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I HAVEN'T EVEN TOLD MY MOTHER

Children as victims of sexual
and sexualized violence
in the Second World War
and its aftermath



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INTRODUCTION

IDEOLOGICAL INTERSECTION OF SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE DURING NAZI PERSECUTION

This volume is based on a conference that took place at the University of Salzburg in July 2023. It was the fifth conference in the international multi-disciplinary series ‘Children and War: Past and Present,’ which began in 2010. The event in 2023 marked the end of this series, dedicated to a topic that the organizers had been thinking about for some time: ‘Children as victims of sexual and sexualized violence in the Second World War and its aftermath.’

In Salzburg, academicians from various disciplines and of different ages gathered. Some were nearing the end of their university careers; others were working on their PhD theses. This created the ideal basis for both an intensive and challenging exchange of views. We would like to thank all participants for this. A huge variety of topics were discussed, ranging from the rapes committed by German soldiers to sexual and sexualized violence during the Holocaust and the Sinti and Roma genocide.

The discussions covered all forms of sexual and sexualized violence suffered by children during and after the Second World War, including heterosexual and same-sex violence perpetrated by German men and women and their male and female helpers, by SS men and *Kapos*. Children were also victims of sexualized and sexual violence in the ghettos, where Jewish victims and Jewish perpetrators lived in close proximity.

It was exciting and informative to learn how renowned academics and young colleagues at the beginning of their careers approached the sources available and made use of them. The focus was both on traditional data and methods, as well as on sources that have only just become accessible or are not yet in the archives at all, including compensation files that need to be researched, analyzed and interpreted. These sources will probably change our understanding of the past.

The contributions to this volume not only draw from a wide range of sources; they also reflect the diverse forms of sexualized violence. It is a matter of fact that speaking about sexual/sexualized violence was and is still—albeit less so—subject to strong taboos. The victims of sexual/sexualized violence were severely inhibited by such taboos, as were historians. As a consequence, for a long time neither the public interest nor the scientific community focused on this subject. Even if there were indications of sexualized violence in personal accounts and documents, this was often not heard or noticed.¹

¹ It is not only social taboos that led to interviewers and historians not picking up on hints of experienced sexualized violence. A lack of knowledge, a general feeling of being unable to cope with this, and the fear of retraumatizing the interviewees can be possible causes for the hesitancy or unwillingness to address this topic (cf. Helga Amesberger, ‘Die Bedeutung von Trauma im Forschungsprozess’, in Peter Gstettner (ed.), *Mauthausen und andere Orte. Narben, Wunden, Erinnerungen*, Schulheft 121, 31, 2006, pp. 58–67).

Another consequence of this taboo was that there was no theorization of sexual/sexualized violence within the scholarly discipline of history. Yet, concepts of violence existed in sociology and political science. One of the first attempts to examine sexual and sexualized violence in the context of the National Socialist persecution of women was made by Helga Amesberger, Katrin Auer and Brigitte Halbmayr in their book *Sexualized violence. Women's experiences in National Socialist concentration camps*.² The authors drew on the concept of violence developed since the 1970s and its distinction between direct-personal violence, indirect-structural violence and symbolic violence.³ The importance of the latter was stressed by philosopher Hans Saner, who, with reference to Pierre Bourdieu⁴, stated:

One should only speak of symbolic violence when the deception, the discrimination, the contempt are already inherent in the symbol system itself—in ideology, for example—so that anyone who falls for this world of symbols inevitably deceives, discriminates and distorts the truth, even if it is done with subjectively honest intentions.⁵

In the National Socialist ideology with its distinction between people ‘worthy of life’ and ‘unworthy of life,’ the classification of people as ‘asocials,’ ‘Jews,’ ‘Gypsies’ etc., the symbolic violence is obvious. The National Socialist society learned to recognize, misrecognize and acknowledge such ideological distinctions.

Symbolic violence is, so to speak, the backbone, the substructure for structural and personal violence. Violence can be seen as a violation of physical and mental well-being that restricts people in their potential for development. Violence is not exclusively caused by individuals; it is also inherent in systems of inequality and the ideologies that underpin them. Rather, the forms are mutually dependent, whereby one would not be possible with-

2 Helga Amesberger, Katrin Auer and Brigitte Halbmayr, *Sexualisierte Gewalt. Weibliche Erfahrungen in NS-Konzentrationslagern* (Vienna: Mandelbaum 2004). Brigitte Halbmayr, ‘Sexualized violence against women during Nazi “racial” persecution’, in Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel (eds.), *Sexual violence against Jewish women during the Holocaust* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England 2010), pp. 29–44.

3 See, for example, Johan Galtung (who in recent years was heavily criticized for his antisemitic remarks), *Strukturelle Gewalt. Beiträge zur Friedensforschung* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt 1975). Hans Saner, ‘Personale, strukturelle und symbolische Gewalt’, in Hans Saner, *Hoffnung und Gewalt. Zur Ferne des Friedens* (Basel: Lenos Verlag 1982), pp. 73–95. Stephan Moebius and Angelika Wetterer, ‘Symbolische Gewalt’, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 4/2011, pp. 1–10. Wilfried Graf and Klaus Ottomeyer, ‘Identität und Gewalt. Ein Überblick’, in Österreichisches Institut für Friedensforschung und Friedenserziehung in Burg Schlaining, Burgenland (ed.), *Szenen der Gewalt in Alltagsleben, Kulturindustrie und Politik*, Wien 1989, pp. 1–46.

4 In various studies, Pierre Bourdieu aimed to explain why people so easily accept discrimination, hierarchy and social inequality (Stephan Moebius and, Frithjof Nungesser, ‘Symbolische Gewalt’ *Themenheft Gewalt*, Heft 3, 2018, 68. Jg., pp. 120–127. The three essential functions of symbolic violence recognizing, misrecognizing and acknowledging are mediated through socialization. As a result, social inequality is taken for granted. See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu: *Die männliche Herrschaft* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag 2005), p. 8.

5 Saner, *Personale, strukturelle und symbolische Gewalt*, p. 78. Translation by the authors of the introduction. [‘Von symbolischer Gewalt sollte man erst sprechen, wenn der Betrug, die Diskriminierung, die Verachtung, schon im Zeichensystem selber liegen – etwa in der Ideologie –, sodass jeder, der dieser Symbolwelt verfällt, unweigerlich betrügt, diskriminiert, die Wahrheit verbiegt, selbst wenn es in subjektiv redlicher Absicht geschieht.’]

out the other; they are in a dialectical relationship to each other. This theoretical frame allows the observer to see that patriarchy as ideological basis/backbone of (National Socialist) society facilitates violence against women and hints at the importance of considering the respective gender of the perpetrators and victims.⁶

We understand sexual/sexualized violence as a violation of sexual self-determination and autonomy. Again, physical violence does not necessarily have to be exercised—other means were available, like economic, cultural, psychological and legal constraints. This means that a further differentiation appears to be useful: namely, the distinction between sexual and sexualized violence. The term sexualized violence makes it possible to distinguish direct (severe) sexual violence such as rape, coercion and forced sterilization from forms of violence beyond physical violence. Examples of sexualized violence in the context of National Socialist persecution and concentration camps include the violation of the sense of shame, the infringement of intimate space, leering stares, verbal sexualized humiliation, hair shaving, or the lack of hygiene products.⁷ The consistent naming of both terms—sexual and sexualized violence—broadens the view of the spectrum of sexually connoted violence, and at the same time counteracts the concealment of serious sexual violence by using only the broader term sexualized violence.

Sexual violence is—as Regina Mühlhäuser states—‘not to be understood as always being the same crime. It is instead about a variety of actions carried out by the perpetrator for different reasons, having a number of results for the victims.’⁸ The distinction between personal and structural violence permits analysis of the ideological foundations that make personal violence possible in the first place. The use of violence always refers to unequal power relations. Violence can only be exercised with impunity if structures (laws, social norms, political guidelines, etc.) tolerate it. These structures are, in turn, informed and further developed by symbolic/ideological systems that determine the normative orientations.⁹ Or to put it in another way, it is necessary to consider the implications of misogyny, sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, ableism, homophobia and so on. In the context of National Socialist persecution, the racist population policy of the Nazis

6 Amesberger et al., *Sexualisierte Gewalt*, relates exclusively to interviews with women, many of whom were minors at the time of the persecution; yet no attention was paid to the aspect of age in the attempt at theorization of sexual /sexualized violence.

7 Cf. Amesberger et al., *Sexualisierte Gewalt*, pp. 19–20, and Halbmayr, *Sexualized violence*, p. 30.

8 Regina Mühlhäuser, ‘Handlungsräume. Sexuelle Gewalt durch Wehrmacht und SS in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion 1941–1945,’ in Insa Eschebach and Regina Mühlhäuser (eds.), *Krieg und Geschlecht. Sexuelle Gewalt im Krieg und Sex-Zwangsarbeit in NS-Konzentrationslagern* (Berlin: Metropolis 2008, pp. 167–186), p. 185. The translation into English follows Halbmayr, *Sexualized violence*, p. 40.

9 Helga Amesberger, ‘Unter dem Vorwand des Schutzes – Kennzeichen und Chiffren von Moralpolitik am Beispiel österreichischer Prostitutionspolitik,’ in Georg Teichert (ed.), *Das Prostituiertenschutzgesetz. Implementierung – Problematisierung – Sensibilisierung*, Schriftenreihe Impulse, Band 2 (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag), pp. 103–128), see pp. 109–112.

and, associated with it, their gender conceptions, are significant; so are 'race,' ethnicity, nationality, class, sexual orientation, religion etc. This intersectional approach—theorized by Kimberlé Crenshaw with regard to the simultaneity of sexism and racism¹⁰—helps to understand differences in the experience of sexualized violence among persecuted persons.

The fact that specific forms of violent acts were committed only against specific groups of individuals refers to ideological intersections of sexism with racism, anti-Semitism, hetero-sexism etc. According to these ideological levels, and with reference to Amesberger et al., four types of sexualized violence can be distinguished.¹¹

In patriarchal societies, women and girls are repeatedly confronted with misogynistic violence and, not infrequently, with sexualized-misogynistic violence. Sexualized-misogynistic violence may be directed against the identity as a woman/girl, against the sexual integrity of a woman/girl, against the identity as a mother and/or against the self-determination of one's own body. Even if the perpetrator is not pursuing an overriding goal in committing sexual/sexualized violence, the violent act and its non-prosecution reinforce the devaluation and humiliation of people read as female, social inequality, and the patriarchal system.

Sexualized antisemitic and sexualized racist violence, on the other hand, mainly affects male and female, adult and under-aged individuals who were categorized as Jewish or 'racially' inferior (e.g. Roma and Sinti). This form of violence is therefore directed against specific, racially devalued persons. Hair shaving, forced sterilization and abortions were forms of this kind of violence. The goal by the Nazis was the meta-level 'race' and the extinction of people who were categorized as 'non-Aryan.'

Eugenic violence is always sexual violence, as it is a severe intervention in one's sexuality and reproductive abilities. In the context of National Socialism, it was directed against individuals construed as Jews and Gypsies but also against so-called Aryan people with handicaps (mental or physical) and so-called 'asocial' persons. The primary interest of National Socialist health policy was not the individual well-being of the population. Their ultimate goal was to create a racially defined 'pure national body', from which the 'internal enemies', i.e. 'Aryans' with mental or physical disabilities, also had to be eliminated.

10 Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics', in: Alison M. Jaggar (ed.) *Living with Contradictions. Controversies in Feminist Social Ethics* (Boulder/ San Francisco/ Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 39–52.

11 Amesberger et al., *Sexualisierte Gewalt*, pp. 326–334.

Sexualized-heterosexist violence concerns the sexual orientation of a person. It was directed against the homosexual identity and against the right of sexual self-determination. Examples of sexualized-heterosexist violence include experiments to change the sexual orientation of homosexuals (*Umpolungsversuche*), medical experiments with gay men, forced castration¹² of gay men and forced prostitution (of lesbians). The main goal of the Nazi regime in persecuting homosexuals was the ‘(preservation of the) purity of the German race,’ as homosexuality—especially pertaining to men and boys—was seen as ‘degeneration’ and ‘waste of potency.’

One could extend this list of sexual/sexualized violence with other ideologically based inequalities. Besides ideology, it is necessary to consider other structures which are per se—or may cause—(sexual) violence. For example: severe overcrowding in the barracks, the lack of food and of hygienic material etc. This elaboration on structural violence is not meant to imply that direct personal violence is less significant. Definitely not.

As structural and direct-personal violence are interdependent, the impact of (sexualized) violence also depends on other circumstances: who is the perpetrator—a soldier, a fellow inmate, a policeman, a guard or even a family member? The number of perpetrators—was it e.g. a group rape? When and where did it happen—during deportation, in hiding, in concentration camps, in ghettos? How long did one have to endure sexualized violence? Were there any witnesses? And how did the witnesses react? How did others, survivors and researchers alike, react on accounts of sexualized violence? How did the society react to such atrocities? And so on.

Due to the topic of this volume, it is obvious that age must be seen as a significant element in the analysis. Questions like the following are relevant: What did it mean to be a child, to be an adolescent—in terms of the ability to act, the possibilities of coping? Was it at all possible for them to name the violence as such because of their age? What did the experience of sexualized violence mean in respect to their dependency on others, or even on the perpetrator? Did the victims even remember this form of violence? If so, what effects did it have on the narration about it, on giving testimony?

All these aspects will be addressed in one way or another in *I haven't even told my mother. Children as victims of sexual and sexualized violence in the Second World War and its aftermath*.

12 Forced castration was legalized from November 1934 in the so-called ‘Habitual Offender Act’ (*Gewohnheitsverbrechergesetz*). With the amendment to the GzVeN (*Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses*, Law for the prevention of hereditary diseases) of June 26, 1935, the scope of castration was extended to all homosexual men; cf. Kai Sommer, *Die Strafbarkeit der Homosexualität von der Kaiserzeit bis zum Nationalsozialismus. Eine Analyse der Straftatbestände im Strafgesetzbuch und in den Reformentwürfen (1871–1945)* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang 1998) pp. 335–338, p. 28.

The volume starts with an analysis of sexualized violence by German soldiers. MONIKA J. FLASCHKA in her contribution on ‘Child abuse and the creation of the German Soldier, 1933–1945’ underlines that the sexual assault of children under the Nazi regime has received relatively little attention, even as scholars of the Second World War increasingly focus on topics related to sexual violence. Relying on court-martial records, FLASCHKA examines the language used by all those involved in child abuse cases to determine how the intersection of the gender and racial ideologies of the German military affected the determination of punishment and perceptions of victims and perpetrators. What the courts-martial illustrate is how the law and the trials provided a space for the creation and negotiation of a specific identity: Nazi German soldier. While the first chapter focused on an often-neglected aspect of sexualized violence in the Second World War, the following contributions focus entirely on Jewish children as well as on Sinti and Roma children.

YAAKOV ARIEL’S reflections on ‘The pain that did not speak its name’ examines the long way survivors had to go before they spoke about sexual and sexualized violence they had endured during the Second World War and its aftermath. It took until the final years of the last millennium and huge cultural shifts in societies before survivors overcame their reluctance to report what had happened to them, publishers and editors no longer refused to publish such recollections, and scholars of the Holocaust started to become interested in this topic.

Although the largest and best-known collections of survivors’ accounts, the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University and the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive have not encouraged survivors to focus on this part of their experience, the small percentage of accounts that include recollections of sexualized violence amount to hundreds of testimonies, if not a few thousand. Ariel’s introduction to the topic focuses on some of the main developments and most important sources and publications in this area. It underlines that personal accounts are not carved in stone, and that victims do not share all their experiences at a given time, but rather entrust them when the time is right.

SARA HOROWITZ expands on the general theme described by ARIEL in her analysis of ‘Unsettled accounts’. Confirming ARIEL’S observation about the decades of non-sharing personal experience of sexualized violence, HOROWITZ states that in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, deferred narratives by child survivors and Holocaust scholarship have brought the issue of sexuality and children into the public forum. Her chapter examines the unsettled accounts of men and women who narrate episodes of remembered sexualized violence as children during the Shoah—unsettled in the ethical, psychological, and narrative senses. Looking at three sets of memory narratives, the contribution explores the memories of child survivors, their enduring and evolving after-effects, the narrative construction of shame and agency, and the interpretive demands placed on these accounts by others.

WILLIAM JONES'S chapter on 'Sexual violence against male children and adolescents during the Holocaust' is the first of two contributions to this edition that focuses entirely on male victims. It addresses two forms of sexual violence faced by men and boys in the Nazi concentration camps: exploitative sexual relationships and one-time rape. Whereas some material has been written on the former, the latter has remained elusive in scholarship as the two are often conflated. JONES differentiates between the two forms of violence, and in doing so, further uncovers the fact that victims were almost always Jewish boys or adolescents aged twenty-one or younger. The chapter therefore offers an examination of the interaction between hierarchical camp power and intersectional identity factors that help explain why Jewish youth were so susceptible to sexual violence in the camp system.

The second analysis of male victims was contributed by JONATHAN LANZ. His chapter on 'Male recollections of sexuality and violence in Birkenau' examines recollections of sexuality and violence among a group of young male prisoners known as the 'Birkenau Boys.' The contribution centers on a micro-level analysis of the boys' memories of gender and sexual identities during summer 1944. Additionally, LANZ addresses questions of sexualized violence and barter in the boys' social lives, emphasizing the often-contradictory ways in which they coped with this extreme form of physical and emotional exploitation. The analysis concludes with a theoretical discussion of sexual violence against boys during the Holocaust, and the ways in which children's histories of abuse call for novel methodological approaches to writing the history of sexual violence against Jewish boys during the Holocaust.

In contrast to the two previous chapters, DENISA NEŠŤÁKOVÁ concentrates on female victims. 'Child sexual abuse in Sered' camp' examines a rare criminal investigation of child sexual abuse by an inmate in the labor camp Sered' for Jews in Slovakia in 1944. Based on the police and legal proceedings in which both victims and the perpetrator of the sexual abuse were Jewish, this case sheds light on children's experience and raises questions about sexual exploitation of Jewish children, the agency of their parents, and communal norms in Sered' camp and beyond. NEŠŤÁKOVÁ then shows the limited, yet powerful, response of parents of violated children, the continuity of the old legal structures enabling a fair legal proceeding in contrast to the Slovak antisemitic laws then in force, and the lawlessness of the Sered' camp.

The final chapter on Jewish children was contributed by JOHANNES-DIETER STEINERT who concentrates on 'Jewish forced child laborers as victims of sexual and sexualized violence'. STEINERT focuses on male and female victims in ghettos, during deportation and in concentration and extermination camps. In the latter, sexualized violence against children and adults alike was often tolerated by the authorities, including same sex violence which was not only punished outside the camps but also served as a reason to deport individuals to a concentration camp. However, a few children could escape dangerous

situations because the perpetrators feared vociferous confrontations and punishment under the National Socialist Race Laws, while others successfully defended themselves. The analysis demonstrates that boys and girls became victims of both male and female perpetrators. Special consideration has been given to women as perpetrators and to the behavior of Soviet and Western Allies' combat and non-combat troops after liberation.

Two chapters examine a special form of sexualized violence that Sinti and Roma children had to endure. JOEY RAUSCHENBERGER in his contribution on 'Forced sterilization of underage Sinti and the struggle for compensation' understands the mass sterilization of Sinti and Roma under National Socialism as a form of state-perpetrated sexual violence. The sterilization policy against adult Roma was systematically extended to children and adolescents over the age of twelve. After a brief historical contextualization of the phenomenon, this violent sexual crime against children is illustrated by two case studies. With the help of the compensation files, the focus is directed towards the long-term consequences on the victims post-war lives. Subsequently, the question of compensation for sterilized Sinti children is raised. RAUSCHENBERGER'S analysis considers the extent to which the administrative procedures reflected the tragic fate of the applicants, and according to which criteria and internal logics the authorities made their decisions over the course of the decades.

VERENA MEIER in her chapter on Sinti and their '(Non-)recognition as victims of fascism and their role in the judicial prosecution of medical professionals in East Germany after 1945' examines a huge timespan from pre-war National Socialist Germany to post-war German Democratic Republic. After explaining the racist developments that led to the forced sterilization of Sinti and Roma, she examines the situation in the GDR until 1961, the problems the young victims faced as well as their role in the prosecution of Nazi doctors and medical staff. By analyzing the biographies of these young Sinti, MEIER emphasizes the obvious traumas that affected social relationships and often led to lifelong suffering. In contrast, the former Nazi persecutors had scant difficulties reintegrating into the new East and West German societies and continuing their careers.

The final chapter on 'Revolutionizing testimony preservation of child sexual exploitation in the Holocaust,' contributed by YVONNE KOZLOVSKY GOLAN, is a case study of testimonies of gendered sexual violence inflicted on children during the Holocaust, and the technological and digital means which will help preserve these survivors' memories in the future after the witnesses have passed away. The study traces the recent technological and digital means—among them, holograms, Instagram, story video gems and more—and explains their development and importance for memory preservation. KOZLOVSKY GOLAN also considers their inclusion in the specific media-based corpus of testimonies to reach and hopefully touch viewers emotionally, both current and future generations.

This book is the result of the most stimulating international conference, *Children as victims of sexual and sexualized violence in the Second World War and its aftermath* that took place at the University of Salzburg in July 2023. It was a pleasure to work with researchers from various age groups based in Austria, Canada, Germany, Israel, the United States, and the United Kingdom in a most productive atmosphere.

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