, *Dachau and the SS: A Schooling in Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁵ Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 21.

(Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands/SPD). From February to July of 1933, Nazi Germany focused a lot of effort towards eliminating ‘enemies of Reich.’ Nazi aspirations culminated in the “Law Against the Founding of New Political Parties” on July 14th, 1933, making all political parties illegal besides the NSDAP.⁶

Also, Dachau’s camp was exclusively for male prisoners of the Reich; Dachau never had women as inmates, however, women were sometimes found behind its walls for ‘medical’ and sexual experimentation. The use of Ravensbrück prisoners during ‘medical’ experiments exemplifies a disturbing link between the men of Dachau and the women of Ravensbrück. Reported by former Dachau prisoner Nico Rost, women from Ravensbrück were used during Dr. Sigmund Rascher’s infamous freezing experiments, which were conducted in Dachau from 1941 to 1942 and again during 1944. As described by Rost, while men were subjected to large basins of freezing water in an attempt to simulate the freezing conditions of the North Sea—the main body of water between Germany and the United Kingdom—women from Ravensbrück were instructed to embrace the freezing men and ‘warm’ them up.⁷ Of course, the outcome of this method proved to be useless and degrading for both men and women from each camp.

Interestingly, the experiments conducted by Dr. Rascher are heavily documented in the source material relating to Dachau, but are not mentioned in Ravensbrück’s. The conclusion to be drawn from the lack of source material by the women in Ravensbrück concerning the use of women from Ravensbrück as sexual objects in Dachau’s experiments can be addressed by briefly

⁶ “Law Against the Founding of New Parties,” Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, translated from *Reichsgesetzblatt I*, 1933, p. 479, accessed January 30th, 2022.

(<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/law-against-the-founding-of-new-parties>)

⁷ Nico Rost, *Concentration Camp Dachau* (Dachau International Committee; 4th edition, 1945), 23. Rost was a Dutch born KPD member living in Berlin during 1933 when he was arrested and sent to Oranienburg for the total of three weeks. He became active in the resistance movement in Brussels during the 1940’s, landing him back in Nazi hands in 1942. He moved from a prison, to camp Vught, and finally to Dachau, where he would remain until liberation in 1945.

discussing bordellos. Bordellos were Nazi controlled brothels set up inside of men's camps. Concentration camp inmates barely made it inside of bordellos; bordellos were exclusively for privileged prisoners (Kapos/prisoner functionaries) and SS men. The Ravensbrück women used in Dachau's experiments could have been forced into working in the bordellos after their experimentation in Dachau. To hypothesize that these women were moved into bordellos and then murdered by SS guards or 'customers' after their sexual encounters is not too hard to believe given the reality of the concentration camp. Although speaking about American troops in Vietnam, British investigative journalist Michael Bilton points to how the want for physical domination during wartime morph into extreme sexual violence towards the 'enemy.'⁸

Even when seen as the ultimate 'enemy' of Nazi Germany and the future of the 'Aryan' race, Jews were exposed to incidences of sexual violence. Argued by American Holocaust researcher Rochelle Saidel, regardless of the Nazis' Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor (1935), Jewish women were targets for sexual violence.⁹ Sleeping with a Jewish woman would be grounds for an SS guard to be sent to a concentration camp himself as a 'race-defiler,' which could easily be contained by the murder of the Jewish woman whom he slept with. An example of a woman being sexually and physically abused by SS men comes from Rudolf Höß sexual escapades with political prisoner Eleonore Hodys.¹⁰ Although not Jewish, Hodys was eventually impregnated by Höß in 1943 and subsequently moved to one of the camp's standing cells in an attempt by Höß to kill Hodys via starvation and exhaustion.¹¹

⁸ Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, (London: Penguin, 1993).

⁹ Rochelle G. Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 23.

¹⁰ Eleonore Hodys was a political prisoner from Austria and was interned in Auschwitz in 1942.

¹¹ "Höss hoped that she would quietly die of starvation there." Ian Baxter, *The Commandant: Rudolf Höss: the creator of Auschwitz*, (Dunboyne: Maverick House, 2008), 122.

Granted that Höß and Hodys were in Auschwitz—not Ravensbrück, Dachau, or a bordello—during their interactions and Hodys was *not* Jewish, this exemplifies that men in the SS—even the Commandant of Auschwitz—were sexually interacting with prisoners and were inclined to murder their sexual partners before being outed by their superiors. As presented by military historian Ian Baxter, Höß “was secretly terrified that their relationship would be exposed. He knew that it was illegal for an SS man to have a relationship with a female prisoner, and that the crime was punishable by death.”¹² SS guards in concentration camps could have accomplished the disturbing deed of murdering a bordello ‘worker’ after sexual activities without any issues from others. In the source consulted for this thesis, evidence of bordello workers being executed by SS ‘customers’ or prisoner functionaries after sexual encounters with inmates who were Jewish women is non-existent.

In conclusion, the murder of Ravensbrück women after Dr. Rascher’s experiments in Dachau—whether murdered immediately after their experience in Dachau or after being brought to a bordello in a different camp—could suffice as an answer to why there are not any primary sources translated into English discussing the events in Dachau. As for as sexual relations between males and females in Dachau, the only evidence is through Dr. Rascher’s experiments; a bordello was not established in Dachau at any time.

It should also be recognized that the primary sources—prisoner testimonies, memoirs, and diaries—do not reflect any children, i.e. a male prisoner under the age of seventeen, being imprisoned in Dachau. Although the fact that children were not imprisoned in Dachau is abundantly clear, the reason for this exclusion is not. Understandably in the beginning years of Nazi Germany, Nazis did not want to upset the general public in Germany by imprisoning

¹² Ibid.

women and children at such an early stage of their reign; the general public generally accepted imprisoning men who were deemed ‘enemies of the state.’ In 1933, Nazi officials were still testing the waters with their newly found autonomy and wanted to tread lightly regarding their effort in imprisoning women and children, which was subject to change in the coming years.

Dachau’s construction was ongoing throughout its entire operational timeline of twelve years. Inmates of Dachau were forced to build the camp and keep it maintained for the future. Since Dachau was not a death camp, although death was still omnipresent, inmates tended to survive for longer periods of time as compared to inmates of death camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau or Treblinka. With inmates living longer within the camp society of Dachau, the prisoner hierarchy had more time to become established and integrated into the camp structure. As discussed in my previous work, *The Social Dynamics of the Dachau Concentration Camp*, inmates that were imprisoned in 1933 and helped construct Dachau’s original camp survived long enough to confront incoming inmates in March of 1941. Distinguishing between *newcomers*, *veterans*, and ‘*original-veterans*,’ is important in understanding Dachau’s social atmosphere as well as its end-goal—not the liquidation of its prisoners—since inmates were not being ‘liquidated’ at such an extreme pace.¹³ Newcomers were inmates who were in the camp for less than three to four months; veterans were inmates who were in Dachau for more than five to six months; and original-veterans were inmates who were imprisoned in Dachau from 1933 to 1936.

Moving to the second camp in question, Ravensbrück, we see drastic differences when compared to Dachau. A significant disparity between the camps pertains to the dates the camps were built: Dachau being built from February to March 1933 and Ravensbrück in May of 1939.

¹³ Michael Powell, *The Social Dynamics of the Dachau Concentration Camp*, (Undergraduate Honors Thesis: Marquette University: Milwaukee, WI., 2020), 13.

Ravensbrück stands out since the female prisoners were not limited to a certain age; Ravensbrück imprisoned and murdered females of all age groups from babies to the elderly. However, in 1941, Ravensbrück expanded its camp and started to imprison men as well; from 1941 to 1945, the estimated number of men imprisoned in Ravensbrück is approximately 20,000.¹⁴ Secondly, the locations of the camps differ: Dachau in Southern Bavaria *and* Ravensbrück in Northern Brandenburg. With that change brought significantly more violence to the Ravensbrück camp. One crucial difference between Dachau and Ravensbrück was the mode of murder, i.e. a gas chamber; Ravensbrück had a gas chamber, while Dachau did not.

Although utilizing a gas chamber, Ravensbrück's victim count was relatively low when compared to other camps' use of the gas chamber such as Auschwitz; Ravensbrück's total number of prisoners was, estimated to be, 132,000 women and out of that figure, 119,000 female prisoners were murdered—not all via gas chamber.¹⁵ Moreover, Ravensbrück's installation of a gas chamber can be linked to the camps proximity to other modes of murder in Nazi Germany such as the aforementioned T4 Program and Aktion 14f13. Berlin held the headquarters for the T4 Program, while Brandenburg *and* Bernburg housed the unethical experiments of Dr. Julius Hallervorden.¹⁶ Being geographically close as well as running, almost, sequentially to each other, Hallervorden's killing centers in Brandenburg and Bernburg had a direct consequence for those imprisoned in Ravensbrück: the use of poisonous gas as a mode of executing prisoner of the Reich.

¹⁴ "1939-1945 Ravensbrück concentration camp," Ravensbrück Memorial Site, Brandenburg Memorials Foundation, accessed February 2nd, 2022. (<https://www.ravensbrueck-sbg.de/en/history/1939-1945/>)

¹⁵ Sidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp*, 3.

¹⁶ Dr. Julius Hallervorden, a German physician and neuroscientist during and after the Nazi regime, is an important character when discussing past and current neurological studies in Germany. Through the assistance and research of Dr. Hallervorden at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Brain Research in Berlin-Buch, from 1938 to 1945, the Reich significantly expanded their collection of human brains for neurological studies.

From the methods used in the mobile killing units at Chelmno—connecting a tube to the exhaust pipe of a running vehicle then filtering the exhaust into a closed chamber filled with prisoners thus killing them by asphyxiation—to the use of Zyklon B in Ravensbrück and other camps.¹⁷ Moreover, the links between the killing center at Bernburg, Dr. Hallervorden, and Ravensbrück run deeper than previously mentioned. Ravensbrück historians such as Jack G. Morrison, Iris Nachum, and Dina Porat indicate a horrifically close relationship between the operators of Aktion 14f13 and Ravensbrück.¹⁸ In the beginning years of Aktion 14f13 (1941), i.e. the killing operation dedicated to eradicating ‘asocials’ and ‘superfluous’ concentration camp inmates, officials made ‘selections’ of women to be gassed at the Bernburg facility. The gassing facility at Bernburg was not the only attack on the biological body of women inside of Ravensbrück. From 1941 to 1942, women in Ravensbrück began to be guinea pigs for medical experimentations of all kinds.

Shown in Figure One, the Ravensbrück concentration camp was divided into numerous sections, covered a large portion of land, and was built around a body of water known as Schwedt-see. Sections of the camp included, but were not limited to, a Siemens factory, a German Equipment Works (DAW/Deutsche Ausrüstungswerke) outpost, housing and storage for the SS, and barracks for prisoners (men, women, and children all being in separate portions). Evident from the diagram of Ravensbrück in 1945, the camp was used as a hybrid camp: a labor and a concentration camp. Prisoners of Ravensbrück were subjected to both privatized and governmental work programs. In the diagram, the Siemens factory—where prisoners were used

¹⁷ Jack G. Morrison, *Ravensbrück: Everyday Life in a Women's Concentration Camp, 1939-45* (Princeton, NJ: Wiener, 2000), 289-291; Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück*, 20.

¹⁸ Morrison, *Ravensbrück*, 70-71, 138, and 245; Iris Nachum and Dina Porat, “The History of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp as Reflected in its Changing and Expanding Functions,” in Irith Dublon-Knebel, *A Holocaust Crossroads: Jewish Women and Children in Ravensbrück* (London; Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010), 22-23.

in creating electric small parts for the infamous V-1 and V-2 rockets—was a substantial portion of the camp. For example, the Siemens factory was almost two to three times larger when compared to the section of the camp allotted for imprisoning men.

When comparing the Siemens factory to the DAW's workshop, the diagram shows how the effort the Nazi administrators put towards private industry in the Ravensbrück camp. Indeed the diagram for Ravensbrück states it is “not to scale,” but this does not take away from what is explained above. Using Google Earth's measuring tool, the prior location of the Siemens factory is approximately eight to nine acres while the DAW's location is approximately four to five acres.¹⁹ The later chapter discussing prisoner experiences will focus on the Ravensbrück's crematorium, gas chamber, DAW workshop, and Siemens factory; Figures one, two, and three will be utilized again.

In Figure four, there are three areas outlined on the aerial shot of Dachau (c. 1945): the main camp (red), the area for mass shootings and the crematorium (yellow), and the SS installation (blue). Comparing Figure four to Ravensbrück in Figures two and three, the size difference—Ravensbrück being the larger of the two—is quite noticeable. However, the photograph in Figure four is puzzling from a historian's point of view. The most prominent discrepancy in the photograph is that the camp's barracks and roll call square are empty. The photograph is reportedly taken sometime in 1945 (the exact date unspecified), which does not match up with the reality of what Dachau was in 1945. Although the war came to a stop in September 1945 and Dachau had been liberated in April 1945, thousands of displaced persons (DPs) still remained within Dachau.

¹⁹ See Figures A and B.

Reported by concentration camp historian Nikolaus Wachsmann, Dachau became a DP camp, which was used as apartments, kindergartens, and even built a restaurant there.²⁰ Additionally, in their collaborative work, Wachsmann and historian Jane Caplan argue that Dachau and Bergen-Belsen were the largest of the German concentration camps turned into DP camps.²¹ Dachau continued to be a DP camp until the late 1950's. Due to the lack of snow, one can also hypothesize the image reflects either the summer or fall; Bavaria is known to have extremely cold and snowy winters. Bavarian winters are so intense that numerous Dachau prisoners, most of which were priests, reflected on their work in the 'snow commando,' where prisoners would 'shovel' snow with their hats.²² Former Dachau prisoner Father Johann Neuhäusler described winters in Dachau: "Dachau is situated not far from the Alps, almost 1900 feet above sea level. The winter is very severe. Snow often fell from the end of November until April."²³ In sum, even though this image is supposed to reflect 1945, it is questionable as to whether this is historically accurate or not.

The upcoming chapter focuses on numerous areas pertaining to the importance of a gender studies lens while discussing the concentration camp system. Topics such as physical and sexual violence at the hands of women, homosexuality in the camp system, inmate experiences with medical experimentation, forced sterilization in Ravensbrück, and mortality rates of Dachau and Ravensbrück are discussed at length.

²⁰ Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 128 and 622. Each barrack selected for DP would be divided in to 24 apartments and 500 toilets would be installed with new plumbing throughout the camp; not every barrack was converted into apartments.

²¹ Jane Caplan and Nikolaus Wachsmann, *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany: The New Histories* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 189-190.

²² Stanislav Zámečník, *That Was Dachau 1933-1945* (Paris: Le cherche midi, 2004), 126; Father Jean Bernard, *Priestblock 25487: A Memoir of Dachau* (Munich: Anton Pustet, 1962), 61 and 89; Guillaume Zeller, *The Priest Barracks* (San Francisco, California: Ignatius Press, 2017), 78.

²³ Johann Neuhäusler, *What Was It Like in The Concentration Camp at Dachau?: An Attempt To Come Closer To The Truth* (Dachau: Trustees for the Monument of Atonement in the Concentration Camp at Dachau, 2008), 36.

Figures for Chapter One:

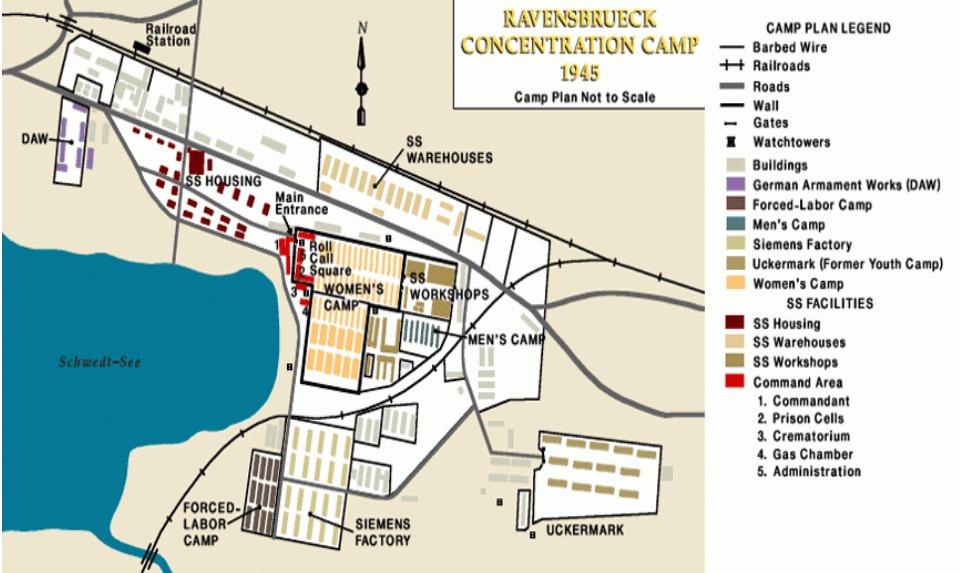


Figure 1: Diagram of Ravensbrück in 1945 (Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)



Figure 2: DAW Installation (Current Location via Google Earth)



Figure 3: Siemens Factory (Current Location via Google Earth)

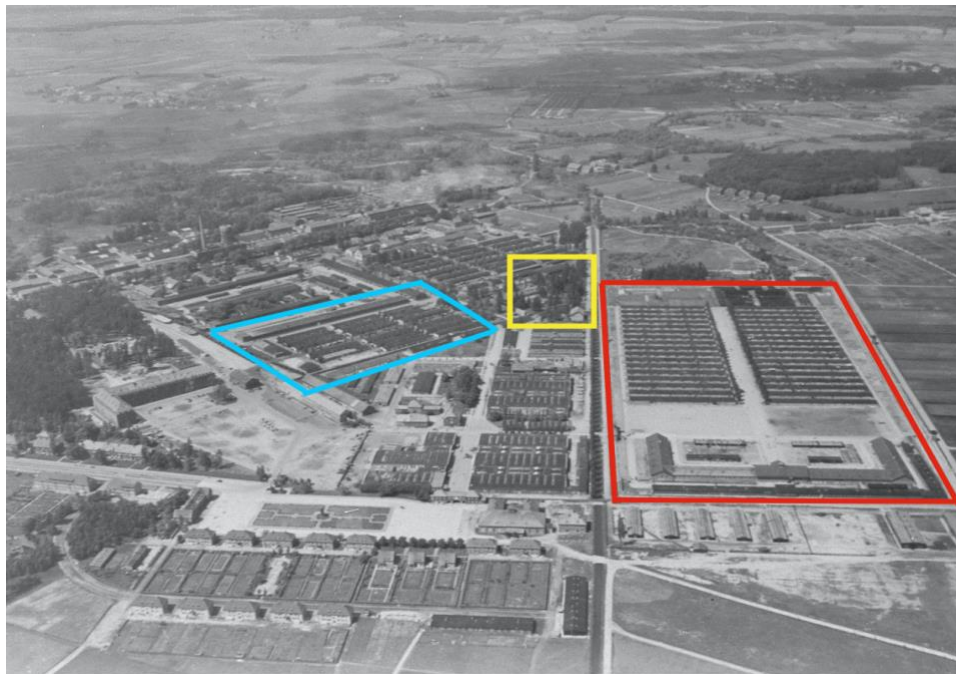


Figure 4: Aerial Photograph of Dachau in 1945 (Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Photograph #80740) Edited by Michael Powell

Chapter Two: Gender in the Concentration Camp

In recent years, the scholarship pertaining to gender and genocide *and* concentration camps has been rapidly expanding. Publications from historians such as Jane Caplan, Elissa Bemporad *and* Joyce W. Warren²⁴, Wendy Adele-Marie Sarti²⁵, and Maja Suderland²⁶ showcase the necessity of a gender studies lens when it comes to life within the concentration camp system.²⁷ Additionally, the work of Laurie Marhoefer gives researchers an understanding of the social, legal, and political attitudes towards homosexuality in both the public and private spaces

²⁴ Bemporad and Warren's *Women and Genocide* addressed numerous global events, which are categorized as genocide. Whether in terms of how tracking genocide on a global scale or explaining the fluidity between victims, survivors, and perpetrators, the encompassing nature of the material is an astonishing characteristic of Bemporad and Warren's work. Their attempt at bringing the intersection of women and genocide to light was quite successful. Spanning both time and space, the two editors of this volume explain the correlation between genocide and the roles women play within the violent act. Nevertheless, the shallow presentation of women as perpetrators is a critique for the editors' work. With the word 'perpetrators' in the title, a reader would expect far more discourse on women as genocidal perpetrators. In this work, "Women as perpetrators" only appears on thirteen pages (out of three hundred and six pages—the book's entirety). Bemporad and Warren strive to incorporate genocidal actions that occurred outside of Nazi Germany, albeit dedicating two chapters to the subject, such as the ones taken in Armenia, Africa (Rwanda *and* Sudan—Darfur), the Middle East (Iraq *and* Syria), Asia (Cambodia), North and Central American (U.S. *and* Guatemala). The editors take a step toward unveiling the true actions of women within the context of genocide by presenting material pertaining to women's roles as perpetrators. In the preface, the editors make a perceptive argument: generally, women during wartime have been portrayed in a liminal sense since scholars identify women as only survivors and victims. Elissa Bemporad and Joyce W. Warren, *Women and Genocide: Survivors, Victims, Perpetrators* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018), 339.

²⁵ Sarti's *Women and Nazis* has proven to be one of the more intricate sources presenting women as perpetrators of violence in Nazi Germany. Sarti's publication focuses primarily on numerous roles women filled during the Nazi regime such as mothers of the future 'Aryan' race, doctors in the concentration camp, camp guards, and prisoner functionaries in the camp system. The second and most important part of her work provides case studies of individual women who engaged in Nazi atrocities. Sarti examines eleven women who were one of the following: Kapos, Aufseherinnen (Female Overseers), or doctors in different camps. Nine out of the eleven women examined by Sarti started their Nazi careers in Ravensbrück. Sarti's publication examines how women in the concentration camps, mainly those in positions of power, were inclined to drop their feminine characteristics and take up masculine characteristics. For instance, these women used a high degree of violence, both physical and sexual, against the prisoners under their command.

²⁶ Suderland's research focuses primarily on the sociological aspects within the concentration camp. Suderland uses sociological arguments from mainly Pierre Bourdieu (his work on habitus specifically), Michel Foucault, and Erving Goffman.

²⁷ Caplan and Wachsmann, *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany: The New Histories*; Elissa Bemporad and Joyce W. Warren, *Women and Genocide: Survivors, Victims, Perpetrators*, Wendy Adele-Marie Sarti, *Women and Nazis: Perpetrators of Genocide and Other Crimes during Hitler's Regime, 1933-1945*, (Palo Alto, California: Academica Press, 2011); Maja Suderland and Jessica Spengler, *Inside Concentration Camps: Social Life at the Extremes* (English ed. Polity Press, 2013).

during the Weimar Republic and early Nazi state.²⁸ Regarding the persecution of homosexuals in Nazi Germany the research of Heinz Heger, Günter Grau, and Richard Plant are pertinent in understanding the multiple facets of Nazi persecution: within social spheres, prisons, and concentration camps.²⁹ Since the source material regarding gender within the concentration camp system is still growing, researchers of the camp system need to make an extreme effort towards researching gender-centered issues such as sexual violence, sexual bartering, and homosexual activities within the camp system. Although the current scholarship on gender and the concentration camps has gained a lot of attention in recent years, however, researchers of the Holocaust and camp system need to continue exploring this topic for it to be considered complete.³⁰

The plain reasons for Dachau and Ravensbrück being considered for this essay on gender studies were already made apparent above, however, there are more gendered specific questions to be analyzed herein. For instance, to my surprise, in my previous research on Dachau—I wrote my honors undergraduate thesis on Dachau’s social dynamics—the mention of homosexual activities, i.e. sexual activities between the same sex, occurring within the camp was surprisingly

²⁸ Marhoefer’s engaging new perspective on the sexual politics of the Weimar Republic, which past historians have incorrectly marked as the evidence for the fall of the democratic republic, proves to be essential for historians of modern Germany. As Marhoefer explains, modern German historians have wrongly attributed the fall of the Weimar Republic and the Rise of Nazism to the sexual liberalism that was embodied in Weimar culture. Marhoefer argues that the aforementioned event comes from a weapon, which was far more potent than sexuality or sexual politics: (the myth of) Judeo-Bolshevism. The close intermingling of Nazi propaganda to ‘cleanse’ Germany of its immoralities in the early 1930’s and the sexual liberation the Weimar Republic inspired during the 1920’s has been misinterpreted as the Nazis’ active polemic against homosexuality in all of its forms. Although being quite convincing and agreeable when seen in tandem with Nazi violence against homophiles (e.g. public beatings or being sent to concentration camps)—as explicitly stated numerous times throughout Marhoefer’s study—this was certainly not the case historically. Laurie Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic: German Homosexual Emancipation and the Rise of the Nazis* (German and European Studies, 2015).

²⁹ Heinz Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle* (Boston, Mass.: Alyson Publications, 1980); Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against Homosexuals* (New York: Henry Holt, 1988); Günter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust?: Gay and Lesbian Persecution in Germany, 1933-45* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1995).

³⁰ For example, British journalist Sarah Helm’s work is some of the most recent publications focused specifically on Ravensbrück and the women who were interned there. *Ravensbrück Life and Death in Hitler’s Concentration Camp for Women*, (ANCHOR, 2016) and *If This Is a Woman Inside Ravensbrück: Hitler’s Concentration Camp for Women*, (Boston, MA., Little, Brown Book Group Limited, 2016).

unaccounted for. Except for Richard Plant's extensive research on homosexuals within Nazi concentration camps, the source material reporting on Dachau's homosexual inmate population is missing.³¹ In addition to unreported homosexual activities, the day-to-day activities, i.e. non-sexual actions, are also scarcely reported on, at least in the case of Dachau. For an exclusively male facility, especially for one that imprisoned hundreds of homosexuals in the years before the war, not seeing accounts of homosexual activity piqued my curiosity. Why did this apparent lack of homosexual activity pique my interest?

First and foremost, as a camp which housed only male prisoners, Dachau's ability to produce homosexual activities are much like those within the prison system. Holocaust historians, of course, chalk the lack of sexual activities up to the poor nourishment, arduous labor, and physical mistreatment endured by the prisoners of Dachau. Be that as it may, homosexual activities between two prisoners might be harder to recognize in light of the nourishment, labor, and mistreatment hypothesis, but homosexual activities between guards and prisoners cannot be as easily dismissed. Homosexual activities between prisoners cannot be easily dismissed either since there were multiple tiers of prisoners, which would, essentially, have access to more nutrition than others. For example, a German political prisoner could get more food than a Polish Jewish prisoner. The reason for this is two fold: nationality and personal convictions. More often, the German political prisoner would be treated better than the Polish Jewish prisoner since he is within a German camp and can navigate the camp properly since his mother-tongue is the same as the camp's: German. Also, by not being Jewish, the German political prisoner gains an even bigger foothold in the 'respectability department' of the SS guards.

³¹ Plant, *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War Against Homosexuals*.

In the same vein, prisoner functionaries, also known as ‘Kapos,’ could have easily acquired more rations, by means of force and their standing in the prisoner hierarchy, which was at the top right below the SS guards. Through demonstrations of dominance or true homosexual tendencies, Kapos engaged in sexual violence. One of the few examples of homosexual activity utilized as a bargaining tactic within Dachau comes from a French journalist, Guillaume Zeller, in his research on priests’ imprisoned there. Zeller presents the narrative of “Russian youths who prostituted themselves in exchange for a few cigarettes or a quarter of a round loaf of bread” in Dachau.³² To give a little context to the situation, the ‘Russian youths’ were under the supervision of both a “Blockälteste,” the German word for “block elder,” and “Stubenälteste” translates to “room elder.”³³ A ‘block elder’ was a prisoner in charge of the entire ‘block’ or ‘barrack,’ while the ‘room elder’ maintained order within a specific room inside of the barrack. We can analyze this interaction further by the items the Russian youth wanted in return for their sexual favors. By asking for cigarettes in return for sexual favors, this indicates that the Russian youth mentioned were relatively new to the concentration camp; veteran inmates, i.e. those within Dachau for an extensive amount of time, knew bargaining and trading anything for cigarettes would be detrimental to their health thus their chances to survive. Nevertheless, while supplies lasted, smoking and even purchasing cigarettes at the commissary were common in Dachau.³⁴

Moreover, Floris B. Bakels, a Dachau survivor, mentioned a few ‘tips’ for surviving a concentration camp and included on his list was: “...never exchange your bread or other food for

³² Guillaume Zeller, *The Priest Barracks*, 141.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Zdzislaw Koziarkiewicz, *Dachau Prisoner Correspondence* (Lepley Publisher: Dayton, Ohio: Distributed by Antique Malls of America, Inc., 1999), 29. Zeller, *The Priest Barracks*, 89. Jean Bernard, *Priestblock 25487: A Memoir of Dachau*, (Zaccheus Press, 2007), 50 and 129. Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL*, 513.

cigarettes (as often happened).”³⁵ Again, the primary source material is ever so revealing. Bakels’ claim of inmates’ desire for cigarettes, a prevalent vice then and now, indicates the inmates’ want for a sense of normalcy in the camp. With wanting a sense of normalcy in the camp, it is not a far stretch to hypothesize the same went for sexual pleasure, which were obviously lacking in a concentration camp such as Dachau. To further the point of Kapos having maintained their virility, concentration camp historian Nikolaus Wachsmann pushes the envelope and argued that Kapos used their sex drive as a hierarchical wedge, further separating the Kapos’ position in the camp from the ‘regular’ inmates. The term ‘regular inmates’ refers to inmates in the concentration camp who did not have any special privileges that were assigned by SS officials within a respective camp. Whether inmates traded physical objects for other physical objects or physical pleasures for an alleviation of physical brutality, black market trading was present in both camps, Dachau and Ravensbrück.

As previously mentioned, the location of the two concentration camps should be factored into this analysis of Dachau and Ravensbrück. Without readily understanding the possible effects of being closer to the Nazi death camp system in Poland one may overlook the significance it can bring to the daily life and mistreatment of the inmate population. Being located in Northern Brandenburg Ravensbrück’s operation was influenced by the concentration camp system in Poland, which I will refer to as the ‘death camp’ system rather than concentration camp system. Due to the fact that all of the death camps under Nazi control were located in Poland differentiating each system is integral to Holocaust studies. For further explanation, there are three types of concentration camps: labor, concentration, and death. A labor camp is a concentration camp that intends on working inmates to death (Mauthausen—a rock quarry); a

³⁵ Floris B. Bakels, *Night and Fog* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1993), 208.

concentration camp is a camp, which wants to consolidate prisoners of certain affiliation, e.g. political prisoners, in one location (e.g. Dachau and Sachsenhausen); and a death camp is a concentration camp that focuses on the extermination of their inmates (e.g. Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, and Sobibór).

Nevertheless, as research continues to reveal more about complicit and implicit subjects of activities during the Holocaust, categorizing camps in this singular form becomes difficult and limits perspective. Many, if not all, camps morphed into becoming hybrid versions, some including both extreme labor and gas chambers, while others included a concentrated number of inmates and abused them for manual labor until their death. In the case of Ravensbrück, the transformation from a concentration to a death camp occurred in the end of 1944.³⁶ Now, with the Ravensbrück facility, one can make a few assumptions about the incorporation of a gas chamber into the camp in 1944. The first and aforementioned reason for Ravensbrück transformation into a death camp is Ravensbrück's proximity to the death camp system in Poland. A second and less explored possibility was Ravensbrück's proximity to a separate operation's headquarters: the T4 Program. A third and final explanation was the approaching Allied Powers after the D-Day invasion in the early summer months of 1944, which accelerated the Nazis' efforts to exterminate as many prisoners as they could, in an attempt to eliminate evidence. Spending a few moments analyzing the reason for the introduction of the gas chamber to Ravensbrück allows for understanding the additional pressure of being imprisoned in a camp such as Ravensbrück versus Dachau. As the above arguments have not been addressed in previous research on Ravensbrück and there isn't evidence to substantiate their veracity, future Ravensbrück research should focus its attention on investigating them further.

³⁶ Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück*, 20.

The rationale of bringing a gas chamber to Ravensbrück was the fluidity of SS men from camp to camp, i.e. the movement of SS commandants and guards from concentration camps in Germany to death camps in Poland and back to concentration camps in Germany. Being less than four hundred miles away from the most ‘efficient’ death camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, the connection to Ravensbrück may be misleading. However, Ravensbrück was incredibly close to the death camp system. The closer a camp is to the death camp system the more deadly it becomes by virtue of the surrounding camps. Concentration camp administrators and guards were routinely moved from camp to camp as needed. SS-Obersturmbannführer Max Koegel (Commandant of Ravensbrück, Majdanek, and Flossenbürg); Karl Otto-Koch (Commandant of Sachsenhausen, Columbia, Buchenwald, and Majdanek)³⁷; Martin Gottfried Weiß (Commandant of Dachau, Majdanek, Mühldorf, and Dachau) all exemplify that commandants were moved from Germany to Poland and back to Germany.³⁸

The intermingling of the death camp system in Poland and Northern Germany cannot be separated or discounted as unimportant to the victims of Ravensbrück. With SS men committing atrocious acts of violence against European Jewry just across the border, influencing the nearby camps daily functions—specifically the SS men in nearby camps—would have been relatively easy in comparison to the camps in the southern portion of Germany such as Dachau. Rudolf Höß, the commandant of Auschwitz from 1940 to 1943, started to work within Ravensbrück at the end of 1944 until early 1945.³⁹ Additionally, Höß new position as the inspector of concentration camps began in December of 1943. As inspector of concentration camps, Höß’s

³⁷ Koch, after being found responsible for prisoners escaping Majdanek in 1942, was relocated by the Reich to continue working for the SS in Berlin.

³⁸ Dillon, *Dachau and the SS*, 12 and 246. The list of camps following each commandant is in chronological order.

³⁹ Stefan Hördler, *Ordnung und Inferno: Das KZ-System im letzten Kriegsjahr*, (Wallstein Verlag GmbH: Göttingen, 2015), 175.

responsibility was “to improve the overall concentration camp system and he enjoyed much more power and authority than he had ever had at Auschwitz.”⁴⁰ Placing Höß in Ravensbrück at the end of 1944 and beginning of 1945 substantiates the claim of a death camp commandant returning to Germany after spending substantial time in occupied Poland’s death camp system. In the case of Ravensbrück’s installation of a gas chamber, which happened in early 1945, Höß arrival to the camp is extremely telling.⁴¹ The fact a gas chamber was constructed shortly after Höß arrival to Ravensbrück and his appointment to inspector of concentration camps should not be overlooked. Having two and a half years of experience with the devastating nature of gas chambers in Auschwitz, it is doubtful that Höß and the other SS men who followed him from Auschwitz did not play a part in a gas chamber being installed in Ravensbrück.⁴²

While Dachau promoted brutality and violence, the ‘model camp’ for numerous other camps did not have as high as a death toll as those camps on or close to the death camp system in Poland; out of the prisoners of Dachau, around 200,000, the estimated death toll is estimated to be from 30,000 to 40,000.⁴³ Even though Dachau’s death toll is not a ‘small’ number by any means, *it is* a small percentage of the total prisoners to be killed when compared to Ravensbrück; mentioned before, Ravensbrück’s estimated death toll is 119,000 out of the estimated 130,000 to 132,000 prisoners. In purely numerical terms, the percentage of death was by far higher in Ravensbrück (90.2% to 91.5% mortality rate)—a camp near the death camp system—compared to Dachau (15% to 20% mortality rate).⁴⁴ Again, due to the Nazis’ attempt to destroy evidence of

⁴⁰ Baxter, *The Commandant: Rudolf Höss*, 146.

⁴¹ “1939-1945 Ravensbrück concentration camp,” Mahn-und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.ravensbrueck-sbg.de/en/history/1939-1945/>.

⁴² There are not any sources that directly state Höß as the man behind the idea of installing a gas chamber in Ravensbrück, but it is not purely coincidental that shortly after Höß arrived to Ravensbrück a gas chamber was built.

⁴³ Dillon, *Dachau and the SS: A Schooling in Violence*, 251.

⁴⁴ The percentages for each camp’s mortality rate were calculated using the following formulas: Ravensbrück: $(119,000/130,000)= 91.5\%$ and $(119,000/132,000)= 90.2\%$. Dachau: $(30,000/200,000)= 15\%$ and $(40,000/200,000)= 20\%$.

their genocidal tendencies, the given rates are purely estimates of the destruction produced by the camps Dachau and Ravensbrück. The true number of victims from either camp will not be found since the Nazis were successful in the destruction of evidence, specifically classified documents.⁴⁵

Ravensbrück historians Jack G. Morrison, Iris Nachum and Dina Porat indicate a horrifically close relationship between the operators of Aktion 14f13 and Ravensbrück.⁴⁶ In the beginning years of Aktion 14f13 (1941), i.e. the killing operation dedicated to eradicating ‘asocials’ and superfluous concentration camp inmates, officials made ‘selections’ of women to be gassed at the Bernburg facility. The gassing facility at Bernburg was not the only attack on the biological body of women inside of Ravensbrück. From 1941 to 1942, women in Ravensbrück begun to be guinea pigs for medical experimentations all kinds. In 1942, Heinrich Himmler, SS-Reichsführer as well as Chief of German Police, wanted to complete his goal of sterilizing concentration camp inmates whom he deemed ‘useless.’ Inmates categorized as ‘useless’ by Himmler ranged from inmates unable to physically work in the camps to Jewish prisoners of the Reich. A common characteristic of Nazism was the use of all-encompassing vocabulary when speaking about the ‘enemies of the Reich,’ which in effect allowed the Nazis to arrest, imprison indefinitely, and murder those found within the boundaries of said categories. As Himmler embarked on his sterilization project in 1942, the women of Ravensbrück found themselves in the crosshairs and were soon visited by medical officials to be deemed as ‘unworthy.’ Furthering the attack on womens’ bodies in Ravensbrück, along with the forced sterilizations came medical

⁴⁵ Many inmates taken to concentration camps were not added to a registry due to mass influxes of prisoners at one time or their immediate murder.

⁴⁶ Morrison, *Ravensbrück*, 70-71, 138, and 245; Nachum and Porat, “The History of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp as Reflected in its Changing and Expanding Functions,” in Irith Dublon-Knebel, *A Holocaust Crossroads: Jewish Women and Children in Ravensbrück*, 22-23.

experimentation in the camp. Unlike most of the sterilizations, which occurred outside of the camp, medical experimentation happened within the barbed wire fences of Ravensbrück.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Rascher's medical experimentation in Dachau overlaps with the history Ravensbrück, specifically the women prisoners of Ravensbrück. Rascher's experiments on altitude and freezing were meant to alleviate Nazi casualties in battles such as the Battle of Britain, where many fighter pilots fell into the North Sea thus dying from hypothermia. The altitude experiments were from Royal Air Force pilot fighters reaching higher altitudes than Nazi pilot fighters; Rascher was brought in to find a solution to this issue. Rascher's personal access to Himmler—Rascher was married to Nini Diehls, who was someone within Himmler's inner circle—allotted him more influence regarding the prisoners he had the ability to use in his experiments.⁴⁷ Our interests lay with the freezing experiments—where Dachau prisoners were submerged in ice cold water for an extensive period of time then Rascher implemented 'solutions' to the cold prisoner—since the freezing experiments employed the use of both Dachau and Ravensbrück prisoners.

The intersection of prisoners from Dachau and Ravensbrück was found in the moments after the male Dachau prisoners were taken out of the ice-cold water. To explain the experiment and involvement of each camp's prisoners: the men from Dachau were the ones submerged in the ice cold water, then after being relieved from the freezing water, two women from the Ravensbrück camp were told to wrap themselves, fully naked, around the Dachau prisoner in an attempt to elevate his body temperature through sexual stimulation and "coitus."⁴⁸ Rascher's use of sexual arousal in the freezing experiments, not only purposeless, requires a gendered lens to

⁴⁷ Farron, "Rascher and the 'Russians,' 262.

⁴⁸ Farron, "Rascher and the 'Russians,' 264; Morrison, *Ravensbrück*, 247. Nico Rost, *Concentration Camp Dachau*, 23.

understand the effects of the experiment on both the male and women prisoners it included. For women, it can be hypothesized that negative effects were more prominent in their experience for a few reasons. First, as Saidel presents, women in the concentration camp had a harder time dealing with the attack on their sense of modesty.⁴⁹ For instance, upon arriving to the camp, women in Ravensbrück were made to strip down until completely naked. Saidel argues that women took being naked in front of the opposite sex—SS guards were predominately male—more psychologically damaging than men who were naked in front of other men.

Moreover, the issue of infidelity via experimentation could have had an impact on the men of Dachau and the women of Ravensbrück.⁵⁰ As superficial as marriage may seem in the context of a concentration camp, the men and women used for this experiment could have been married; the sexual escapades forced by the SS guards and Rascher might have ruined their personal relationship with their significant other after the war—by the chance both wife and husband survived. Sadly, since the source material regarding the anguish felt by married individuals while performing, as well as after completing, the ‘medical’ experiments in Dachau has not been researched; future research on Nazi medical experiments must attend to this issue. The fact women from Ravensbrück were brought to Dachau during the freezing experiments is uncontested, however, the effects of their participation are yet to be examined critically. The issue with examining the source material necessary for such a study is non-existent or destroyed. Additionally, the murders of the prisoners via the experiments were a significant factor in limiting the primary source material on the pertaining to individual’s experience before, during, and after.

⁴⁹ Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück*, 22.

⁵⁰ It is uncertain as to how many men and women, if any, were married and part of the freezing experiments.

Also tying into the Nazi's attack on the biological body of prisoners is the work of the Director of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at West Chester University (Pennsylvania), Dr. Jonathan C. Friedman.⁵¹ Friedman mainly discusses female oriented issues in camp life, such as miscarriages; removal of babies through prisoner-led abortions or devastatingly putting an end to the newborn child's life; loss of menstruation; and sexual assault whether by SS guards or other inmates. However, Friedman does devote a few pages to the plight of men, which included self-mutilation of their genitals to make the Jewish men appear as non-Jewish and homosexual relationships with younger inmates as well as prisoner functionaries. Out of all of the primary source documentation pertaining to Dachau, there has yet to be any discussion of Jewish men self-mutilating themselves in an attempt to appear non-Jewish.⁵² The benefits of ascribing yourself as non-Jewish in Nazi Germany, specifically a concentration camp, could be life saving. In Dachau's case, it is questionable as to how many men chose the option of self-mutilation since the primary source material from Dachau has not discussed this issue. Although Christians have long used circumcision as a religious ceremony and identifier—making it seem as if the act of self-mutilation would be superfluous to Christians within the concentration camps—in Europe it is less common to have men circumcised.

Friedman uses a few examples of women in Ravensbrück, however, not all of his sources derive from Ravensbrück, so one must be wary in making overarching comparisons to camp conditions, as each camp is different from the next. “Luba S” and “Rachel P,” two women who were imprisoned in Ravensbrück, corroborate the claim of the SS purposefully preventing Jewish

⁵¹Jonathan C. Friedman, *Speaking the Unspeakable: Essays on Sexuality, Gender, and Holocaust Survivor Memory*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002). Friedman's research derives directly from the use of “interviews from the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation,” which is based in Los Angeles. He conducted his research from 1998 to 2000—when the collection was in its infancy (cataloging only 3,000 out of their 50,000 interviews). Most of the survivors that were interviewed were Polish-Jewish women. The interviews he investigated are in both English and German, but I assume mainly in English since the location of the archive is in Los Angeles.

⁵² Male Jewish children are circumcised on the eighth day of living, this ceremony is known as a Brit Milah.

prisoners from menstruating via ‘a powder’ in the daily ration of soup or through injections they received by SS doctors.⁵³ Friedman explains the reasoning for this is to prevent women, specifically Jewish women, from producing Jewish offspring. Friedman argues that women were not taken as ‘spoils of war,’ as seen in traditional accounts of wartime, however, I would argue against that due to the evidence of SS men using bordellos—the concentration camp brothels mentioned in the first chapter—seeking sexual pleasure as well as masculine domination. Ruth Elias, a survivor of Auschwitz reported disturbing instances of SS men raping Jewish women after a night of heavy drinking:

Young Jewish women would be pulled from their bunks, taken away somewhere, and raped. Raping Jewish women wasn’t considered *Rassenschande* (race defilement), therefore it was allowed...Any woman who refused to go with the SS men was savagely beaten, so no one offered any resistance. I cannot describe the pitiable state of these poor women when they came back to the barracks.⁵⁴

Even though this evidence was from Auschwitz, i.e. a camp in which there were both male and females, pushing the idea of SS guards raping women in Ravensbrück is not too far of a stretch. Although men accused of *Rassenschande* usually were having sexual relations with Jewish women out of love or an emotional connection, the majority of SS men were fixated on physical dominance and torture of the inmate.

For example, in Wendy Adele-Marie Sarti’s publication, *Women and Nazis: Perpetrators of Genocide and Other Crimes during Hitler’s Regime, 1933-1945*, she examines numerous women guards that sexually assaulted women prisoners within concentration camps. One in particular was the German Oberaufseherin (female overseer) named Dorothea (Theodora) Binz.⁵⁵

⁵³ Friedman, *Speaking the Unspeakable*, 50-51: “Luba S Testimony Number 27003” and “Rachela P Testimony Number 18672.”

⁵⁴ Saidel, *Ravensbrück*, 213.

⁵⁵ Binz was born in Dusterlake, Germany on March 16th, 1920, worked as a housekeeper and in the food service industry prior to her arrival to Ravensbrück. Binz volunteered to work in the kitchen of Ravensbrück in August of 1939.

Binz, with her newly found authority as an overseer in Ravensbrück, sexually assaulted women in Ravensbrück and found sexual pleasure in tortured women in the camp; “Some survivors testified that Binz would beat prisoners without provocation and would force women to have sex with her.”⁵⁶ Additionally, Binz and her “SS lover/s” (unnamed), would watch women in the camp receive beatings and simultaneously fondle each other.⁵⁷ When speaking in terms of Ravensbrück, Holocaust historian Doris L. Bergen explains how *women* SS units were a rarity, nevertheless, existed. Key to this study is Bergen’s statement: “two thousand female guards assisted the SS at the Ravensbrück camp for women.”⁵⁸ By women SS guards, Bergen meant “SS-Helferin.”⁵⁹ Although Bergen mentions two thousand female SS guards, it is not too clear if this is at one time or throughout its entire operational timeline, i.e. six years. Women taking positions that include intense use of violence were not the ‘normal’ gender roles of Nazi Germany. In Nazi Germany, women were made to believe being a mother, thus providing a new generation of ‘Aryan’ Germans to perpetuate the ‘Aryan’s’ take over, was of the utmost importance. The appearance of German women volunteering their service to the SS in one of the more shocking claims made by Bergen.

In sum, topics and avenues for further research concerning gender studies in both Dachau and Ravensbrück were mentioned and were explained in this chapter. I chose to omit certain aspects of the two camps due to their well-known nature. Unlike the homosexuals inside of Dachau, Dachau’s political, Jewish, and criminal prisoners were not mentioned specifically since their histories are quite known. The dedication of explaining the lack of homosexual activities in

⁵⁶ Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 72.

⁵⁷ Sarti, *Women and Nazis*, 73.

⁵⁸ Doris L. Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Critical Issues in World and International History, 2016), 218-219.

⁵⁹ Rachel Century, *Female Administrators of the Third Reich* (Palgrave Studies in the History of Genocide, 2017), 24-26.

Dachau, an all male concentration camp, was due in part to the seemingly missing source material on the subject. More research is needed on the homosexual activity pertaining to the camp system's black market and its use as a tool to navigate the daily life in a concentration camp. A reason for the suppression of homosexual memoirs, as well as prisoners admitting to homosexual activities, can be attributed to a harsh German society on public homosexuality, which is addressed in Dr. Laurie Marhoefer's work. Even after the war homosexuals were not commemorated as a victim group since the long-standing debate of public and private homosexual would not be solved until around the 1960's and 1970's with full repeals of same-sex criminality. Of course, the near destruction of European Jewry also can be attributed to gaining much of the support and the recognition as victims of Nazi atrocities. As for Ravensbrück, there were a plethora of subjects to be expanded upon such as pregnant women in the camp, female children of the camp, and women as *Blockälteste* and *Stubenälteste*; the aforementioned topics will be included in the following chapter on prisoner experiences and categories. The subject of women as perpetrators within the concentration camp system exclusively has not been examined and is necessary for understanding of womens' roles and agency in genocidal events.

Chapter Three: Prisoners' Experiences and Memories

Treating the concentration camp system and those who suffered in it in terms of black and white, i.e. as if each prisoner suffered from equal mistreatment and prejudice by SS guards, should be avoided at all costs. The Nazi concentration camp system was different to everyone who encountered it for a multitude of reasons. Individuals who found themselves behind the barbed wire fence were just that, individuals. Inmates had with their own set of values and experiences from their pre-camp lives that carried over into their camp identity. At the time of their arrest and subsequent detention in a camp, many individuals were already adults at the time of their arrest and subsequent detention in a camp; generally most people have a set personality by the time of adulthood. Although the essence of the concentration camp system was to dehumanize and denigrate its inmates, this chapter will bring forth evidence that will speak to the efficacy of the Nazi's goal of degrading. The initiation process—heads being shaved, civilian clothes replaced with tattered/makeshift uniforms, and assignment of a inmate number—cannot be underestimated in its effects on the inmates' definition of self. While the initiation process struck an immense blow at an inmate's definition of self, the system of categorized barracks in each camp helped reestablish their sense of identity. For the most part, inmates were assigned to a barrack according to their pre-camp identities thus perpetuating their sense of self.

While political affiliations, religious beliefs, age, nationality, and class were some of the more blaring identities of prisoners, other identities were crucial in determining a prisoner's experience and memory of their respective camp. For example, a man could experience and remember certain aspects of camp life more vividly than his female counterpart, and vice-versa. In the same vein, Jews would have a completely different experience in the camp compared to Christians; excessive violence ending in murder was inflicted on the Jews more often than

Christians. However, Christians were of course subjected to violence, but on the basis of other identifying factors, e.g. being a member of the SPD or KPD, for the most part. It should go without saying that Jews and Christians, men and women—all prisoners—were severely mistreated and murdered in Nazi concentration camps, but their experiences and memories of the camp system differ significantly due to their numerous pre-camp identities.

The triangle system in the concentration camps may have been arbitrary, but it was far from being superfluous. A color a prisoner was assigned also determined a prisoner's experience in the camp setting. With camp triangles, i.e. camp identities, ranging from red, green, black, green, purple, blue, brown, pink and yellow, the triangle system was over complicated and confusing for prisoners.⁶⁰ Additional bars over triangles, small black dots within circles underneath triangles, and letters inside of triangles does not seem overly confusing. However, for prisoners who were abruptly ripped from their ordinary lives and introduced the camp system, the triangle system could be seen as overwhelming. Mentioning that not every camp was uniform in their methods of categorizing prisoners is important since this study focuses on two camps, which were built almost six years apart from one another. Despite the fact Dachau was built in March of 1933, the triangle system was not formally established until 1937-1938.⁶¹ Additionally, the placement of inmates' triangles and intake numbers differed from camp to camp. For instance, a system of inmate identification in 1933 Dachau only included intake numbers as other categories were not necessary; the first prisoners in Dachau were exclusively political prisoners and the need for identifying triangles were not needed until the camp system became diversified.

⁶⁰ Categories prisoner by color of triangles: red (political), green (criminal), blue (emigrant), purple (Jehovah's Witnesses), pink (homosexual), brown ('Roma' and 'Sinti'), yellow (Jewish), and black ('asocial'). Former Dachau prisoner G.R. Kay and Dachau historian and Buchenwald and Dachau survivor Paul Martin Neurath claimed an additional brown triangle marking "work-shy" prisoners was also present in the Dachau camp. G.R. Kay, *Dachau: The Nazi Hell* (London: Francis Aldor, 1939), 58; Paul Martin Neurath, *The Society of Terror: Inside the Dachau and Buchenwald Concentration Camps*, (Paradigm Publishers, CO., 2005), 53.

⁶¹ Wachsmann, *KL*, 118.

The triangle system had already been in place at the time of Ravensbrück's opening in late 1938/early 1939, but the prisoners in Ravensbrück were forced to stitch their own intake numbers and triangles to their uniforms.⁶²

The reasons for interning clergy members—priests and nuns—should be known since they ranged from small to large offenses against the Reich: protesting against the state marriage laws, partaking in conduct likely to undermine the unity of the state, being an enemy of the state, ministering to his congregation despite orders to the contrary, ministering to foreigners contrary to the existing laws, hiding deserters, incitement of the children, and lastly being a friend of the Jews.⁶³ Christians, specifically priests, were a special case in Dachau; the official number of priests sent to Dachau is unknown, but SS guards murdered 1,034 priests by the spring of 1945.⁶⁴ Dachau had three barracks (26, 28, 30) out of thirty were specifically designated to house the vast number of priests sent there.⁶⁵ The majority of the priests inside of the camp were Catholic and from Poland. A low number of priests were interned at Dachau until 1940 when Heinrich Himmler, the Reichsführer of the Schutzstaffel (SS), ordered that all priests in protective custody be consolidated in Dachau.⁶⁶ Through Nazi Germany's pursuit of *Lebensraum*, or 'living space,' a new demographical category was seemingly gifted to the Dachau camp: clergymen. After the invasion of Poland in 1939, Nazi Germany focused much of its attention of ridding Poland of Polish intelligentsia; priests were considered to be part of the intelligentsia. Unlike the first

⁶² Saidel, *The Jewish Women*, 26.

⁶³ Nico Rost, *Concentration Camp Dachau*, 28.

⁶⁴ Zeller, *The Priest Barracks: Dachau, 1938-1945*, 13. The priests murdered in Dachau were mainly Polish, which was a result of mass arrests of Polish intelligentsia after the war began in 1939.

⁶⁵ Zeller, *The Priest Barracks: Dachau, 1938-1945*, 76-77.

⁶⁶ Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001*, 43. Harold Marcuse, *Nazi Crimes and Identity in West Germany: Collective Memories of the Dachau Concentration Camp, 1945-1990* (The University of Michigan, PhD dissertation, 1992), 116. Johann Lenz, *Christ in Dachau or Christ Victorious: Experiences in A Concentration Camp* (Vienna, Roman Catholic Book, 1960), 78; Wachsmann, *KL*, 201.

prisoners of Dachau, the first priests to pass through the gates of the camp were of non-German origins.⁶⁷ Even though Nazi Germany's expansion into Poland during the fall of 1939 usually marks the beginning of the pursuit of *Lebensraum*, Guillaume Zeller argues it began with the *Anschluss* in March 1938, which brought Austria under Germany's control.⁶⁸ After Germany annexed the Sudetenland in late 1938, Moravia and Bohemia in the spring of 1939, and invaded Poland in 1939, the prisoners of the Reich changed dramatically in relation to their national origins. Interestingly, Austrian monks were not immediately incarcerated in the camp due to the Archbishop of Vienna, Theodor Innitzer, favored the German occupation.⁶⁹ Contrary to this claim, Austrian religious figures such as Georg Schilling and Matthias Spanlang were arrested and imprisoned in Dachau shortly after the *Anschluss*.⁷⁰ From 1938 to 1939, the only priests that were inside of Dachau were of German and Austrian descent, which did not change until 1940. From 1938 to 1939, there were only forty-nine German and Austrian priests. In 1940 a shipment of 13,337 Polish prisoners arrived in Dachau, over one thousand of them were priests. By the end of April 1945, two thousand seven hundred and sixty-two clergymen had been through Dachau. Two thousand five hundred and seventy-nine were Catholic, while one hundred and forty-one were Protestant.⁷¹

Catholic and Protestant priests also discriminated against one another; a Protestant minister blamed the Catholics, or in other words Pope Pius XII, for the "special treatment" the

⁶⁷ However, since 1933 the Nazis were actively looking into clergy members, and anyone else, that publicly and privately opposed the Reich.

⁶⁸ Zeller, *The Priest Barracks*, 21.

⁶⁹ Thuerry Knecht, *Bishop von Galen, the Bishop Who Challenged Hitler*, Polish title: *Mgr von Galen, l'évê qui a défié Hitler* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2007), 27.

⁷⁰ Zeller, *The Priest Barracks*, 24-25: Father Matthias Spanlang was an Austrian priest that openly denounced Nazism in both his sermons and newspaper articles since 1931. Lenz, *Christ in Dachau*, 83: Father Georg Schilling was an Austrian Catholic priest and arrested in March of 1938, shortly after the annexation of Austria. He was transferred to Buchenwald from 1939 to 1940, arriving back in Dachau in late 1940 remaining there until early April of 1945.

⁷¹ Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL*, 201; Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau*, 43-44.

priests received in the camp.⁷² Despite that claim, Bishops in Berlin, headed by Bishop Wienken of Berlin, hold responsibility for the priests being awarded special treatment during December of 1940 since they failed at securing the priests' release. At first, the special treatment of priests included the following three main points: priests were to have a chapel, daily Mass, and issued breviaries; priests were to be housed together; and the work designated to priests needed to be "light" to reserve their energy for "spiritual and intellectual work."⁷³ Burying the camp's dead was a fourth point proposed by the committee of Bishops, which ultimately the German authorities rejected; the Catholic Church clearly disliked the fact that the bodies of the dead were cremated in Dachau instead of being buried, accompanied by their last rites. In 1963, the Catholic Church finally allowed their followers to be cremated, so in the 1940's Catholics frowned upon cremation since it interrupted the ability to physically rise whenever the Rapture occurred.⁷⁴

As strange as it sounds, some of the special treatment priests received did not always benefit the group. One example was waking up fifteen minutes before the rest of the camp, during the summer season the priests were at out their beds by 3:45am each morning.⁷⁵ The daily ration of wine, one-quarter of a liter, and beer, one-eighth of liter, are another two examples of exclusive privileges awarded to priests. Although a daily ration of wine and beer may sound inviting to someone outside of a concentration camp, the priests' daily rations deviated from their original purpose. SS guards along with Kapos devised a perverse plan of making the priests

⁷² Bernard, *Priestblock 25487*, 34: "That's a fine kettle of fish your Pope got us into," a protestant minister to Fr. Bernard.

⁷³ Lenz, *Christ in Dachau or Christ Victorious*, 78.

⁷⁴ "Instruction Ad Resurgendum Cum Christo Regarding the Burial of the Deceased and the Conservation of the Ashes in the Case of Cremation (15 August 2016)." Accessed December 15, 2020. (https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160815_ad-resurgendum-cum-christo_en.html)

⁷⁵ Bernard, *Priestblock 25487*, 36. Neuhäusler, *What Was It Like*, 44. Being dependent on the season, the time the priests woke up varied from 3:00am to 5:00am.

drink their entire ration at once. Having to gulp down a ration of both wine and beer once a day while having a bare minimum of food, let alone nutrition, in your body leads to faster alcohol absorption. Thus causing the priests to become inebriated off of far less alcohol regularly needed to reach such a state. While the priests were not intentionally committing the sin of over-indulgence, this simple action of drinking until drunk can be interpreted as the SS guards creating an internal moral conflict in the priests' community. Once the priests were not given their daily wine rations for two days. On the third day, the priests had to drink three full rations, three-quarters of a liter, and equivalence of a full bottle.⁷⁶ Unsurprisingly, during these daily episodes there were SS guards ready to dish out violence to anyone drinking too slowly. Former Dachau prisoner, Stanislav Zámečník, mentions a time in which a priest, while drinking, had his cup slammed up against his lip, gashing it open and creating a "semicircle" wound.⁷⁷

The priest community was eventually forced into completing arduous tasks and put into groups for work detail. There is a discrepancy concerning the date in which the priests were forced into the work detail. Fr. Neuhäusler claims the priests in Dachau took over the duty of shoveling the snow from 1940 to 1942, while Fr. Bernard argues that the priests began their shoveling duties in November of 1941.⁷⁸ While keeping in mind that Fr. Bernard entered the camp during the summer of 1941, the confusion between the two different starting dates begins to fade. Once the priests were formulated into working groups they were still separated from the rest of the "ordinary" prisoners; the work detail assigned to priests was exclusive and the priests did not work alongside other prisoner groups. A few examples of specific work details for priests included shoveling snow and plantation work.

⁷⁶ Bernard, *Priestblock* 25487, 45.

⁷⁷ Stanislav Zámečník, *That Was Dachau 1933-1945*, 169.

⁷⁸ Neuhäusler, *What Was It Like*, 38; Bernard, *Priestblock*, 61.

Being part of the snow commando, some of the priests were given winter clothes that were made out of thicker material. The main reason for priests not obtaining winter clothes was that the camp did not have enough of them to equip all of the priests, so some men endured the additional torment of being extremely cold while working. Also, as I have personally visited the camp, I can attest to Dachau never being paved and uses loose gravel or flattened dirt for any type of road inside of the camp. The task of shoveling snow combined with having zero paved roads makes the exercise much more difficult. Priests were given shovels and used small wheelbarrows to move the snow “to the nearby river Würmbach.”⁷⁹ As mentioned in the previous chapter, in Bavaria there is usually a constant blanket of snow from the end of November until April with especially heavy and consistent loads of snow coming in the month of February, causing the priests to continue shoveling for eight hours straight in some cases.⁸⁰ Additionally, the size of the camp in the forties did not help with their task; as of 1938, Dachau’s enclosure encapsulated a 250m x 600m area.⁸¹

Although their numbers were not as high as the clergymen imprisoned in Dachau, Catholic nuns were imprisoned within the walls of Ravensbrück. In Ravensbrück there were not barracks that held nuns exclusively and unlike Dachau, nuns were not given special privileges or a ‘church’ to hold mass in.⁸² The amount of literature written on priests in Dachau trumps that of nuns in Ravensbrück; Dachau being assigned the camp for the clergy in 1940 allowed for more source material to be available to scholars. Primary and secondary source material on nuns and the camps they were sent to is insufficient in the historiography of the concentration camp

⁷⁹ Neuhäusler, *What Was It Like*, 38.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Marcuse, *Legacies*, 33.

⁸² In 1941, the priests of Dachau were allowed to construct their own chapel to hold mass. Zeller, *Priest Barracks*, 27.

system including Ravensbrück. Saidel, as with other historians, uses the examples of Elisabeth Skobzoff and Élise Rivet when discussing nuns held in Ravensbrück.⁸³ Skobzoff and Rivet were arrested in France at different times—Skobzoff in 1943 and Rivet in 1944—but for the same offense: resistance.⁸⁴

Per Saidel, Skobzoff aided Jews by hiding them and offering a safe passage to southern France.⁸⁵ Eventually, Skobzoff and Father Dimitri Klepinin were issuing false baptismal papers to French Jews and arrested in 1943 by the Gestapo. Skobzoff was sent to Ravensbrück and Klepinin the subcamp of Buchenwald, Mittelbau-Dora. Although Mother Maria did not write an autobiography/journal before her murder in Ravensbrück, her fate in Ravensbrück is recorded in the work of Carol Rittner, Stephen D. Smith, and Irena Steinfeldt; Mother Maria offered herself in place of a Ravensbrück inmate during a selection and was consequentially gassed on Good Friday in 1945.⁸⁶ As for the second distinguished nun, Élise Rivet, she was born on January 19th, 1890 in Algeria.⁸⁷ Rivet was accused of stashing weapons for the resistance and arrested by the Gestapo in 1944; it is unclear as to whether Rivet truly held weapons for French resistance members or not. Mother Superior lived in Ravensbrück for less than a year before being murdered in the newly built gas chamber; Rivet, like Skobzoff, willingly took the place of another prisoner destined for the gas chamber. Publications in English on the fate of nuns in

⁸³ Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück*, 32.

⁸⁴ Ibid. Elisabeth Skobzoff was born in Russia in 1891 and moved to France in the 1923. Saidel writes Skobzoff's last name differently than other scholars such as Carol Rittner. Stephen D. Smith, Irena Steinfeldt, and Yehuda Bauer, Her last name is spelled "Skobtsova" and she is also known as "Mother Maria."

⁸⁵ Ibid. Although southern France was unoccupied, Skobzoff helping guide Jews towards the south of France seems out of place since there were numerous concentration camps in the south of France, e.g. Gurs, Rivesaltes, Septfonds, Recebédou, Noe, and Les Milles. All of which were directly linked to the Drancy concentration camp in northern France, which was known for its many deportations of Jews to Auschwitz.

⁸⁶ Carol Rittner, Stephen D. Smith, Irena Steinfeldt and Yehuda Bauer, *The Holocaust and the Christian World: Reflections on the Past, Challenges for the Future*, (New York: Continuum, 2000), 167.

⁸⁷ In this thesis, Rivet was the only concentration camp inmate investigated that was born in North Africa. Although the French controlled Algeria until its independence in 1962, Rivet was one of the few Ravensbrück inmates from North Africa. In 1933, she became a nun taking on the name 'Mother Superior.'

Ravensbrück are sparse or incomplete with only mentioning the two women above. However, the research on nuns during the Holocaust and World War II is extensive; the historiography is lacking an analysis of the experiences and memories of nuns while living in the concentration camp system.⁸⁸

Attacking members of the Catholic Church did not stop with priests and nuns. Two prominent figures in the historiography of Ravensbrück are former prisoners Geneviève DeGaulle and Nanda Herbermann. Both women wrote memoirs that reflect their experiences inside of the camp.⁸⁹ Beginning with DeGaulle, she was the niece of Charles DeGaulle who led the resistance group Free France and later became the president of France in 1959. Since her uncle Charles was an important French leader, the Nazis ascribed the title of privileged prisoner to Geneviève. DeGaulle was a French Catholic sent to Ravensbrück in February of 1944 as a political prisoner, however, it is not stated whether she bore a red triangle or not. What can be seen as a change over time was the treatment of specific political prisoners; camps in the beginning of the Nazi regime would have murdered DeGaulle for being related to such a high-ranking oppositional force. The change over time could be interpreted as Nazi officials thinking

⁸⁸ Suzanne Vromen, *Hidden Children of the Holocaust: Belgian Nuns and Their Daring Rescue of Young Jews from the Nazis*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Gena Houten, *History Story: The Polish Nuns Saved Jewish Children From The Holocaust During World War II: Jewish Children In Convents*, (Gena Houten, 2021); Sally M. Rogow, *They Must Not Be Forgotten: Heroic Priests and Nuns Who Saved People From the Holocaust*, (Holy Fire Publishing, Tennessee, 2005).

⁸⁹ Geneviève DeGaulle, *The Dawn of Hope* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999): Geneviève DeGaulle's memoir is brief, nevertheless extremely useful in analyzing the position of a privileged prisoner within Ravensbrück. *The Dawn of Hope* was published in 1999—over fifty years since the events described occurred—so memory's fallibility is a prominent component when analyzing this memoir. The issue of fallibility and personal intention is crucial when discuss all memoirs since this is one perspective of an event, which numerous people witnessed; Nanda Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss: Inmate #6582 in Ravensbrück Concentration Camp for Women*, (Detroit, MI.: Wayne State University Press, 2000): Nanda Herbermann's memoir provides details of the camp that are backed by secondary source material. The reason for this hybridity between a primary and secondary source is due to Herbermann's memoir being found by a distant relative—Hester Baer—in the 1990's. Herbermann's memoir is first translated into English by Baer in 1996, but was not published until 2000. Since the memoir is published in 2000, Baer had the advantage of using secondary source material to lend support to Herbermann's claims. Baer's influence on this memoir's ability to present factual information merged with personal experience is a godsend to historians studying the Ravensbrück camp. This merge allows the reader to commit to both historical facts and personal interpretation of events from a camp survivor.

about the end of the war, its repercussions, and how to escape impending war trials. Although DeGaulle does not explicitly state the reason, the SS move her to solitary confinement upon her arrival; her memoir describes her experience in solitary confinement from February of 1944 to early 1945.⁹⁰

DeGaulle's stay in solitary confinement was, in her own words, "peaceful" since it took her away from the hordes of prisoners fighting for the latrines, showers, and sustenance.⁹¹ In contrast to the 'regular' camp, solitary confinement offered prisoners their own bunk without a straw mattress. DeGaulle mentioned this was a small trade in relation to the amount of quality sleep she now receives. It is important to emphasize DeGaulle's privileged status since her account of solitary confinement could be vastly different from other non-privileged prisoners in solitary as a punishment rather than isolation/protection such as DeGaulle. Downfalls of being in the "bunker," or solitary confinement were the lack blankets, of food—prisoners were given bread every three days and soup every five—and the gruesome beatings upon arrival. DeGaulle does not mention any personal beating upon arriving to the bunker, which is again telling and may, further signaled her privileged status. Unfortunately, other prisoners were subjected to a brutal beating of twenty-five to seventy-five lashes, which DeGaulle claimed, "the prisoner rarely survives."⁹² Although DeGaulle was a privileged prisoner, for her not to receive the initial beating in the bunker strikes at a key characteristic of concentration camp life: not every prisoner was subjected to the same brutalities as others. As far as violence goes, DeGaulle mentions that an SS guard named "Syllinka," beat her numerous since she was unfit for work due to scurvy and

⁹⁰ DeGaulle, *The Dawn of Hope*, 2.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 14.

⁹² *Ibid*, 2.

corneal ulcerations.⁹³ To the point of prisoners and their definition of self in the camp, Gaulle made a statement about her mental state and the camp system:

As we walked, or rather staggered, bone-weary between the dark camp barracks day in and day out, across the black cinders of the ground beneath our feet, I was struck with the absolute certainty that there was indeed a fate far worse than death: the destruction of our souls, which was the purpose and goal of the concentration-camp universe.⁹⁴

The statement above exhibits a prisoner's desire and need to feel 'normal' or in other words, they wanted to preserve their inner-self even if they were not able to preserve their physical being.

The laundry room in the camp facilitated solidarity through motherly acts such as "cooking with the mouth" and sewing are described in this memoir, which differs from events of solidarity in the men's camp in Dachau.⁹⁵ Cooking with the mouth was an expression used by the Terezin survivor Susan E. Cernyak-Spatz to describe the constant references to "organizing food and fantasizing about recipes women's memoirs."⁹⁶ The women inmates of Ravensbrück formed bonds through nurturing other inmates in motherly and sisterly ways. For example, the inmates made a cake for DeGaulle's birthday: "everyone contributed a handful of bread crumbs, which we kneaded together with several spoonfuls of the molasseslike [sic] substance they call 'jam' or 'jelly.'"⁹⁷ The prisoners even stuck twenty-four twigs in the cake to resemble candles. DeGaulle and a Jehovah's Witness (known as "Anna") share a bond of sewing; Anna brought DeGaulle materials to mend her tattered uniform. DeGaulle thinks so highly of this action she decides to sew a napkin for Anna's Christmas present.⁹⁸ Fractured solidarity was omnipresent in the camp

⁹³ Ibid, 12.

⁹⁴ Ibid 16.

⁹⁵ Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss*, 41.

⁹⁶ Michael Berenbaum, Cara De Silva, and Bianca Steiner Brown, *In Memory's Kitchen A Legacy from the Women of Terezín*, (Northvale, New Jersey, Jason Aronson Inc., 1996), xxix.

⁹⁷ DeGaulle, *The Dawn of Hope*, 5.

⁹⁸ Ibid 28.

via the bread thieves and *Muselmänner*; like many inmates, DeGaulle resented and discriminated against the bread thieves and *Muselmänner*.⁹⁹ She also brings forth evidence of women SS guards being present in the camp, but does not go into much detail. Both a black market and a prisoner hierarchy—where the German political prisoner named Maria Wittmeyer held the reins—were discussed but not at length.¹⁰⁰

The second example of Catholic women in Ravensbrück, Nanda Herbermann, shows how important pre-camp lives were to a prisoner's definition of self in the camp. Herbermann made her way into the Gestapo's hands in February of 1941 due to her being "accused of collaboration with the Catholic resistance."¹⁰¹ Her arrival to Ravensbrück was in July of 1941.¹⁰² Like DeGaulle, Herbermann can be seen as an outlier in the scholarship on Ravensbrück, but in her own way. Herbermann was born in Germany, raised as a Catholic, which allowed the Nazis to consider her as an 'Aryan' by the Nazis' definition.¹⁰³ Upon arriving to the camp Herbermann struggled to cope with her national identity as a German for a few reasons. The first being the fact of how brutal and 'non-German' she thought Ravensbrück was; Herbermann did not classify

⁹⁹ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, (New York: Vintage International, 1986), 85: *Muselmann/Muselmänner* were inmates in the camp that were near death, bandaged heavily, and had the least amount of energy. The term has yet to be traced back to its origin, however, survivors have used numerous terms to discuss the *Muselmänner*: *dokodjaga* (Russian for *conclusion*), and *Schmutzstück* (garbage) and *Schuckstück* (jewel) were used in Ravensbrück.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 50: "For they all had to go through her for anything they wanted on the camp black market."

¹⁰¹ Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss*, 13: Herbermann worked for a German Catholic press—*Der Gral (The Grail)*—under Father Friedrich Muckermann—who was an outspoken anti-Nazi. After releasing numerous critics of Nazism in his paper, he had to flee to Holland. Herbermann visited him numerous times (to bring personal property he left in Germany) and this drew attention to her by the Nazis, thus prompting her to be arrested. Herbermann was released from Ravensbrück on March 19th, 1943 on direct orders from Himmler; Herbermann's brother, Heinz Herbermann, was a soldier in the Wehrmacht and personally petitioned for her release.

¹⁰² For the most part, concentration camp inmates were held in local prisons before being transferred to the camp itself. This is true for nearly all camps in the concentration camp system; however, there are examples, such as Auschwitz and Treblinka, where inmates were held in nearby ghettos rather than official prisons. Unlike DeGaulle's work, Herbermann's publication date does not make as big of a difference to the reliability of her memories since Herbermann wrote this memoir only a few years after her release in March of 1943. So, the issue of memory is still pertinent with the work of Herbermann. Additionally, Herbermann's life as a writer before her arrival to Ravensbrück in 1941 significantly changes how a historian is to analyze her statements. Herbermann's knowledge of writer's tone and objective greatly influenced the way she chose to write her memoir.

¹⁰³ Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss*, 37.

Ravensbrück as a *German* camp, but as a *Nazi* camp. This is a key differentiation and is quite prominent in Holocaust scholarship. Events, like Kristallnacht, and places, such as the concentration camps, were seen as seemingly non-German—not orderly, clean, and chaotic—and were at times looked down upon by Germans under the yoke of Nazism. Herbermann believed she was not supposed to be in the camp and had a sense of arrogance in her writing when speaking about other inmates in Ravensbrück.¹⁰⁴ For instance, when talking about veterans of the camp, i.e. prisoners who were already integrated into the daily struggles of the concentration camp, Herbermann compares them to animals when they fight over food.¹⁰⁵

As with primary sources from Dachau, Herbermann's work details the importance of barrack assignments. Herbermann recalled how tidy and in order the political and Jehovah's Witness prisoners' barracks were in comparison to the asocials and prostitutes' barracks.¹⁰⁶ A more orderly barrack meant less trouble by the SS guards who routinely scrutinized and attacked inmates for even the smallest infractions. Moreover, Herbermann joins DeGaulle in the category of privileged prisoners as Herbermann was 'promoted' to Stubenälteste and then to Blockälteste.¹⁰⁷ Herbermann brings to light the two different kinds of armbands given to prisoners of privilege in Ravensbrück: the green *and* the red. The former signifies an inmate holding the ascribed status of the Stubenälteste, which was a prisoner who made sure their specific barrack, was not only 'clean,' but also remained in order. In Herbermann's case, she was the barrack elder of Block II, which was the prostitute's barrack.¹⁰⁸ The latter armband was for the Blockälteste, who were in control of numerous barracks and had direct contact with SS

¹⁰⁴ After evaluating the current inmates, Herbermann began to believe that she was mistakenly sent to a concentration camp.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 114 and 121.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 30.

¹⁰⁷ It is not clear in her memoir as to the dates of her 'promotions,' however, both her promotions happened within a two year span from 1942

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 126.

guards. Herbermann's red armband provided her with much more authority and freedom than her previous green armband; Herbermann was allowed to move freely throughout the entire camp with her red armband. An act of kindness Herbermann could not have performed without her red armband was reuniting a daughter with her mother just minutes before she was shot. Herbermann explained "since I wore the red armband, which gave me the right to walk through the camp alone, this was possible."¹⁰⁹

Additionally, Herbermann being sent to Ravensbrück shows how 'Aryans' were targeted and had the chance of being sent to camps, which was hypocritical of the Nazis' agenda to continue and perpetuate the 'Aryan' race. By actively imprisoning *any* dissenters, whether Jewish or 'Aryan,' the Nazis produced an ideological paradox relating to the continuation of the Aryan race. Herbermann's antisemitism is also another characteristic she shared with the SS guards in Ravensbrück. Being raised as a Catholic during the early twentieth century, Herbermann's life would have been filled with antisemitic teachings; the Catholic Church adamantly believed the Jews were guilty of deicide.¹¹⁰ Although Herbermann does not overtly state she is antisemitic, her statements about Jews say otherwise. In her two-page chapter, 'Jews...', Herbermann makes her personal feelings about Jews overtly known: "There were

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 207-208.

¹¹⁰ Catholicism and antisemitism have a long-standing history. Evident through numerous publications, the Catholic Church's collaboration and cooperation with Nazi Germany is very well documented. When discussing Nazi Germany, the Holocaust, and the Catholic Church, one of the leading and most critical publications comes from Daniel J. Goldhagen: *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair* (New York City, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2007). Goldhagen's 2007 publication focuses much of its attention on the complicity of the Catholic Church regarding the persecution of European Jewry. Goldhagen's blaring research on the Church's support of Nazi Germany and its long-term goals, i.e. the annihilation of European Jewry, complements Michael Rothberg's *Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Redwood City, CA., Stanford University Press, 2019). Goldhagen's work strives to uncover the Catholic Church's—direct or 'indirect'—culpability for Nazi atrocities, while Rothberg's publication focuses on individuals who may be connected to or 'implicated' in a crime/s committed in the past, e.g. the Holocaust. For more on the Catholic Church and Nazi Germany see: John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII*, (New York, NY, Penguin Publishing Group, 2000) and Hubert Wolf, *Pope and Devil: The Vatican's Archives and the Third Reich*, (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

filthy rich Jews among them, half-Jews: absolutely everyone was driven into prisons and concentration camps in those fateful years because of their ‘non-Aryan descent.’”¹¹¹ With this statement, Herbermann shows her own antisemitism and a characteristic ascribed to Jews by Nazis: Jews were *filthy* and *rich*. Herbermann’s memoir proved that you were not protected from being sent to a concentration camp if you were antisemitic, German, and non-Jewish, i.e. an ‘Aryan.’¹¹²

¹¹¹ Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss*, 209.

¹¹² Scare quotes are used around the word “Aryan,” since it is Nazi terminology and is not something the author of this thesis believes in.

Conclusion

The reason to compare and contrast the camps Dachau and Ravensbrück for this research was threefold: to determine the discrepancies between camps tasked with imprisoning a specific sex; elaborate on the topic of the concentration camp system and those who were victims of it; and to bring forth a fresh investigation of two commonly researched concentration camps in Germany. This study has attempted to break the repetitive nature of prior research on Dachau and Ravensbrück and add a more nuanced comparative analysis to their historiography. By using the simple research approach of comparing and contrasting, particularly in the case of concentration camps, this study aimed to enlighten and educate individuals about the incongruities of Nazi concentration camps. Despite all camps being the embodiment of Nazi prejudice, hatred, and violence, one camp was not identical to the next.

The disparities between the camps influenced the experiences of the prisoners within the camp system, thus making each concentration camp inmate experience their respective camp differently. Treating the concentration camp system as if each camp was run in the same manner as the next is a treacherous way to analyze the concentration camp system since it limits the conclusions of a researcher. When investigating in such an oversimplified and uncomplicated way, the small details are overlooked as unimportant or irrelevant, when in reality they were life changing. Further research on the concentration camp system is still needed due to the fact there was over 10,000 concentration camps—ran privately or by the SS—in Nazi Germany.

In this comparative analysis of the two concentration camps Dachau and Ravensbrück we covered issues relating to camp differentiations based on geography, operational timelines, ascribed and achieved statuses of imprisoned individuals, gender roles, homosexuality, and sexual violence. This study aimed to broaden individuals' understanding of the concentration

camps, which were found within the border of Germany proper, while simultaneously examining camp survivors' experiences in their respective camp. Comparing and contrasting concentration camps may seem as if it is unimportant, however, it allows researchers to understand the drastic differences between the camps during the Nazi regime. The numerous forms of camps—concentration, labor, and death—were similar in their efforts of dehumanization, of course, but were very different from one another. With each camp being distinct in its location, inmate populations, and SS management, comparative analyses of Nazi camps is imperative for the future of Holocaust investigations. Understanding that each concentration camp inmate experienced his or her respective camp differently from other inmates in the same camp is key to this study. Moreover, this study did not seek to devalue or limit the plight of inmates in the concentration camp system; however, it did seek to evaluate how seemingly 'small' differences had major effects in a volatile and reactive environment such as the concentration camp system.

In the first chapter, we examined the physical layout, prisoner demographics, and SS management of Dachau and Ravensbrück. The key takeaways from the material covered were the following: Dachau was not as big as Ravensbrück, Ravensbrück's investment in privatized and governmental work projects dwarfed that of Dachau's, and Dachau held exclusively adult male prisoners while Ravensbrück held exclusively women prisoners (until 1941). As the Siemens factory and DAW outpost in Ravensbrück had large plots of land allotted to their activities—the Siemens factory had nine to ten acres and the DAW outpost four to five acres—the Reich's emphasis on beneficial labor was undisputed.¹¹³

As argued in the chapter, Ravensbrück's close proximity to the Nazi extermination projects in the Berlin area—the T4 Program and Aktion 14f13—and the death camp system in

¹¹³ "Beneficial labor" in comparison to "useless labor" can be described as labor the Reich and private industries utilized with the intentions of turning a profit via cheap slave labor.

occupied Poland allowed for the camp to mirror camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau and Sobibór in certain aspects. For example, Ravensbrück's installation of a gas chamber in early 1945 and the extreme dedication to slave labor (privatized and governmental) for turning a profit mirror camps found within the death camp system. Being in the Southern portion of Germany, Dachau's objectives were focused less on privatized/governmental labor; Dachau prioritized its ability to be a 'training facility' for SS men to 'learn the ropes,' so to speak, of camp management before moving onto larger camps. As discussed in the chapter, the mortality rate of Ravensbrück (90% to 92%) when compared to Dachau (15% to 20%) exemplifies the claim of camps closer to the death camp system having mirrored its devastating characteristics.

The second chapter outlined the necessity of incorporating the topic of gender while analyzing the concentration camp system. Homosexuals, particularly male homosexuals, were persecuted intensely by the Nazi regime due to their inability to boost the production of a pure 'Aryan' German race. Since homosexual men found themselves being arrested and sent to concentration camps quite frequently the lack of primary source evidence of homosexuality activities in Dachau is thought provoking. In the 1940's—when the camps were liberated and prisoners started publishing their experiences in the concentration camp system—there was a strong stigma against homosexuals, which drove many not to publish or write about their experience in the concentration camps. The discrimination against homosexuals, which is ongoing today, has severely weakened the body of primary source material and thus the current research on homosexuals in concentration camps. Moreover, the chapter examines the intersection of homosexuality and sexual violence in Ravensbrück via the example of German Oberaufseherin Dorothea (Theodora) Binz. Forcing women prisoners in Ravensbrück to have sex with her, Binz's use of sexual violence was one of the numerous representations of concentration

camp realities. Although Holocaust historians limit themselves to the lack of nourishment, extensive physical labor, and mistreatment hypothesis, sex was still extremely relevant in the concentration camp system. This hypothesis would make sense if each prisoner was treated equally, i.e. having the same amount of rations, physical mistreatment, and forced labor, but in the camps this was far from the truth. Whether on the basis of their prisoner categories assigned upon entering the camp, gender, sexuality, or pre-camp affiliations, each prisoner was treated differently.

Philip Zimbardo's publication, *The Lucifer Effect* (2007), examined the infamous Stanford Prison Experiment in 1971 and prison complex for terrorists, Abu Ghraib. Zimbardo's findings while conducting the Stanford Prison Experiment and examining Abu Ghraib are known throughout the world and hold a lot of weight in terms of the social and psychological effects on individuals who are forcibly detained. Zimbardo's experiment at Stanford and analysis of Abu Ghraib are applicable to the discourse on sexual violence in both Dachau and Ravensbrück. As Holocaust historians have pointed out, the Stanford Prison Experiment highlighted a key characteristic of Nazi concentration camps, which was the substitution of a prisoner's name with an inmate number. This form of dehumanization is of course extremely relevant to the discourse on the concentration camp system, but is not the main reason Zimbardo's work is being mentioned in this study. Our interests lay with Zimbardo's use of paid volunteers in his 1971 experiment, which paralleled the SS guards within Dachau and Ravensbrück. Explained by Christopher Dillon, Dachau SS were paid employees and were averaging "115 Reichsmark per month gross, netting to 67 Reichsmark after deductions for insurance, Labour Service contributions, taxes, and meals. For married guards the respective figures were 130 and 82

Reichsmark.”¹¹⁴

Dillon argued that: “This self-selection – and the contractual nature of payment – accentuated their initial identification with and commitment to the experiments. In other words, volunteers are more likely to fulfil [sic] a task – and to invest in a particular culture...”¹¹⁵ Dillon discusses how SS guards in Dachau were paid volunteers of violence and how they were guarding individuals deemed by Nazi society as ‘undesirable,’ which elevated the commitment to degradation and genocidal acts of SS guards. When individuals become extremely committed to a cause the actions for the cause become more and more radical, especially when those individuals are actively volunteering for said positions. Given their willing and occasional enthusiastic collaboration, the volunteers of violence, as I have come to call them, were instrumental in the attempted destruction of men and women’s sense of self. The volunteers of violence during the Nazi regime proved to be key examples of how sociological aspects such as assimilation, collective violence, and toxic masculinity blended into various and arbitrary forms of abuses in the concentration camp system.¹¹⁶

Additionally, the use of sexual violence by the American guards of Abu Ghraib aligns with the argument in this study that SS guards would have used their power and position in attempts to emasculate men in Dachau.¹¹⁷ Zimbardo’s work on Abu Ghraib showcased photographs of prison camp guards—male and female—forcing all male inmates to form a

¹¹⁴ Dillon, *Dachau and the SS*, 60.

¹¹⁵ Christopher Dillon, ‘Tolerance Means Weakness’: *The Dachau Concentration Camp S.S., Militarism And Masculinity*,” in *Historical Research*, vol. 86, no. 232 (Institute of Historical Research, May 2013), 378.

¹¹⁶ Volunteers of violence during the Holocaust are discussed at length in works such as: Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992); Jan Grabowski, *Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland* (Indiana University Press, 2013); Jan Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction Of The Jewish Community In Jedwabne, Poland*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans And The Holocaust*, (New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1996).

¹¹⁷ Philip G. Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*, (New York: Random House, 2007), 324-325.

human pyramid while nude. The more telling issue in these images was the sadistic grinning from Abu Ghraib guards just behind the human pyramid, which was made up of men with bags over their heads. Zimbardo's research exemplifies the frequent use of sexual humiliation and degradation by men and women in the American armed forces, especially in places such as detention centers and prison camps. Despite the fact Zimbardo's work being on American armed forces abusing their captives, in a setting such as the concentration camp system, where abuse in all its forms was omnipresent, the toxicity of Nazi hypermasculinity, militarism, and volunteerism cannot be underestimated especially in an all male camp like Dachau.

The final chapter argues that many concentration camp inmates prevailed in holding onto their definition of self through the Nazi's gauntlet of dehumanization and degradation. The two non-clergy Catholic women examined in the chapter—Geneviève DeGaulle and Nanda Herbermann—were prime cases of how concentration camp inmates' pre-camp lives and affiliations filtered into their camp identities. The Nazi's heinous attacks on prisoner's definition of self caused many prisoners to lose their sense of self and the meaning of life itself. In Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* he clarifies two identities that seem to permeate the concentration camp system: political and religious. Frankl admits to the camp system instilling a "cultural hibernation" in its inmate population, but states "There were two exceptions to this: politics and religion."¹¹⁸ In agreement with Frankl, political and religious identities were harder for individuals to shed as compared to other identities such as prior occupations. Adding to Frankl's astute argument of pre-camp identities persevering Nazi tactics of dehumanization, in Dachau and Ravensbrück we find the same phenomenon occurring, but with different identities.

¹¹⁸ Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, (New York: Washington Square Press/Pocket Books, 1985), 34.

With Nanda Herbermann—a woman who identified as ‘Aryan,’ German, antisemitic, and Catholic—her identities only became more staunch and entrenched in her psyche upon her arrival to Ravensbrück in 1941 as she made a point to distinguish being *German* or *Nazi*. Moreover, Geneviève DeGaulle’s identities—a French Catholic and niece of Charles DeGaulle—became more integral to her definition of self during her time in solitary confinement in Ravensbrück. DeGaulle’s statement “that there was indeed a fate far worse than death: the destruction of our souls, which was the purpose and goal of the concentration-camp universe” speaks directly to Frankl’s analysis of the concentration camp inmate honing in on their spirituality.¹¹⁹ Throughout both of their experiences in Ravensbrück, DeGaulle and Herbermann maintained the integrity of their pre-camp identities, as did many other concentration camp inmates.

The last chapter also examined the Nazis’ attack on religious figures such as Catholic priests in Dachau and nuns in Ravensbrück. Although the list of nuns imprisoned in Ravensbrück is not as extensive as the list of priests and Church members imprisoned in Dachau, the examples of Elisabeth Skobzoff and Élise Rivet demonstrate the breadth of Nazi determination to eliminate any oppositional force. The material covering the priests’ community in Dachau reveals how certain groups of inmates in the camp system were allotted ‘special privileges,’ which truly made their time in the camp much worse than others. As discussed in the chapter, priests were forced to consume copious amounts of sacramental wine by the SS guards and Kapos. Let alone the fact priests were malnourished; the priests’ commitment to being ‘sinless’ was attacked via these instances since it is a sin to over-indulge. The chapter examined the physical labor and violence priests were subjected to in Dachau—shoveling snow, tending to the garden in the ‘plantation,’

¹¹⁹ Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 36; DeGaulle, *The Dawn of Hope*, 16.

cups slammed into their lips, and —which exemplified how prisoners in the camps all suffered horrendously, but in contrasting ways. This chapter emphasized the fact all inmates of the concentration camp system endured physical, emotional, and psychological abuse at the hands of SS guards, prisoner functionaries, and other prisoners, which fluctuated from prisoner to prisoner.

In conclusion, by writing about these two camps, the goal of this study is to encourage more research and conversations pertaining to the disparities between camps within the Nazi concentration camp system. Dachau and Ravensbrück were chosen due to their similarity of imprisoning one sex exclusively. However, through this study it is evident that even camps with potent similarities can diverge significantly in terms of a prisoner's experience. Subjects that were not covered in this study, but absolutely warrant extensive research in coming years include: children (or lack thereof) imprisoned in Dachau, the experiences of Jehovah's Witnesses in Ravensbrück and Dachau, the current memorialization of victims/survivors of Dachau and Ravensbrück in Germany, and the effects on prisoners of Ravensbrück by introducing a gas chamber in early 1945. Research and publications on Dachau and Ravensbrück will hopefully continue to saturate the historiography of the concentration camp system and the Holocaust. More comparative analyses of concentration camps are warranted for fully understanding the plight and suffering of Nazi Germany's victims in the concentration camp system.

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