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"Inhuman Acts of Lesbian Love". The Stigmatization Process of Lesbianism from Weimar Germany to KZ Ravensbrück

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Abstract: This paper investigates the extent of the presence of lesbians in Germany between the end of the Weimar Republic and the sedimentation of Nazism, notably focusing on the dialectical perception between negation and (in)visibility that characterizes the stigmatization process undergone by the lesbian prisoners in KZ Ravensbrück, the only concentration camp entirely for women. During the "Golden Twenties", the absence of female homosexuality in law was incongruous with the real presence of lesbianism within Weimar society, culture, and art. Following Adolf Hitler's rise to power, while female homosexuality remained uncriminalized, lesbians began being persecuted in "unorthodox" ways and interned in concentration camps. Lesbians were detained on the grounds that they were considered *asozial* ("anti-social"). Consequently, lesbianism was contextualized within a new (forgotten) environment in which the role of women was manipulated by a patriarchal system aimed at standardizing, normalizing, and repressing the "lives unworthy of life", most of which still remain invisible.

Keywords: Lesbianism, Weimar Republic, Nazism, Ravensbrück, Stigmatization

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Introduction

The debate concerning the persecution of lesbians and their consequent imprisonment within the Ravensbrück concentration camp ("KZ Ravensbrück") still raises controversies that minimize the issue in either heteronormative or androcentric ways. On the one hand, many heterosexual women who were imprisoned in Ravensbrück strongly opposed references to lesbianism in relation to the camp over the years, such as on the occasion of the Conference of Women Surviving the Holocaust, held in New York in March 1983, where some ex-prisoners stated that they felt "deeply insulted that anyone could even think of such a possibility in the midst of their terrible suffering" (Saidel 2004, 37). On the other hand, as reported by the activists of the Autonomous Feminist Lesbian Women from Germany and Austria, the placement of a lesbian commemorative orb inside the Ravensbrück concentration camp – to create a memorial and a space of resistance for the lesbian women interned – has always been boycotted by the Brandenburg Lesbian and Gay Association Germany (LSVD). This attitude is motivated by the fact that, although Nazism did not accept female homosexuality, lesbians were not directly persecuted by Paragraph 175, the law punishing male-male intercourse. Consequently, according to the LSVD, the creation of a concrete symbol representing lesbian women would give credit to the legend of lesbian persecution during Nazism, which, since it can be documented only in rare, rather doubtful cases, would lead to an altered representation of history (see Steininger 2017b, paragraph 19). Therefore, and because of political interests, the creation of the memorial would reveal a need probably linked to a sort of attempted lesbian-matriarchal *coup d'état* to the detriment of the current homo-patriarchal hegemony.

In the meantime, however, and mainly thanks to the support of the International Ravensbrück Committee, the group of Autonomous Feminist Lesbian Women from Germany and Austria has been able to give visibility to the orb that was initially exhibited temporarily, for a few days every year, but has been on display continuously since the celebration of the 70th Anniversary of the Liberation of the Women's Concentration Camp Ravensbrück in 2015. The orb has

now turned into a symbol of the battle against the remembrance of those women who should be recognized as victims of Nazism even if lesbianism, being an accessory element, would have been considered only an aggravating circumstance and not a punishable crime in itself. It is exactly because of these considerations that the core of the question lies in raising consciousness in relation to the recognition and visibility of lesbians as a victim group during the Nazi dictatorship.[1]

Likewise, the lack of visibility and recognition methodologically influences the present speculation that moves from the time of the Weimar Republic, for which it is still possible to draw on direct testimonies concerning the social presence of lesbian communities, to the historical moment following it, the Nazi dictatorship, where lesbians had to disappear from public life while suffering because their sexuality was considered a perversion and a vice. For this reason, during and after Nazism, they are no more the narrators of their lives, which are instead to be told through the heteronormative and homophobic accounts of their heterosexuals coprisoners.

Lesbianism during the Weimar Republic: Legal Invisibility and Social Visibility

From 1919 to 1933, in Germany, the numerous processes of sedimentation and establishment of the homosexual movements and community stabilized. First, male homosexuality needed a proper standardization in order to both be counted as a legitimate object of medical study – a natural disposition of the individual – and fight, through the use of literary and scientific instruments, its illegality, ratified by §175 of the German Criminal Code, according to which "[u]nnatural fornication, whether between persons of the male sex or of humans with beasts, [was to be] punished with imprisonment, with the further punishment of a prompt loss of civil rights"[2]. This law, valid from 1871 to 1994, lacks reference to one of the two dialectical aspects strictly connected with homosexuality: lesbianism. As reported by Sabine Hark (see Hark 2018, paragraph 18) and explained by Judith Butler,

> "to be prohibited explicitly is to occupy a discursive site from which something like a reverse-discourse can be articulated; to be implicitly proscribed is not even to qualify as an object of prohibition. And though homosexualities of all kinds in this present climate are being

1 A lesbian commemorative orb was installed in Nuremberg on Magnus-Hirschfeld-Platz in May 2019. For more information on the history of the lesbian commemorative orb, see the most recent work by Insa Eschebach (2019).

2 §175 of the German Criminal Code (08.05.1871). Translations of quotes by the author.

> erased, reduced, and (then) reconstituted as sites of radical homophobic fantasy, it is important to retrace the different routes by which the unthinkability of homosexuality is being constituted time and again." (Butler 1993, 312)

Therefore, not including lesbians in the Criminal Code meant not making the issue visible by activating a mode of contrast, that of denial, that is subtler than the one activated through §175, showing, *de facto*, a discrepancy between public and private life.

Indeed, lesbianism, as much as male homosexuality, was present and deeply rooted within the Weimar Republic. Aspects of the female homosexual movement were numerous: associations, bars, magazines, novels, movies. Everywhere, especially in Berlin[3], references to the presence of lesbians can be found – everywhere but in the law. Such a lack corresponds to a concrete impossibility for lesbian women of owning/enjoying their rights: since the rights were not denied, they could not be affirmed.

The reasons that led to this exclusion are to be addressed in relation to several concurrent causes that refer to a patriarchal attitude described as "phallocentric fixation" (see Pieper 1984, 121) and relate to the exclusion of female homosexuality from German law. Indeed, since the legislation was exercised by men, the contamination of the "pure and fair" woman – their mother, wife, or daughter – could not be tolerated. This figure of the woman had to be preserved and could not be associated with any kind of abnormal deviations. Moreover, it has been observed that "for the most part, women were not considered to have a sex drive, nor were they seen to be able to have sexual relations without a phallus" (Myers 2003, 7). Likewise, Anna Hájková and Birgit Bosold (2017, paragraph 12) explain that female homosexuality was not legally persecuted because women were not perceived as sexual subjects. In addition, the power of women had to stay "dormant". As explained by Mecki Pieper, the fundamental requisites to the development of bourgeois society referred to a family ideology based on a strict dichotomy between the male and female spheres, i.e., between production and reproduction. Female sexuality – when it was permitted to women – was limited to the inside of the house and preferred to be absent at all or at least subordinated to the triad of "children-kitchen-church" (see Pieper 1984, 121).

Despite numerous unsuccessful attempts to criminalize women's homosexuality (see Schoppmann 1997, 82pp.), deriving from both a male reaction toward the female movement that was growing quickly, hence threatening the

3 In reference to the importance of the Berlin alternative scene, see Lücke (2008) and Föllmer (2013).

old patriarchal authorities, and the many scandals and crime-news events[4] that occurred during the Weimar Republic, no sanction was ratified. Historian Laurie Marhoefer refers to a legal structural impossibility linked to §175 – the "sodomy law" – and the use of the word "sodomy" to refer to penetrative sex:

> "[T]he lack of a penetrating penis in lesbian sex [...] led to a persistent difficulty in criminalizing it. This definitional problem came up when lawmakers in imperial Germany debated and declined to criminalize lesbianism. Some argued against doing so because lesbian sex could not, they alleged, be 'similar to intercourse.' By the 1920s, lesbian sex had bewildered lawmakers in the German lands on this count for hundreds of years. When the question of criminalizing lesbian sex came up in 1929, the Reich Minister of Justice advised against it because of the difficulties with the definition of 'acts similar to intercourse.'" (Marhoefer 2015, 74)

Women's homosexuality was instead determined to be "a substitute for sex" (Marhoefer 2015, 74) and thus not punishable by the law.[5]

However, although lesbianism was invisible according to §175, the lesbian community was working to create a safe environment, a real "private property", dislocated in several real and fictional urban performative spaces. If the legal ignorance of female homosexuality cannot be associated with its real presence in society, city, and arts, referring to lesbianism during the Weimar Republic does not merely mean considering the issue from a general scientific point of view, notably through the work of Magnus Hirschfeld and his Institute of Sexology, but – specifically – in sociological, topographical, and even esthetic terms, since the characterization of lesbianism shows a wide range of different types sedimented within specific metropolitan areas.

Indeed, homosexual women were gathering as a specific group and it was necessary to define a perception of the group itself so that the members would be able to perceive who belonged to it through an urban localization (see Schader 2004, 26pp.).

At the very beginning of the 20th century, Hirschfeld had already started the process of topographical and social identification of Berlin homosexuals in the 1904 book "Berlin's Third Sex"[6], which investigated the real queer topography of the city. A similar analysis was carried out in the 1914 book "The

4 One such scandal refers to the German steel manufacturer Friedrich Alfred Krupp (1854–1902); a second one concerns the events connected with Philipp zu Eulenburg (1847–1921), a Prussian diplomat, and Kuno von Moltke (1847–1923), a Prussian general, both members of the Liebenberger Circle, the most private circle of the German Emperor Wilhelm II.

5 Nevertheless, dildos "were illegal under Paragraph 270 of the Criminal Code, which banned the sale of 'an object that is intended for obscene [unzüchtig] purposes[']" (Marhoefer 2015, 73).

6 See Hirschfeld (1904) for the German version of the book.

Homosexuality of Men and Women"[7], in which Hirschfeld also presents the theory of sexual intermediaries. Certainly, Hirschfeld's analysis played an important role for members of LGBT communities at the time who lacked perceptible clues in identifying each other, helping them to better understand themselves and their identity-making positions. In fact, Berlin was both reference and evidence for the movement and sedimentation of homosexuality in the city.

At the beginning of the Weimar Republic, the events and bars connected with the homosexual subculture systematically reopened while placing themselves in specific areas of the city that, with the implementation of the 1920 Greater Berlin Act, reached 4,000,000 inhabitants across 20 districts. Through the geographical expansion of the city, the district of Schöneberg, initially inhabited by the middle class, turned into the queer neighborhood *par excellence* of the Weimar Republic (see Gordon 2011, 59). Other important places in the city for LGBT people were in the center/east – Friedrichstraße, north Kreuzberg – and in the north-east around Alexanderplatz, together with the *Tiergarten* park, where the Institute of Sexology was located (north-east of the park). At the beginning of the 1930s, there were approximately 85 bars exclusively aimed at lesbians. The most fashionable were in the west, in the north of Schöneberg, and around Friedrichstraße. In the east and around Alexanderplatz were the more working-class bars (see Kokula 1988, 160).

This excitement was the reason why writer and journalist Ruth Margarete Roellig wrote the 1928 guide "Berlin's Lesbian Women", which focused on the main bars of lesbian Berlin. The introduction to the book by Hirschfeld magnetized the attention of the homosexual community while informing its individuals about their shared life conditions and the places where it was possible to gather together. The bars for women, as explained by Roellig (1928), despite the freedom of female association, were intentionally wrapped by a veil of secrecy and not advertised except for on the pages of lesbian magazines. For the same reason, most of these places restricted entry to regular customers and maintained a limited clientele.

The most active bars of the lesbian community numbered about 30[8], excluding the most famous bars, such as the "Eldorado", which offered a wider kind of entertainment addressed to trans people, gay men, lesbians, and, surprisingly, curious straight "Berliners" and international tourists.

7 See Hirschfeld (1914) for the German version of the book.

8 Some of the most famous bars were the "Café Domino" on Marburger Straße 13; "Der Toppkeller" run by "Zigeunerlotte" on Schwerinstraße 13; "Die Hohenzollern-Diele", one of the first cafés offering a shelter to and protecting the lesbian community, on Bülowstraße 101; "Dorian Gray", a meeting point for the homosexual community on Bülowstraße 57; and "Mali und Igel" at the corner between Wormser Straße and Lutherstraße, gathering place of the women's club "Monbijou des Westens".

The other places in which the creation of a lesbian private sphere was possible were official associations, such as organizations[9], the press[10], and clubs[11], which were constantly monitored by the authorities and worked to create a real subversive "class (gendered) consciousness"[12].

Nevertheless, in 1933, with Hitler's rise to power, the people and places that became symbolic of the homosexual social movement suffered the consequences of Hitler's regime. First, serious steps were taken against male prostitution. Afterwards, the Decree Against Public Immorality was released to newspapers on 24 February 1933, mandating the closure of all clubs and bars for homosexuals.[13] In addition, on 4 March 1933, the newspaper "Berliner Tageblatt" stated, "Night clubs closed. Restrictive regulations for dance halls and bars. A few days ago, the police chief threatened harsh measures against inns and taverns, against which moral complaints had been raised."[14]

The official closure of the bars and clubs was, gradually, followed by the closing of other pubs, publishers, and organizations supporting the homosexual movement. The same happened to Hirschfeld's institute, which was sacked and seriously damaged on 6 May 1933.

9 For example, the League of Human Rights, founded by Friedrich Radszuweit in 1923, was the biggest and most important homosexual organization of the time (with about 48,000 members) and included a section for women with more than 1,500 members.

10 The press was an actually free environment in which women were eventually able to share their thoughts, be informed, and get in contact with other women. The foremost magazines were "Die Freundschaft", for both women and men, the first magazine that dealt with the "homosexual issue" focusing on society, politics, education, and entertainment; "Frauenliebe", "Frauen, Liebe und Leben", "Garçonne", and "Liebende Frauen", edited by the German Friendship Association; "Die Freundin", and "Ledige Frauen", connected with the League of Human Rights, exclusively for women; the "Blätter für ideale Frauenfreundschaft. Monatsschrift für weibliche Kultur", the only independent magazine, created by activist Selli Engler (1899–1982), written by and addressed to women. Nevertheless, on 18 December 1926, with the Law to Protect Youth from Trashy and Dirty Writings, some actions had been taken in order to hinder the homosexual community. Indeed, "the censorship boards established by the Filth and Trash Law ruled rather consistently that periodicals about lesbianism (particularly innuendo-filled personal ads) threatened to infect young women with lesbian desires" (Marhoefer 2015, 77).

11 Among the most active lesbian feminists was the Überbubi Charlotte (Lotte) Hahm. She wrote for the most important lesbian magazines, was the owner of the bars "Manuela" and "Monokel", and the director of the circle "Violetta", an eclectic association with about 400 members and a section for transvestites, offering lesbians a kind of shelter. Other important circles were "Monbijou des Westens", whose members met at the "Dorian Gray", the "Mali und Igel" and who were headed by Amalie Rothaug and Else Conrad as well as "Monbijou des Ostens", which organized events together with "Violetta" in the "Zauberflöte".

12 In addition, many artistic endeavors prove the existence of lesbian communities during the Weimar Republic, e.g., works by painters Jeanne Mammen, Christian Schad, and Paul Kamm or, in literature, books by Anna Elisabet Weirauch, "Der Skorpion" (1919, 1921 and 1931), Maximiliane Ackers, "Freundinnen" (1923), Grete von Urbanitzky, "Der wilde Garten" (1927), and the play by Christa Winsloe, "Gestern und heute" (1930), followed by the famous film "Mädchen in Uniform" (1932), directed by Leontine Sagan.

13 Osnabrücker Tagesblatt, 18.02.1933.

14 Berliner Tageblatt, 04.03.1933.

Lesbianism during Nazism: Social Invisibility and In/Visible Persecution[15]

Starting in 1933, and lasting until the end of the dictatorship, lesbianism remained legally ignored, even if new attention was being paid to the issue. First, from a legal point of view, the possibility of criminalizing lesbianism in exceptional instances, such as lesbian acts through violence, with minors, or in public, was introduced via sections 174, 176, and 183 of the Criminal Code (see Schoppmann 2010, 16). Second, although §175 was strengthened in order to enable the "catching" of more homosexual men, a long debate arose again on the possible penalization of lesbianism. The majority of the jurists agreed on a non-inclusion approach – Himmler himself perceived lesbianism as only an esthetic issue (see Kokula 2010, 25) – for three main reasons:

> "First, women were frequently described as 'pseudo-homosexuals' who could be cured by heterosexual intercourse. For this reason, female homosexuality did not seem to pose a serious threat to population growth. […] Second, the emotional relationships between women made it difficult to draw a clear line between what was permissible or prohibited behavior. It was thus impossible to satisfactorily establish that a woman had indeed committed a crime. Third, because of the subordinate position of women in the Nazi state, female homosexuality did not appear seriously to threaten public life." (Schoppmann 2005, 58)

Similarly, as explained by Marie-Jo Bonnet (2010), Nazi laws did not consider female homosexuality from a criminal perspective. As German women already possessed subordinate status, being excluded from important political and administrative positions, lesbian sexuality did not threaten the "purity of the race" or male power. Furthermore, intimate relationships between women were difficult to identify reliably. Finally, it was deemed that the best way not to encourage the spread of an "epidemic" homosexuality among women was to let it pass in silence (see Bonnet 2010, 84).

On the other hand, criminalization was particularly supported by jurist Rudolf Klare (1913–1946?), according to whom women's homosexuality was as contagious and dangerous as men's and thus could lead to the "degeneration of the race" and the German people (see Schoppmann 2010, 17). In addition, as suggested by Ilse Kokula (2010), since the persecution of lesbians during Nazism was strictly connected to the Nazi perception of the German woman's essence, Klare also argued that female homosexual activities were a character-

15 In reference to the lives and persecution of lesbians during Nazism, see the rich bibliography by historian Anna Hájková (2019).

istic feature by no means intrinsic to a German woman, which supported their criminalization (see Kokula 2010, 24).

Surprisingly, the legal issue became even more problematic after the annexation of Austria on 11 March 1938. Austria had been punishing both male and female homosexuality legally since 1768, reaffirming the illegality of "same-sex fornication" in the 1852 Criminal Code through its §129Ib (valid until the 1970s). Therefore, the discrepancy between the two legal systems corresponded to a persecution of lesbians in Austria; notably, in Vienna, between 1938 and 1943, 1,100 men and 66 women were sentenced (see Schoppmann 2010, 17) to jail, castration, and camps (see Rieder 2010, 37).

As a result, while a few clubs and pubs were still run secretly, such as "Bart" in Charlottenburg or "Ellis Bierbar" in Kreuzberg, allowing homosexual couples to dance together (which was also forbidden by law) in covert places (see Kokula 2010, 34), lesbians started hiding themselves in their everyday lives, marrying gay or heterosexual men, limiting their movements with their closest friends or moving to another city or other neighborhoods where no one knew them and their lives.[16] Indeed, lesbians could not feel safe just because they were excluded from the Criminal Code. On the contrary, they were equally aware of the "unorthodox" ways in which they could be persecuted. In fact, the word persecution does and did not limit itself in its meaning to the official victim groups or to imprisonment in jail and detention in concentration camps. To better understand the extent of the Nazi persecution of lesbians and other "minor" groups, such as trans people, the term has to be widened in order to include passive actions aimed at "catching" all those considered deviant.

As explained by Marhoefer (2019), the concept of risk should be considered. Although gender non-conformist women, some trans men and women, and lesbians were not subjects of an official state campaign, they risked the suspicion of the neighborhood, acquaintances, and state officials. This suspicion could ultimately lead to violence (see Marhoefer 2019, 47pp.). As a consequence, and despite few direct testimonies, the structural persecution of lesbians is evident in patriarchal power structures and sexist laws, in the persecution of lesbian lifestyles, in the destruction of lesbian magazines and bars, in dismissal and termination of leases, in the stigmatization and persecution of lesbians as "anti-social", "criminal", or "crazy", and in the punishment, torture, and eventual deportation and murder of lesbian women in concentration camps (see Steininger 2017b, paragraph 20).

16 In a surprising turn, during the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin, Hitler allowed homosexual bars to open in order to show the "well-known" Nazi tolerance. In reference to the process of lesbians hiding in their everyday lives, see Schoppmann (1993).

Indeed, given the extent of "the female issue" – also referring to women who were Jewish, Sinti, or Jehovah's Witnesses as well as women political prisoners and sex workers – the first female camps were established. The very first was Moringen – 22 km north from Göttingen – which operated as a jail for 1,350 women between 1933 and 1938; then, Lichtenburg in Sachsen with 1,415 female prisoners, active between 1937 and 1939 (see Schoppmann 1997, 232).

Ravensbrück, in Fürstenberg/Havel, Brandenburg, was opened on 15 May 1939 and was the biggest camp for women who were interned and marked by different triangles: yellow for Jewish women, red for political prisoners, brown for gypsy women, purple for Jehovah's Witnesses, green for criminals, and possibly pink for homosexuals – but very few accounts of Ravensbrück refer to pink-triangle prisoners. Most of the lesbians targeted had been deported through other stratagems, e.g., reported for small crimes (see Vermehren 1979, 51) and marked with the black triangle, i.e., as "anti-social". In order for this to be possible, in 1937, the police were given special permission to intern individuals regarded as "deviant from the norm" (but who had not committed any crime) because of their "anti-sociality" (see Schoppmann 2010, 20).

Despite the scarceness of direct testimonies on the experience within Ravensbrück or other camps, one can read about many lesbian relationships in the stigmatizing and often homophobic accounts given by heterosexual coprisoners. For instance, Wanda Półltawska, a Ravensbrück political prisoner from 1941 to 1945, and her friend Krysia were horrified by the "terrifying" lesbians:

> "[T]hey stole everything we had: only half our camp rations ever reached us and soon those last souvenirs of freedom – our toothbrushes and combs, together with a few treasures we had brought with us from prison – vanished irretrievably. We couldn't wash, because they wouldn't let us into the wash-room. We couldn't go to the sleeping quarters during the day, because the woman in charge wouldn't let us. She was always 're-making' our beds, stealing anything she could find and spitting on the sheets." (Półltawska 1989, 57pp.)

She adds, "[A]t first, I couldn't credit what was happening, and watched wide-eyed, torn between curiosity and despair. The last shreds of humanity were slowly disappearing. Lesbian love… love… love…" (Półltawska 1989, 58) – "inhuman acts of lesbian love".[17]

17 When Sarah Helm, journalist and author of the book "Ravensbrück: Life and Death in Hitler's Concentration Camp for Women", interviewed Wanda Półltawska, something had to be asked: "Sitting in her Kraków apartment, overlooking the central square, I asked Wanda about the 'inhuman acts'. A portrait of Pope John Paul II stared down on us from the wall, and Wanda stared too, saying nothing. She asked if I had travelled all the way to Kraków to ask her that. But there was a time when Wanda Wojtasik was haunted by the 'inhuman acts' of lesbian love as much as she was by other acts the camp was known for" (Helm 2015, 174).

> According to Póltawska, among them, there were also the *many* or *julots*, "shaved masculine women with rigid collars, high-heeled shoes, male voices, and sometimes even with a little beard. Those [...] stood in front of the blocks, looking at the women who passed by. They were always more. On Sunday, behind the blocks, real orgies took place. Some young gypsies danced and the *Many* beat the time." (Póltawska 1989, 143)

Moreover, in the accounts by Ravensbrück prisoners Margarete Buber-Neumann, Georgia Tanewa (see Schoppmann 1997, 247), and Irma Trksak, it is possible to observe a common prejudicial, bourgeois point of view (see Meier 1999, 22pp.) according to which the lesbian relationships of the political prisoners remained platonic, while the criminals and "anti-socials" had actual lesbian intercourse. As reported by Buber-Neumann – who was a young German communist when she was interned, in 1940, in Ravensbrück, where she met Milena Jesenská, Kafka's friend – there was also a lesbian prostitute in Ravensbrück:

> "[H]er name was Gerda, but she called herself Gerd. She serviced a number of women, but not for money. Every Saturday and Sunday her customers brought her their rations of margarine and sausage, which were distributed only on weekends." (Buber-Neumann 1988, 40)

Likewise, Nanda Herbermann, a German political prisoner deported to Ravensbrück in July 1941, underlines a similar attitude in reference to the wards, categorized as former prostitutes or criminals:

> "Many of my wards were completely morally ruined in this environment. They performed the most depraved acts with each other, since sexuality was the only thing left for them. They could no longer be helped by goodness and patience. They were totally ruined; physically, too, they were unkempt and dirty." (Herbermann 2000, 136)

Nevertheless, lesbianism remained illegal within the camps and the heteronormative attempts to hinder it were extremely humiliating for those affected by them. According to the 17th disciplinary regulation of the camp, "anyone who approaches other prisoners in a lesbian manner or who engages in lesbian obscenities, or who fails to report such activities" was to be punished (see Mailänder 2015, 210) in the punishment block or with 25, 50, or 75 strokes (see Buber-Neumann 1963, 288).

In addition, as reported by Bonnet and confirmed by Germaine Tillion's (2012) account, it was very common to send lesbian "anti-socials" to the camp brothels with the promise of release after six months. But, to add insult to injury, the lesbians who spent six months in the brothel were deceived by the Nazis twice, undergoing a process of forced heteronormativization and eventually being killed (see Bonnet 2010, 94).

The connection of lesbianism with crime, prostitution, and vice in the accounts of the heterosexual political prisoners shows a shared stigmatization of lesbians within the camp as a reflection of its societal perception. Lesbianism was considered an epidemic disease that was breaking through the whole camp and, therefore, as explained by Hájková and Bosold (2017), the figure of the perverted lesbian prisoner plays an outstanding role in the narratives of the survivors after the war. Not surprisingly, not a single testimony from one of the lesbian survivors has survived. They were sentenced to silence; the lack of self-testimony of lesbian women and the massive homophobia that characterizes the majority of the surviving testimonies still determine the politics of remembrance and research (see Hájková/Bosold 2017, paragraph 11).

Indeed, even if, on the one hand, it is possible that lesbianism was exploited for personal gain by some women (who probably had a privileged position in the camp), on the other hand, the reported testimonies cannot be considered in any way representative of either the real number of lesbians in the camp or their attitude because, on the contrary, to be known as a lesbian also meant to be oppressed by the SS and the other prisoners (see Janz 2019, 20).

Conclusions

The posthumous invisibility of lesbian women and the silence that surrounds their lives are the reasons it is still impossible to quantify their number and the way in which they were persecuted, interned, or murdered in the camps. As a consequence, the evidence found – such as that referring to Elli Smula and Margarete Rosenberg; Henny Schermann, Elsa Conrad, and Margarete U.; Mary Punjer (see Schoppmann 1997, 233pp.); or Ilse Totzke[18] – is still too little and lacks detailed information.

What can be known for certain is that lesbians were subjected to both "alternative" and "classic" persecution, including stigmatization, which resulted in the representation of the lesbian community as the summation of a never-ending set of societal and cultural stereotypes. Its members were – in almost any account – German, as if the collective stigma of German lesbians corresponded to the need to oppose the German enemy itself (see Bonnet 2010, 96pp.) – public enemies, parasites of the people. They were *jules* and *julots* (pimps); obviously prostitutes; criminals; "anti-socials". Their love was a vice, a defect, never congenital but always a compensation given by the absence of

18 In addtion, see Schoppmann (2012). For further information, see Boxhammer (2015), Lesben- und Schwulenverband Berlin Brandeburg (2017), Queer Code (n.d.), Schoppmann (2015a; 2015b), Marhoefer (2019), and Rosenthal (2018).

men and, contextually, a substitution and a reproduction of the heterosexual matrix (see Eschebach 2012, 67). Lesbianism was an illness, a contagious epidemic disease.

Such a situation does not allow the analytical evaluation of real experience, which is, unfortunately, mainly reported on via constant stigmatization carried out in the accounts of the women who were (un)consciously reactivating the patriarchal system of external society within the camp. "These descriptions", as explained by Schoppmann (1997, 244), "mostly stigmatizing and pejorative, have something in common: they are external images, alien images, third-party images, ascriptions. [It] is further problematic that the fictional extent of these accounts cannot be assessed with certainty". Such a confusion results from the impossibility of drawing on directs reports, which, if it had been possible, on the one hand, would have been extremely helpful for understanding the real extent of the phenomena, but, on the other hand, would have caused problems for these women (who could have been stigmatized again because of their lesbianism).

Ravensbrück could have represented the possibility of building an internal secret matriarchy (see Kokula 2010, 36) among female prisoners within the *Reich* and to give rise to a shared matriarchal consciousness. Instead, it was a "successful" attempt to reiterate the general perception of the heteronormative lesbophobic and homophobic context in which individual lives are leveled to a patriarchal vision. The continuous stigmatization of lesbians in Ravensbrück, therefore, corresponds to a shared social discrimination strengthened within the camp experience (see Kokula 1984, 159) but dating back to the Weimar Republic, where lesbianism had emancipated within itself but not within the new German society.

Although nowadays, the debate regarding the visibility of lesbians persecuted under Nazism is increasingly analyzed, it is still hindered. The dynamic inherent in today's denial of lesbian commemoration seems to relate precisely to the Weimar past; since lesbians were not included in the German Criminal Code and were therefore not categorizable as a victim group, they were not prosecutable because of their sexuality during Nazism and, today, there is no reason to remember them with a celebratory monument. Now, finally, it is clearer – but still conflicted – as to what extent the lesbian legal invisibility of the Weimar Republic and the Nazi era is deeply connected to the invisibility that still today does not allow us to remember lesbian women and create their commemorative spaces.

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