

Backlash against Prostitutes' Rights: Origins and Dynamics of Nazi Prostitution Policies

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IN *MEIN KAMPF*, Adolf Hitler attacked prostitution as a major cause of Germany's decline. The "prostitution of love," he claimed, was responsible for the "terrible poisoning of the health of the national body" through syphilis. "Even if its results were not this frightful plague, it would nevertheless be profoundly injurious to man, since the moral devastations which accompany this degeneracy suffice to destroy a people slowly but surely." According to Hitler, many of Germany's troubles could be blamed on "this Jewification of our spiritual life and mammonization of our mating instinct" that threatened to annihilate future generations of healthy Germans.¹ Hitler's tirades about the moral and racial dangers of venal sex suggested that, once in power, the Nazis would show little tolerance for the persistence of "vice." Paradoxically, however, state-regulated prostitution increased dramatically under Nazism. Especially during wartime, the regulated brothel became a key institution of Nazi sexual policy. How can we make sense of this tension?

As this essay intends to show, to gain a fuller understanding of Nazi attitudes toward prostitution, it is vital to analyze them in the context of Weimar conflicts over prostitution reform. Recent studies on the history of prostitution in the Third Reich tend to neglect pre-1933 developments.²

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¹See Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, 1971), 246–47.

²See especially Christa Schikorra, "Prostitution weiblicher KZ-Häftlinge als Zwangsarbeit: Zur Situation 'asozialer' Häftlinge im Frauen-KZ Ravensbrück," *Dachauer Hefte* 16, no. 16 (November 2000): 112–24; Gaby Zürn, "'Von der Herbertstraße nach Auschwitz,'" in *Opfer und Täterinnen: Frauenbiographien des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Angelika Ebbinghaus (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), 124–36; Christa Paul, *Zwangsprostitution: Staatlich errichtete Bordelle im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 1994); and Gisela Bock, "'Keine Arbeitskräfte in

If historians mention the topic of Weimar prostitution policy at all, it is primarily to emphasize basic continuities in this area after the Nazi takeover. Thus, Gisela Bock has argued that Weimar prostitution reforms paved the way for the sexual and economic exploitation of prostitutes under National Socialism.³ However, the notion of unbroken continuities between Weimar and Nazi attitudes toward venal sex is problematic for several reasons. The exclusive focus on continuity tends to obscure important differences between the two periods. Far from representing a mere prelude to the brutal persecution of prostitutes after 1933, the nationwide abolition of state-regulated prostitution in 1927 led to significant improvements in prostitutes' civil and legal status. To acknowledge these (albeit limited) gains in prostitutes' rights is key for the analysis of the impact that concerns about "immorality" had on the crisis of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Nazism.⁴

The more liberal aspects of Weimar prostitution reforms triggered a powerful right-wing backlash. In the eyes of religious conservatives, the state's perceived failure to enforce "moral order" and cleanse the streets of prostitutes profoundly discredited Weimar democracy. Among large segments of the police, the loss of authority to control and punish streetwalkers similarly bred resentment against the democratic government. The Nazis were keenly aware of the propagandistic value of the issue of prostitution. Nazi attacks on the 1927 prostitution reform as yet another expression of Weimar's "materialism" and "moral decay" aimed to widen the party's appeal among the religious Right and conservative officials. During the early 1930s, the Nazis' successful attempt to portray themselves as guardians of conventional morality intent on eliminating "vice" was key to winning them the approval and collaboration of many conservatives. We can only account fully for this dynamic, however, if we recognize some of the positive achievements of Weimar prostitution reforms. The abolition of state-regulated prostitution was one of the major successes of the 1920s movement for sexual reform, which failed to achieve other goals such as the decriminalization of abortion and homosexuality. This is why Weimar prostitution reforms became a central target of Nazi propaganda.

diesem Sinne': Prostituierte im Nazi-Staat," in *Wir sind Frauen wie andere auch!* Prostituierte und ihre Kämpfe, ed. Pieke Biermann (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1980), 70–106.

³See Bock, "Keine Arbeitskräfte in diesem Sinne," 86; for a similar argument, see Patrick Wagner, *Volksgemeinschaft ohne Verbrecher: Konzeptionen und Praxis der Kriminalpolizei in der Zeit der Weimarer Republik und des Nationalsozialismus* (Hamburg, 1996), 367.

⁴For a discussion of the destructive effects of the "moral" agenda on Weimar democracy, see Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford, 1993), chap. 8. On the backlash against Weimar sexual reform, see Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920–1950* (New York, 1995), chaps. 5 and 6; and Cornelia Osborne, *The Politics of the Body in Weimar Germany: Women's Reproductive Rights and Duties* (Ann Arbor, 1992), esp. chap. 2.

Moreover, the emphasis on unbroken continuities in the history of prostitution after 1933 tends to obscure the special nature of Nazi prostitution policy. Nazi prostitution policies aimed to reverse key Weimar achievements—most importantly, the abolition of state-regulated prostitution. At first sight, the Nazis' endorsement of police-controlled prostitution might appear as a revival of older repressive attitudes toward venal sex. But under the mask of conventional authoritarian police practices for the control of "vice," Nazi prostitution policies increasingly served radically different ends. Although the police had previously justified the institution of the regulated brothel as the most effective means to protect respectable society from prostitutes, this concern increasingly became secondary under the Nazis.

The first part of this essay focuses on the backlash against Weimar prostitution reforms during the late 1920s and early 1930s. This backlash, I argue, had a decisive impact on the course of Nazi prostitution policy. The second part of the essay analyzes the different stages in Nazi attitudes toward prostitution, with a special emphasis on the early years of the regime. The initial stage, which lasted from 1933 to mid-1934, is characterized by the Nazis' effort to appeal to conservative concerns about "immorality" and to present themselves as defenders of established notions of sexual propriety. During this phase, important representatives of the Nazi leadership sided with the opponents of police-controlled brothels. However, to the extent that the regime consolidated its power and became more and more independent of religious conservatives, National Socialist Party leaders and administrators pushed openly for state-regulated prostitution. The period between 1934 and 1939 was marked by the triumph of the institution of the regulated brothel and by an increasingly brutal suppression of streetwalkers. The rise of Heinrich Himmler and the SS and the declining power of the Catholic and Protestant churches during these years decisively tipped the balance in favor of police-controlled prostitution. As preparations for war intensified, the military also lobbied for the establishment of regulated brothels. After 1939, the Nazis finally abandoned all efforts to accommodate the religious Right and launched a massive campaign to set up brothels throughout the Reich. It was during this third, radicalized phase that Nazi prostitution policy truly came into its own and most clearly revealed its unique features.

I.

In 1927 the Law for Combating Venereal Diseases (*Reichsgesetz zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten*) abolished state-regulated prostitution (*Reglementierung*, or "regulationism").⁵ Until 1927, prostitution in general had been illegal in Germany. However, cities with *Reglementierung*

⁵See *Reichsgesetzblatt*, part 1, February 22, 1927, 61–63. On the history of the anti-VD law, see Osborne, 109–12; see also Paul Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870–1945* (Cambridge, 1993), esp. 357–59.

tolerated registered prostitutes.⁶ State-regulated prostitution subjected prostitutes to compulsory medical exams for sexually transmitted diseases as well as to numerous other restrictions on their personal freedom. Thus, regulated prostitutes were banned from major public areas, could only reside in lodgings approved by the police, and had to obtain permission if they wanted to travel. A special section of the police, the morals police (Sittenpolizei), was responsible for the supervision of prostitution. Registered prostitutes' exceptional legal status marked them as social pariahs.⁷ Women arrested for street soliciting and registered by the police generally had no recourse to the courts. The legal principle of due process did not apply to prostitutes.

In the Weimar Republic, popular support for state-regulated prostitution quickly waned for several reasons. Most important, regulationism's moral double standard became increasingly untenable after the introduction of woman suffrage in 1919. Feminists had long criticized the misogynistic rationale for regulated prostitution, which imposed repressive controls on prostitutes yet condoned men's use of commercial sex.⁸ Winning the vote greatly increased feminists' leverage in their fight against regulationism. Other factors contributed to the downfall of *Reglementierung*. Social Democrats and liberals objected that the extensive arbitrary powers of the morals police were incompatible with the new democratic constitution. After the war, principled opponents of state-regulated prostitution, the "abolitionists," increasingly focused on the system's failure to stem the rise in sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).⁹ Abolitionists pointed out that unlicensed streetwalkers, who according to some estimates outnumbered registered prostitutes by a ratio of 10:1, were not subject to controls for STDs. Moreover, sexual promiscuity had increased to such an extent that professional prostitutes had ceased to represent the major source of venereal infections. To encourage all streetwalkers infected with STDs to seek medical treatment, abolitionists demanded that prostitution be decriminalized.¹⁰

⁶See Richard J. Evans, "Prostitution, State, and Society in Imperial Germany," *Past & Present*, no. 70 (February 1976): 106–29; Regina Schulte, *Sperrbezirke: Tugendhaftigkeit und Prostitution in der bürgerlichen Welt* (Hamburg, 1994), esp. chap. 4; and Lynn Abrams, "Prostitutes in Imperial Germany, 1870–1918: Working Girls or Social Outcasts?" in *The German Underworld: Deviants and Outcasts in German History*, ed. Richard J. Evans (London, 1988), 189–209.

⁷See the detailed discussion of the legal aspects of regulated prostitution in Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, 1985), chap. 2. See also Abraham Flexner, *Prostitution in Europe* (Montclair, 1969 [originally 1914]), esp. 136–37.

⁸See Anna Pappritz, "Das Reichsgesetz zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten vom Standpunkt der Frau," *Mitteilungen der deutschen Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten* 25 (1927): 133, emphasis in the original; see also Anna Pappritz, "Die abolitionistische Föderation," in *Einführung in das Studium der Prostitutionsfrage*, ed. A. Pappritz (Leipzig, 1919), 220–60.

⁹See Max Quarck, *Gegen Prostitution und Geschlechtskrankheiten* (Berlin, 1921), 20.

¹⁰See, for instance, Curt Geyer and Julius Moses, *Gesetz zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten nebst Erläuterungen und Kommentar* (Berlin, 1927), 15–16.

Widespread fears about the “racial poisons” of STDs led to the passage of the 1927 Law for Combating Venereal Diseases (anti-VD law).¹¹ To curb venereal infections, the anti-VD law promised financial support to uninsured patients and criminalized people who knowingly spread STDs. In many ways, the 1927 law marked a victory for the abolitionists. The law decriminalized prostitution in general, abolished the morals police, and outlawed regulated brothels. These were major achievements from the perspective of prostitutes’ rights. However, to secure passage of the reform, Social Democrats and liberals were forced to make important concessions to the moral Right, who opposed a consistent decriminalization of prostitution. Clause 16/4 of the anti-VD law, dubbed by critics the “church-tower paragraph” (*Kirchturmparagraph*), made street soliciting illegal in areas adjacent to churches and schools as well as in towns with a population smaller than 15,000.¹² Abolitionists immediately pointed out that the church-tower paragraph potentially could lead to a resurgence of regulated prostitution.¹³ Andreas Knack and Max Quarck, two of the Social Democratic Party’s major experts on public health, warned that the repeal of *Reglementierung* would “cause considerable opposition among the organs of the administration” and called on socialists to be vigilant.¹⁴ As subsequent developments showed, their concerns about a possible backlash against the more liberal aspects of the 1927 prostitution reform were to prove prescient.

Opposition from within the State: The Police

When the Prussian minister of welfare asked police presidents in February 1921 to comment on recent demands to abolish state-regulated prostitution, the responses were overwhelmingly negative.¹⁵ Most officials rejected the proposal as unrealistic and dangerous. Many would have agreed with the Berlin police, who accused abolitionists of manipulating the issue of prostitution reform for “women’s rights [*frauenrechtlerisch*] and general political agitation.”¹⁶ Erfurt’s chief of police predicted that in the event of a repeal of regulated prostitution, “street whores will shoot up from the

¹¹See “Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten,” in *Verhandlungen des deutschen Reichstages*, vol. 401 (Berlin, 1925), doc. no. 975. For a critical discussion of Weimar debates about STDs, see Usborne, esp. 110; and Bessel, 233–39.

¹²See Paragraph 16, section 4 of the anti-VD law.

¹³See Marie Elisabeth Lüders, “Befreiung von Krankheit und Lüge,” *Die Frau* 34 (1927): 302–5.

¹⁴See Andreas V. Knack and Max Quarck, *Das Reichsgesetz zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten und seine praktische Durchführung*, ed. Hauptausschuß der Arbeiterwohlfaht (Berlin, 1928), 23, emphasis in the original.

¹⁵See the extensive correspondence in Geheimes Staatsarchiv preussischer Kulturbesitz Berlin (GStA-PK) I. HA Rep. 76 VIII B/3822.

¹⁶See the report of Berlin’s chief of police of April 20, 1921, in *ibid.*, 16.

ground like mushrooms.”¹⁷ Like many of his colleagues, he claimed that without *Reglementierung*, the police would be unable to protect respectable citizens and to control crime associated with commercial sex. The police president of Hanover warned that the decriminalization of prostitution would lead to an explosion of STDs. In times of intense “sittliche Verflachung” [moral shallowness], the police fulfilled a vital function as protector of public morality.¹⁸ Misogynistic views often underpinned the defense of regulationism. In 1926 Stuttgart’s chief of police complained that “women’s organizations of all kinds [are] blinded by the slogan ‘Against the moral double standard.’” In contrast to feminists, he believed that “against the woman who has sunken to the level of the whore and who is much more dangerous to the public than the dissolute [*liederlich*] man, special preventive measures are necessary.”¹⁹

To the dismay of proregulationists, the 1927 prostitution reform limited the police’s ability to impose special controls on prostitutes. Regulations that banned streetwalkers from certain areas (*Strichverbot*) or that restricted them to special streets or houses (*Kasernierung*) were no longer permitted. According to the revised version of Clause 361/6 of the penal code, the police could intervene against prostitutes if the latter solicited publicly “in einer Sitte und Anstand verletzenden oder andere belästigenden Weise” [in a manner that violates morals and decency or harasses others].²⁰ This rather vague formulation led to substantial discrepancies in jurisprudence.²¹ One of the most contentious legal issues was the question of whether it sufficed that a streetwalker’s behavior objectively was suited to offend morality (*Gefährdungsdelikt*) or whether proof was needed that members of the public had actually been offended or harassed (*Verletzungsdelikt*). Where courts interpreted Clause 361/6 in the narrow sense of the *Verletzungsdelikt*, arrests of prostitutes declined sharply, since citizens generally avoided filing charges or giving testimony in such cases. In the summer and fall of 1928, the Saxon State Supreme Court (Sächsisches Oberlandesgericht) overruled numerous convictions of Leipzig streetwalkers for violations of Clause 361/6. The justices argued that a prostitute’s solicitation of passersby, even if conducted in a conspicuous, sexually explicit manner—“nach Dirnenart” [in the manner of hookers]—in itself did not constitute a criminal offense. Rather, additional evidence was necessary to demonstrate that public morals had indeed been violated. As a result of the ruling, convictions of Leipzig prostitutes on

¹⁷See *ibid.*, 81.

¹⁸See *ibid.*, 95.

¹⁹See Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArch) R 1501/11890, 71–72.

²⁰This clause of the criminal code was identical with Paragraph 16/3 of the anti-VD law.

²¹See Leopold Schäfer, “Prostitution und Rechtsprechung,” *Mitteilungen der deutschen Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten* 27 (1929): 412–31; see also Dorothea Karsten, “Prostitution und Straßenbild: Neue gesetzliche Bestimmungen?” *Freie Wohlfahrts-pflege* 7 (1932): 310–15.

the basis of Clause 361/6 sank from 227 in 1928 to 11 in 1930.²² The verdict caused great frustration among the Saxon police, who complained that it tied their hands in the fight against prostitution.

Police officials in other states faced similar problems. In the fall of 1931, amidst growing public pressure to cleanse the streets of prostitution, Munich's police felt humiliated by local judges who often acquitted streetwalkers. As one police report noted, "It happens frequently during public trials that the judges ridicule the officers with their remarks and questions and then acquit the prostitutes or hand down minor sentences. . . . During one such trial, a judge remarked that he preferred four other cases to a single one that had to do with matters concerning the morals police since in this area, there existed no legal basis whatsoever."²³ The decriminalization of prostitution led to a broad backlash among the police. Throughout Germany, police officials argued that the 1927 anti-VD law deprived them of the requisite means for suppressing street solicitations. In 1928 Magdeburg's police president reported a sharp rise in casual prostitution "since the deterrent of the morals police is absent, and the bad example is contagious." Public prostitution, he claimed, had become far more conspicuous after 1927 because the police lacked authority to intervene against the growing "shamelessness and excesses" of streetwalkers.²⁴ Similarly, the Prussian district president (*Regierungspräsident*) in Düsseldorf reported that "all police chiefs in my district . . . have observed a substantial increase in street soliciting since passage of the new [anti-VD] law. . . . Without doubt, the abolition of the morals police is a main cause for the growth in prostitution."²⁵ In 1931 the police presidents of major Prussian cities, including Cologne, Essen, and Dortmund, demanded a revision of Clause 361/6 of the penal code to outlaw all forms of street soliciting.²⁶

A key to this reaction against liberal prostitution reforms was the political mobilization of prostitutes. The decriminalization of prostitution energized streetwalkers to resist attacks on their civil and economic rights. Thus, Leipzig prostitutes founded an association that employed legal counsel to defend its members against the police. In March 1931 the Saxon Ministry of Labor and Welfare (Sächsisches Arbeits- und Wohlfahrtsministerium) reported that a "large number of Leipzig prostitutes have submitted a petition to the city magistrate and the chief of police, in which

²²See "Sachverständigenkonferenz über das Straßenbild nach dem Inkrafttreten des RGBG," *Mitteilungen der deutschen Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten* 29 (1931): 80–81.

²³See the report of November 3, 1931, in Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv München (BayHStAM), M-Inn/72644.

²⁴See GStA-PK I. HA Rep. 76 VIII B/3831, 222.

²⁵See the report of December 5, 1928, in *ibid.*, 356.

²⁶See the list of police presidents' proposals for the revision of Clause 361/6 of the penal code in GStA-PK I. HA Rep. 84a/869, 175.

they protest against unduly repressive measures on the side of the police. They argue that they have the right to pursue their business like any other tradesperson since they pay taxes and would become dependent on social welfare if the severe controls continued.”²⁷ In the city-state of Bremen, prostitutes challenged what they considered illegal forms of police repression. According to the Bremen health office, streetwalkers there had founded “a kind of protective association which represents the supposed rights of its members . . . through a certain lawyer.”²⁸ After July 1932 the Bremen police arrested streetwalkers on the basis of the Law for the Temporary Arrest and Detention of Persons (Gesetz betreffend das einstweilige Vorführen und Festhalten von Personen), which allowed the police to detain individuals for a period of up to twenty-four hours if this appeared necessary to protect the person’s own or the public’s safety. Prostitutes opposed this practice as incompatible with the decriminalization of prostitution and sued the police for false imprisonment and grievous bodily harm.²⁹ Bremen police officials were exasperated by the conflict, especially since negotiations with the court had cast doubt on the legality of the police measure.³⁰

Despite its flaws, the 1927 anti-VD law introduced important improvements in prostitutes’ status. The general decriminalization of prostitution enabled streetwalkers more effectively to challenge police violations of their personal liberties. From the perspective of police officials, these gains in prostitutes’ rights threatened to undermine their own authority and jeopardize public order. However, under democratic conditions an open return to regulationism faced sizable obstacles. As we will see, their frustration over the detrimental impacts of the 1927 prostitution reform led many police officials to abandon Weimar democracy and endorse the resurgence of an authoritarian state that granted them greatly extended powers to control “vice.”

Popular Opposition: The “Moral” Right

Growing public protests against the perceived rise in street soliciting put additional pressure on the police. A year after implementation of the 1927 anti-VD law, the Council of German Cities (Deutscher Städtetag) conducted a survey among local health offices.³¹ One important question focused on public reactions to the reform. Of the twenty-four cities included in the

²⁷See the report to the Reich Ministry of the Interior of March 17, 1931, in GStA-PK I. HA Rep. 84a/869, 163.

²⁸See the health office’s report of January 1932 in Staatsarchiv Bremen (StAB) 4,130/1-R.I.1.-17.

²⁹See the legal brief of September 29, 1932, in StAB 4,130/1-R.I.1.-24.

³⁰See the report of a meeting at the Bremen health office on August 28, 1928, in StAB 4,130/1-R.I.1.-24.

³¹See *Die Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten in deutschen Städten*, Schriftenreihe des deutschen Städtetages, vol. 8, ed. Otto Schweers and Franz Memelsdorff (Berlin, 1930).

survey, only three (Hamburg, Berlin, and Stettin) reported generally positive responses from the population. In a range of cities, the perceived rise in prostitution mobilized citizens against the anti-VD law. This was true especially of the overwhelmingly Catholic cities of Munich, Nuremberg, Augsburg, Cologne, and Münster.³² In subsequent years, religious conservatives organized a vocal movement against the more liberal elements of the 1927 prostitution reform. While Catholic politicians and associations often spearheaded initiatives to impose tougher controls on prostitutes, Protestants supported such efforts as well. In April 1930 the Reichstag Bevölkerungspolitischer Ausschuß (Committee on Population Policy) passed a resolution that called for the strict suppression of street soliciting and of lodging houses (*Absteigequartiere*) used by prostitutes to meet their clients. Author of the motion was Reinhard Mumm, the Lutheran pastor and leader of the conservative Christian-Social People's Service (Christlich-Sozialer Volksdienst).³³ The resolution reflected demands communicated to Mumm by leading representatives of Lutheran churches and morality associations.³⁴

Major centers of conservative reaction against the 1927 reform were Catholic-dominated cities in the Prussian Rhine Province. Cologne, a Center Party stronghold where Konrad Adenauer was mayor (*Oberbürgermeister*), was at the forefront of efforts to reintroduce harsher penalties for street soliciting.³⁵ During the early 1930s the Catholic morality association, Volkswartbund, coordinated the local campaign against the anti-VD law.³⁶ The Bund organized public protests and petitions and pressured Cologne's chief of police to implement more punitive measures against prostitutes. In April 1932 the Working Group of Cologne Catholics (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kölner Katholiken*) alerted Reich chancellor Heinrich

³²See *ibid.*, 103.

³³On Mumm, see Kurt Nowak, *Evangelische Kirche und Weimarer Republik: Zum politischen Weg des deutschen Protestantismus zwischen 1918 und 1932* (Weimar, 1988), 36–37, 142–45; see also Peter Fritzsche, *Rehearsals for Fascism: Populism and Political Mobilization in Weimar Germany* (New York, 1990), esp. 50–51.

³⁴See BArch 90 Mn (N 2203 [estate of Reinhard Mumm]), no. 531, esp. 33–37.

³⁵The Center Party was founded in 1870–71 to represent the political and religious interests of Germany's sizable Catholic minority. It gained widespread support among Catholics during the *Kulturkampf* of the 1870s, when Reich chancellor Bismarck implemented a range of anticlerical laws that aimed to curb the influence of the Catholic Church. During the Weimar period, the Center Party and its Bavarian counterpart, the Bayerische Volkspartei, predominated in Catholic areas. Of all the Weimar parties, the Center maintained the most stable electorate. On the history of the Center Party, see David Blackbourn, "Catholics and Politics in Imperial Germany: The Centre Party and Its Constituency," in David Blackbourn, *Populists and Patricians: Essays in Modern German History* (London, 1987), 188–214. On Catholic support for the Center Party in the Weimar Republic, see Jürgen Falter, *Hitlers Wähler* (Munich, 1991), esp. 169–75.

³⁶See "Sitzung des Volkswartbundes in Köln am 25. Januar 1933," in Archiv des deutschen Caritasverbandes (ADCV), Sozialdienst katholischer Frauen (SKF), 319.4 D01/05e, Fasz. 1.

Brüning to the dramatic proliferation of commercial sex.³⁷ “Growing poverty and the resulting moral degeneration of whole strata of the population have produced such an increase in prostitutes that prostitution has become a veritable plague [*Volksplage*]. . . . Responsibility for this terrible situation largely lies with the Law for Combating Venereal Diseases.” The petition called for an emergency decree authorizing the police to suppress any form of street solicitation. Similar conservative grass-roots movements against the 1927 reform emerged in Essen, Krefeld, and Dortmund.³⁸ Catholic politicians increasingly pushed for a general criminalization of prostitution. In June 1932 the National Women’s Caucus of the Center Party (Reichsfrauenbeirat der deutschen Zentrumspartei) appealed to the Reich Minister of the Interior to outlaw street soliciting.³⁹ On July 9, 1932, the Prussian State Council, the representative body of the Prussian provinces, supported a motion to criminalize public prostitution that had been submitted by Konrad Adenauer and the other members of the Center Party delegation.⁴⁰

Less than two weeks later, conservative critics of Weimar prostitution reforms could be hopeful that a policy shift toward more repressive measures was imminent. The *Preußenschlag* (Papen Putsch) against Prussia’s Social Democratic government brought to power prominent opponents of the 1927 reform. Historians have pointed out that Papen justified the coup with charges “that the Prussian government was unable to maintain law and order.”⁴¹ They focus especially on Papen’s criticism that Social Democrats were “soft on Communism.” Unfortunately, most existing scholarship tends to neglect the significance of the backlash against the liberalization of sexual mores for understanding the political origins of the *Preußenschlag*. For religious conservatives, the Prussian regime’s perceived failure to combat “immorality” effectively was a major reason to support Papen’s coup. Franz Bracht, a Center Party politician and federal commissioner for Prussia

³⁷See the petition of April 19, 1932, in BArch R 1501/26315, 16–18. See also “Gegen die öffentliche Unsittlichkeit,” *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, April 19, 1932.

³⁸See the petition to Brüning by the Altstädtischer Verein Essen of November 22, 1931, in BArch R 1501/27217/8, 55; on the movement against the 1927 reform in Dortmund, see “Wann folgt Dortmund?” *Tremonia*, December 29, 1932; on Krefeld, see the minutes of a meeting of the Krefeld Alliance for the Protection of Spiritual Welfare (Krefelder Hilfsbündnis für geistige Wohlfahrtspflege) on October 25, 1932, in Archiv des Katholischen deutschen Frauenbundes (AKDF), Morality Commission 1-27-6.

³⁹See “Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten,” *Mitteilungen des Reichsfrauenbeirats der deutschen Zentrumspartei* 7 (1932): 194–95; see also “Der Widerstand gegen das Gesetz zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten,” *Der Abolitionist* 31 (1932): 67–69.

⁴⁰For the debate in the Prussian state council, see GStA-PK I. HA Rep. 169 D IX E/6, 155–59; see also Dorothea Karsten, “Zur Frage der Bekämpfung der Prostitution,” *Soziale Praxis* 41 (1932): 1277–86.

⁴¹See Dietrich Orlow, *Weimar Prussia, 1925–1933: The Illusion of Strength* (Pittsburgh, 1991), 228; see also Gotthard Jasper, *Die gescheiterte Züchtung: Wege zur Machtergreifung Hitlers, 1930–1934* (Frankfurt am Main, 1986), 93–104.

after July 20, 1932, swiftly implemented several decrees aimed at restoring public morality. On August 8 Bracht outlawed nude bathing; on August 19 he forbade nudity and other “indecent performances” in theaters.⁴² As former mayor of Essen, Bracht brought with him to the capital his chief of police, Kurt Melcher.⁴³ Melcher, who became Berlin’s new police president, was one of the most prominent critics of the 1927 anti-VD law.⁴⁴

For religious conservatives, Bracht’s appointment was an important victory. An article in *Volkswart*, the organ of Cologne’s Volkswartbund, stressed that the path was now clear for a more rigorous repression of prostitution in Prussia.⁴⁵ Bracht did not disappoint such expectations. The federal commissioner installed a new chief of police in Cologne, Walter Lingens, who in December 1932 outlawed street soliciting.⁴⁶ During subsequent weeks, the police presidents of Neuss, Münster, and Dortmund followed Lingens’s example. But the religious Right was somewhat divided about the question of how best to combat prostitution. Protestants supported demands for a revision of Clause 361/6 of the penal code to increase the police’s authority to intervene against streetwalkers. Unlike many Catholics, though, representatives of Lutheran churches and women’s associations opposed total criminalization of prostitution for fear that this would pave the way for the return of regulated brothels.⁴⁷ In October 1932 Paula Müller-Otfried, a Reichstag delegate for the conservative German-National People’s Party and president of the German-Lutheran Women’s Federation (Deutsch-Evangelischer Frauenbund, or DEF), commended Bracht on his measures “against the degenerative developments in public life.”⁴⁸ Müller-Otfried admitted that the anti-VD law offered no adequate legal means to curb street soliciting but warned that the complete criminalization of prostitution would revive *Reglementierung*. “A

⁴²See “Die neuen preußischen Verordnungen gegen sittliche Entartung,” *Volkswart: Monatsschrift zur Bekämpfung der öffentlichen Unsittlichkeit*, no. 1 (1932): esp. 149.

⁴³See Hsi-Huey Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic* (Berkeley, 1970), esp. 153–54.

⁴⁴See Kurt Melcher, “Grundsätzliches zur Behandlung der Prostitution im Geschlechtskrankengesetz,” *Die Polizei* 29 (1932): 381–83.

⁴⁵See “Die neuen preußischen Verordnungen gegen sittliche Entartung,” *Volkswart*, no. 1 (1932): esp. 150–51.

⁴⁶See the minutes of a meeting of the Volkswartbund in ADCV, SKF 319. 4 D 01/05 e, Fasz. 1; see also “Köln in Front: Zur Wahrung der öffentlichen Sittlichkeit,” *Tremonia*, December 29, 1932. On Lingens, see Adolf Klein, *Köln im Dritten Reich: Stadtgeschichte der Jahre 1933–1945* (Cologne, 1983), 49.

⁴⁷See Hermine Bäcker, “Änderung des Reichsgesetzes zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten durch Notverordnung?” *Die Rundschau: Mitteilungsblatt der Inneren Mission* 27 (1932): 272–74; see also “Eingaben der Vereinigung evangelischer Frauenverbände Deutschlands zum RGBG,” *Aufgaben und Ziele: Monatsblatt der Vereinigung evangelischer Frauenverbände Deutschlands* 12 (1932): 70–71.

⁴⁸See Müller-Otfried’s letter to federal commissioner Franz Bracht of October 8, 1932, in Archiv des diakonischen Werks (ADW), Central-Ausschuß der inneren Mission (CA), Gf/St no. 291.

return to the old system of regulationism . . . would cause great concern among women and the wider public.” Bracht’s own draft of a revision of Clause 361/6 strove to mediate between the diverging Catholic and Lutheran positions. While the federal commissioner’s proposal made all forms of public solicitation “suited to harass individuals or the public” punishable, it stopped short of outright criminalization of prostitution.⁴⁹

The Papen Putsch fulfilled key conservative demands for a tougher stance on “immorality” and a reversal of the more liberal aspects of Weimar prostitution reforms. This greatly strengthened the moral Right’s support for the semi-authoritarian presidential regime of the early 1930s, which was based on rule by emergency decree and tended to minimize meaningful participation by parliament. The Nazis were keenly aware of the propagandistic potential of the issue of prostitution and used the backlash against the 1927 reform to advance their own political agenda.

Nazi Attacks on Weimar Prostitution Reforms

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler focused on the failure of the Weimar government to prevent the German people’s “pollution” through STDs.

The struggle against syphilis and the prostitution which prepares the way for it is one of the most gigantic tasks of humanity, gigantic because we are facing, not the solution of a single question, but the elimination of a large number of evils which bring about this plague as a resultant manifestation. For in this case the sickening of the body is only the consequence of a sickening of the moral, social, and racial instincts. . . . But how did they try to deal with this plague in old Germany? Viewed calmly, the answer is really dismal.⁵⁰

Neither the medical supervision of prostitutes nor the introduction of “a ‘protective’ paragraph according to which anyone who was not entirely healthy or cured must avoid sexual intercourse under penalty of law” had succeeded in eradicating venereal disease.⁵¹ According to Hitler, Weimar politicians had failed because their measures against prostitution and STDs merely addressed the symptoms, not the roots, of Germany’s deep moral and racial crisis. As Hitler stressed, “Anyone who wants to attack prostitution must first of all help to eliminate its spiritual basis. He must clear away the filth of the moral plague of big-city ‘civilization.’”⁵² Hitler supported

⁴⁹See Bracht’s proposals for a revision of Clause 361/6 of September 29, 1932, in GStA-PK I. HA Rep. 84A/869, 247a–b.

⁵⁰See Hitler, 255–56.

⁵¹See *ibid.*, 256. Since *Mein Kampf* was published two years prior to passage of the 1927 anti-VD law, this reference to antiveneal legislation probably pertains to the Decree for Combating Venereal Diseases of December 11, 1918, which criminalized knowingly infecting others with STDs.

⁵²See *ibid.*, 254–55.

demands raised by the religious Right that “indecent” literature, art, and entertainments be banned; he also argued that the regeneration of the German nation required that “defective people be prevented from propagating equally defective offspring.”

Key, however, to averting Germany’s national and racial “extinction” through the “plague” of venereal diseases was the destruction of those who allegedly had conspired to pollute the German people. The Nazis accused Jews and “Marxists” of being the primary beneficiaries of prostitution and the spread of STDs. Hitler stressed that his observation of Jewish procurers in Vienna had converted him to anti-Semitism. “When thus for the first time I recognized the Jew as the cold-hearted, shameless, and calculating director of this revolting vice traffic in the scum of the big city, a cold shudder ran down my back.”⁵³ The Nazi press was filled with propaganda about the alleged Jewish-controlled “white slave trade” in Christian women. Such articles frequently blamed the Weimar state and its staunchest supporter, Social Democracy, for complicity in Jewish “sex crimes.” *Der Angriff*, a weekly edited by Joseph Goebbels in Berlin, attacked deputy police president Bernhard Weiß, a Jew and a Democrat, for protecting Jewish “slave traffickers” (*Mädchenhändler*) from criminal prosecution.⁵⁴ In another issue, the paper accused the SPD coalition government of Berlin of supporting the establishment of licensed brothels to “increase the profits of Jewish businessmen.”⁵⁵ The pornographic weekly *Der Stürmer* claimed that Jewish and socialist sex reformers aimed to contaminate Germany’s youth with venereal diseases.⁵⁶ Nazi propaganda about prostitution and STDs fused anti-Semitism with conservative fears about “moral decay” and “sexual Bolshevism.” By stressing Weimar’s alleged “immorality,” the Nazis strove to undermine popular support for the democratic regime. The backlash against the 1927 prostitution reform offered them an ideal opportunity to apply this strategy.

Two days before implementation of the anti-VD law, *Völkischer Beobachter*, the official organ of the Nazi Party, ran a front-page article attacking the reform.⁵⁷ Contrary to its professed aim, the article claimed, the law would produce a great increase in venereal diseases because it

⁵³See *ibid.*, 59–60. On Jewish feminists’ efforts to combat anti-Semitic propaganda about alleged Jewish control of the traffic in women, see Marion Kaplan, *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany: The Campaigns of the jüdischer Frauenbund, 1904–1938* (Westport, 1979), esp. 113–17.

⁵⁴See “‘Es gibt keinen Mädchenhandel,’” *Der Angriff*, August 13, 1928; and “Menschenhändler am Werk,” *Der Angriff*, October 22, 1928. On Goebbels’s campaign against Weiß, see Liang, 153, 160–61.

⁵⁵See “Bordelle für die Innenstadt,” *Der Angriff*, January 2, 1928.

⁵⁶See, for instance, “Kamaradschaftssee und freie Liebe,” *Der Stürmer* 6, no. 49 (December 1928); and “Geschlechtskranke Kinder,” *Der Stürmer* 7, no. 9 (February 1929).

⁵⁷See “Der Sieg der Prostitution über die ‘deutsche’ Demokratie: Das volkszerstörende Gesetz zur ‘Bekämpfung’ der Geschlechtskrankheiten als Wegbereiter der Prostituirung und Verseuchung der ganzen Nation,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, September 29, 1927.

elevated prostitution to the status of a respectable profession. Responsible for this were the Jews and Social Democrats, who had pushed for the decriminalization of prostitution to undermine the moral and racial foundations of the family. Under the banners of democracy and equal rights for women, the anti-VD law jeopardized the health of the German people. “Respectable houses are rendered breeding grounds for immorality while procurers, pimps, and whores rejoice that their time has come. The golden age has commenced! This is how Marxism perceives of the solution to the prostitution problem.” Another article in *Völkischer Beobachter* praised the old system of state-regulated prostitution. “The tight organization of the morals police is better suited to protect the health of the people than the proclamation of ‘free love’ through this [anti-VD] law.”⁵⁸

At the local level as well, the Nazis joined conservative movements against the 1927 prostitution reform. In a speech before Munich’s parliament in October 1927, Karl Fiehler, the Nazi city councilor and future mayor of that city, attacked Social Democrats who had “stripped prostitution of its dishonorable character.” Fiehler’s verbal assaults focused especially on Julius Moses, the Social Democratic spokesman on health and a Jew, whom Fiehler blamed for the rise in commercial sex and STDs.⁵⁹ In Bremen, National Socialists mobilized citizens against the decriminalization of prostitution. In a series of articles published during the fall of 1931, the *Bremer Nationalsozialistische Zeitung* called on the government to cleanse the streets of “vice.”⁶⁰ The spread of street soliciting, the paper proclaimed, was a crime against Germany’s youth, “the most precious possession of our nation.” In their campaign against the 1927 reform, the Nazis claimed broad support among Bremen officials and citizens’ associations.

II.

Prostitution, the “Moral” Agenda, and the Establishment of Nazi Rule

During the months following Adolf Hitler’s appointment as Reich chancellor on January 30, 1933, the Nazis continued to present themselves as guardians of conventional sexual morality. This strategy aimed to strengthen support for National Socialism among religious conservatives. Hitler was especially concerned to overcome the Catholic episcopate’s opposition. In January 1931 Cardinal Adolf Bertram of Breslau, the head of the Fulda

⁵⁸See “Nochmals das Gesetz zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, December 27, 1927.

⁵⁹See “Sitzung des Stadtrates am 11. Oktober 1927,” *Münchener Gemeinde-Zeitung*, supplement no. 83, October 19, 1927.

⁶⁰See “Wir verlangen: Restlose Bereinigung der Bahnhofstr. und der angrenzenden Straßenzüge,” parts 2–4, *Bremer Nationalsozialistische Zeitung*, September 11, 1931, September 12, 1931, and September 15, 1931.

Bishops Conference, had condemned Nazi racial ideologies as incompatible with Christianity. As a result, Catholic clergy often admonished their parishioners not to join the Nazi Party or to vote for the NSDAP.⁶¹ To expand their power in the spring of 1933, the Nazis urgently needed conservative Catholics' support. In particular, they had to secure the Center Party's approval of the Enabling Act (*Ermächtigungsgesetz*) of March 24, 1933, which granted the government sweeping dictatorial powers.⁶² The "moral" agenda played a crucial role in winning Hitler the support of the religious Right. In his speech before the Reichstag on March 23, Hitler assured conservatives of the Nazis' commitment to the defense of Christian values.

By its decision to carry out the political and moral cleansing of our public life, the government is creating and securing the conditions for a really deep and inner religious life. . . . The national government sees in both Christian denominations the most important factor for the maintenance of our society. It will observe the agreements drawn up between the Churches and the provinces. . . . And it will be concerned for the sincere cooperation between church and state. The struggle against the materialistic ideology and for the erection of a true people's community serves as much the interests of the German nation as of our Christian faith.⁶³

The next day, the Reichstag passed the Enabling Act with the support of the Center Party delegates. Shortly thereafter, the Catholic bishops revoked their condemnation of Nazi "paganism."⁶⁴ Catholic as well as Lutheran conservatives were hopeful that the Nazis would stamp out "sexual Bolshevism" and reverse Germany's perceived "moral decay."

The Nazis consciously cultivated their image as purifiers of public morality. They focused especially on the fight against prostitution, since this was a key concern of the religious Right. As federal commissioner for the Prussian Ministry of the Interior, Hermann Göring issued a series of decrees against "public immorality."⁶⁵ On February 22, 1933, Göring announced that preparations were under way for a revision of Clause 361/6

⁶¹See J. S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches, 1933–45* (London, 1968), 6–7. Nazism's electoral gains among Catholics trailed far behind those among Protestants, who on the average voted twice as often for the NSDAP between 1930 and 1933. See Falter, 169–93.

⁶²On the Center Party's support for the Enabling Law, see Jasper, 135–37; and Ellen Lovell Evans, *The German Center Party, 1870–1933* (Carbondale, 1981), esp. 384–86.

⁶³See Hitler's speech on government policy before the Reichstag on March 23, 1933, quoted in Conway, 20; for the complete text of the speech, see *Dokumente der deutschen Politik und Geschichte von 1848 bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Johannes Hohlfeld (Berlin and Munich, n.d.), 4:29–36.

⁶⁴See Conway, 21–23; Evans, *The German Center Party*, 387.

⁶⁵See "Maßnahmen der preußischen Regierung zur Bekämpfung der öffentlichen Unsittlichkeit," *Volkswart: Monatschrift zur Pflege der Volkssittlichkeit* 26 (1933): 54–56;

of the penal code that would grant the police greater authority to combat public prostitution. In the meantime, the police were to make “full use” of existing legal provisions against street soliciting. The decree of February 22 expressly forbade special police regulations for the control of prostitutes, a measure that would have alienated conservative opponents of regulationism. On February 23 Göring issued another decree that demanded the strict suppression of *Absteigequartiere*.

In May 1933 the Nazis effectively outlawed street soliciting. The revised Clause 361/6 criminalized any form of public solicitation pursued “in a conspicuous manner or in a manner suited to harass individuals or the public.”⁶⁶ Parallel to these new legal restrictions on prostitution, the police engaged in massive raids on streetwalkers. Though no comprehensive figures exist, it has been estimated that “thousands, even more likely tens of thousands” of prostitutes were arrested during the spring and summer of 1933.⁶⁷ In Hamburg the police arrested 3,201 women suspected of prostitution between March and August 1933; of these, 814 were taken into preventive detention (*Schutzhaft*), and 274 were subjected to compulsory medical treatment for STDs.⁶⁸ In a single nightly raid in June 1933, the Düsseldorf police, reinforced by local SS units, arrested 156 women and 35 men accused of street soliciting.⁶⁹ The dubious legal basis for these mass arrests was provided by the Emergency Decree for the Protection of People and State of February 28, 1933, which suspended civil liberties.

Religious conservatives welcomed the Nazis’ measures against prostitution. Adolf Sellmann, head of the Protestant West German Morality Association (Westdeutscher Sittlichkeitsverein), praised Hitler for “saving” Germany from the “moral decay” of Weimar: “It was a great and wonderful day for us when our leader and Reich chancellor Adolf Hitler took charge of the government on January 30, 1933. At one blow, everything changed in Germany. All trash and filth disappeared from the public. Once again, the streets of our cities were clean. Prostitution, which previously had been able to spread in our big cities as well as in many smaller towns, was scared away. . . . Suddenly, everything we had hoped

see also Adolf Sellmann, *50 Jahre Kampf für Volkssittlichkeit und Volkskraft: Die Geschichte des westdeutschen Sittlichkeitsvereins von seinen Anfängen bis heute, 1885–1935* (Schwelm, 1935), 108–9.

⁶⁶The revision of Clause 361/6 was included in the Law for the Alteration of Criminal Provisions (Gesetz zur Abänderung strafrechtlicher Vorschriften) of May 26, 1933. See *Reichsgesetzblatt*, part 1, May 29, 1933. See also Leopold Schäfer, “Neue Gesetzgebung und Rechtsprechung zur Prostitutionsfrage,” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Wohlfahrtspflege* 9 (1933): 157–65.

⁶⁷See Bock, “Keine Arbeitskräfte in diesem Sinne,” 83.

⁶⁸See “Der Kampf gegen die Prostitution,” *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, September 8, 1933.

⁶⁹See “Aus der Arbeit der Sittenpolizei,” *Volkswart* 26 (1933): 125.

and wished for had come true.”⁷⁰ Similarly, the Catholic Volkswartbund rejoiced at the *frischer Zug* [vigorous attitude] of the new regime toward “vice.” An article published in *Volkswart* in the summer of 1933 favorably compared the Nazis’ suppression of prostitution and other forms of “indecentcy” with the “laxity” of the Weimar state. “How grateful we all are in the Volkswartbund about the new government’s level-headed yet firm approach toward filth wherever it is visible. . . . Therefore: *Siegheil!*”⁷¹ And the new rulers indeed proved responsive to the demands of the religious Right. On March 16, 1933, leaders of Lutheran and Catholic morality associations met with representatives of the Prussian Ministry of the Interior and the police to discuss proposals for a more effective fight against “immorality.” With evident delight, the Volkswartbund noted that at the meeting, Prussian officials emphasized “the need for cooperation between the government and the local branches of the individual morality associations.”⁷² During the spring and summer of 1933, the Nazis convinced the religious Right of their genuine determination to defend traditional Christian ideals of sexual purity. This was a key precondition for the extension and stabilization of Nazi power during this vital period.

Against the Moraltuerer: Regulationism after 1934

In the fall of 1933 conservatives witnessed with alarm a growing movement among police officials to reintroduce regulated brothels. The city of Essen spearheaded the revival of *Reglementierung*. In October 1933 the journal *Die Polizei* published the new regulations for the control of prostitutes issued by Essen’s chief of police.⁷³ The author of the article, Dr. G. Müller, critically observed that the abolition of the morals police through the 1927 Law for Combating Venereal Diseases had led to a dramatic increase in prostitution. The anti-VD law had failed, Müller argued, because it combined beneficial measures against the spread of STDs with “the ‘emancipation’ of the prostitute, a demand of eastern Marxism and of a feminist movement contaminated by Marxist ideas.”⁷⁴ The Essen regulations openly disregarded Paragraph 17 of the anti-VD law, which forbade the police to confine prostitutes to special streets or blocks (*Kasernierung*). In Essen registered prostitutes were banned from public areas and restricted to certain houses. Müller stressed that the anti-VD law’s provisions concerning prostitution were no longer binding, since they represented “the formal law of a regime whose ethos has become entirely incomprehensible and

⁷⁰See Sellmann, 107.

⁷¹See “Der frische Zug im neuen Staat,” *Volkswart* 26 (1933): 170–71.

⁷²See the circular of the Volkswartbund of March 24, 1933, in ADCV, SKF 319.4 D01/05e, Fasz. 1.

⁷³See G. Müller, “Zur Kasernierung der Dirnen in Essen,” *Die Polizei* 30 (1933): 440–43.

⁷⁴See *ibid.*, 440.

alien to us today.”⁷⁵ Instead, Essen officials based their measures on the Emergency Decree of February 28, 1933. During the fall and winter of 1933, a range of other cities, including Hamburg, Altona, and Bremen, followed suit and introduced new systems of police-controlled prostitution.⁷⁶

A memorandum on National Socialist criminal law by the Prussian minister of justice published in the fall of 1933 mobilized conservative opponents of state-regulated prostitution into action.⁷⁷ The Prussian minister proposed the legalization of regulated brothels. Shortly after publication of the memorandum, the welfare organization of the Lutheran Church, Inner Mission (Innere Mission), approached Reich bishop Ludwig Müller to present Hitler with a petition against the reintroduction of police-controlled prostitution. The petition, submitted to Hitler in late November or early December 1933, emphasized the detrimental impacts of regulationism.⁷⁸ “A new *Reglementierung* or *Kasernierung* would greatly endanger the goal of the National Socialist state to enforce the health of the people, racial purity, and the moral education of the population.” Regulated brothels, the petition stressed, failed to prevent the spread of STDs since only a small minority of prostitutes were subjected to these controls. Instead, brothel districts represented a dangerous source of moral and physical “pollution,” confused popular conceptions of decency, and undermined the family. To drive home their message to the Reich chancellor, the petitioners used arguments derived from Nazi racial ideology. “Moreover, *Reglementierung* [is] an institution alien (*artfremd*) to the Germanic peoples of the Nordic race. [Through its introduction] Germany would once again assume an exceptional status among these peoples.” The Catholic welfare organization, Caritas, similarly condemned efforts to return to state-regulated prostitution. Regulationism, a Caritas memo stressed, “damages the reputation of the state and ruins the moral beliefs of the people.”⁷⁹ Because it signified state sanction of extramarital sexuality, *Reglementierung* incited people to engage in “vice” and destroyed the family. Caritas urged that only a total criminalization of street soliciting provided a viable protection of public morality.

⁷⁵See *ibid.*, 441.

⁷⁶On Altona, see the report of the district president in Schleswig of November 30, 1933, in BArch R 1501/27217/8, 157–58; on Bremen, see the police report of March 17, 1941, in StAB 4, 130/1-R.I.1.-14; for a copy of the Hamburg police regulations of November 1933, see Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB), B Rep. 235 (Helene Lange Archiv), microfilm no. 3395.

⁷⁷The memorandum is discussed in Hermann Wagner, “Kirche und Staat,” *Christliche Volkswacht* (November/December 1933): 163–68.

⁷⁸See the circular by the Central Committee of the Inner Mission of December 4, 1933, in Archiv des diakonischen Werkes der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands (ADW), Central Ausschuß (CA), Gf/St/287.

⁷⁹See “Stellung des deutschen Caritasverbandes zur Frage der staatlichen Reglementierung der Prostitution,” ca. 1934, in ADCV, SKF 319.4 D01/05e, Fasz. 1.

The authoritarian abolitionism of the religious Right received support from other sides as well. One of the major critics of the pro-regulationist movement among the police was Bodo Spiethoff, whom the Nazis had installed as the new president of the German Society for Combating Venereal Diseases (Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, or DGBG). In a report of January 1934, the head of the DGBG sharply criticized the situation in Cologne and Essen where the police restricted licensed prostitutes to special streets.⁸⁰ Spiethoff argued that *Kasernierung* failed to achieve its professed aims, the protection of public health and public order. In Cologne, 150 prostitutes lived in tolerated brothels. However, 1,600 women suspected of prostitution and subject to regular medical controls through the health office lived in various neighborhoods throughout the city. This meant that *Kasernierung* was utterly ineffective in shielding respectable citizens from the “pollutive” impact of streetwalkers. To the contrary, the licensed brothels exacerbated the moral and physical dangers of prostitution since they were centers for the proliferation of “sexual perversions.” Spiethoff demanded the strict suppression of street soliciting and the extension of regular medical controls for STDs to include all female persons “who engage in frequent promiscuity.” Violations of these controls should be severely penalized with extended prison and workhouse sentences. “The state cannot recognize . . . the right to extramarital sexual relations if it does not want to undermine the foundations of the family.”

The police reacted with hostility to such criticisms. Cologne’s police president Walter Lings, whose appointment conservative Catholics had welcomed so enthusiastically in 1932, sharply rejected the DGBG’s position. Lings took exception to the independent “inspection” of Cologne brothels by representatives of the anti-VD society and demanded that the police be given “free rein in the fight against the insufferable whoredom.”⁸¹ In an article published in *Westdeutscher Beobachter* during March 1935, Lings defended Cologne’s system of *Kasernierung*, which allowed the police to intervene “vigorously” against nonlicensed streetwalkers. “Decisive for the police’s actions is not narrow moralism [*Moraltuerei*] but the maintenance of public order.”⁸² Even after the revision of Clause 361/6 of the penal code, police officials continued to complain about the lack of effective means to combat prostitution. The “privileged” status the 1927 anti-VD law had conferred on prostitutes was no longer acceptable. Throughout

⁸⁰See Bodo Spiethoff, “Zur Regelung der Prostitutionsfrage,” January 29, 1934, in BArch R 15.01/26314, 93–103. See also Bodo Spiethoff, “Der Kampf gegen die Gefahren der Prostitution,” *Die Rheinprovinz* 12, no. 12 (December 1936): 853–62.

⁸¹See the letter by Lings of January 17, 1934, in BArch R 15.01/27217/8, 174.

⁸²See Walter Lings, “Wie bekämpfen wir das Dirnenunwesen?” *Westdeutscher Beobachter*, March 21, 1935, reprinted in *Der Dienst: Zeitschrift des deutsch-evangelischen Vereins zur Förderung der Sittlichkeit und der Rettungsarbeit* 49 (July/September 1935): 2–4.

Germany, police presidents defied the law's provisions against *Kasernierung* and established licensed brothels.⁸³

Despite Reich Bishop Müller's intervention, no evidence exists that Hitler supported the conservative opponents of regulationism. However, another member of the Nazi leadership, Reich Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Frick, took the side of the abolitionists. In a decree of July 12, 1934, Frick criticized the reintroduction of regulated brothels.⁸⁴ The decree stressed "that according to Paragraph 17 of the Law for Combating Venereal Diseases, . . . the *Kasernierung* of prostitution is illegal." The police were ordered to abide by the law. However, religious conservatives soon learned that Frick's announcement had little impact on prostitution policy at the local level. In Hamburg the Lutheran Volkswachtbund published Frick's decree in its organ, *Mitteilungen für die Freunde der Mitternachtsmission Hamburg*, and criticized the establishment of regulated brothels by the police. On September 6, 1934, the paper's editor, Helene Sillem, received "a very serious warning" from the secret police (Geheime Staatspolizei, or Gestapo) that "not only would the paper be confiscated, but the entire work of the Volkswachtbund would be terminated if any issues of the paper ever again contained such a critique of the Hamburg administration."⁸⁵

Conflicts over regulationism persisted for a while after 1934. Ultimately, however, religious conservatives could not halt the rise of the regulated brothel. A major reason for the triumph of *Reglementierung* was the declining power of the churches during the second half of the 1930s. The Nazis stepped up their repression of Catholic associations and clergy after the Saar plebiscite in January 1935; in March 1935 there were mass arrests of members of the Lutheran Confessing Church who opposed a Reich church dominated by the Nazi state.⁸⁶ As early as July 1933 the Prussian government had prepared a revision of the 1927 anti-VD law that reintroduced the morals police and legalized regulated brothels.⁸⁷ But such plans were not made public to avoid alienating the religious Right. Only when the regime became independent of the support of religious conservatives did Nazi leaders push openly for regulationism.⁸⁸ At the same time that

⁸³See Rohne, "Dirne und polizeiliche Praxis," *Reichsverwaltungsblatt*, no. 56 (1935): 769–72.

⁸⁴See BArch R 15.01/27217/8, 251.

⁸⁵See Sillem's letter of November 9, 1934, in *ibid.*, 278.

⁸⁶J. S. Conway has argued that during 1936 and 1937, "the ideological campaign against the Churches was to reach its zenith" (141).

⁸⁷See "Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten" of July 19, 1933, in GStA-PK, I. HA Rep. 84A/869, 272–75.

⁸⁸Of course, another key precondition for the resurgence of police-controlled prostitution after 1933 was the demise of an independent women's movement and the defeat of those Nazi women who envisioned a racial community where "Aryan" men and women shared the same rights and privileges. See Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York, 1987), esp. chaps. 5 and 6.

the political influence of the Christian churches deteriorated, the police gained power. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, the police had closed ranks with the moral Right in efforts to reverse the more liberal aspects of the 1927 prostitution reform. Unlike religious conservatives, however, police officials believed that state-regulated prostitution represented an indispensable tool for controlling prostitutes and their criminal associates. The rise of Heinrich Himmler and the SS played a key role in the emergence of Nazi-era regulationism. Under Himmler, who was appointed chief of the German police in June 1936, the police became increasingly autonomous vis-à-vis the other branches of the administration.⁸⁹ Himmler was one of the most fanatic proponents of regulated brothels and a major driving force behind the massive expansion of police-controlled prostitution during the Second World War.

The Nazis' support for regulationism also reflected the demands of the military. As preparations for war intensified during the second half of the 1930s, the Wehrmacht insisted on regulated prostitution to control the spread of STDs among the troops and to strengthen military morale. In February 1936 the Deutscher Gemeindetag, the organization of German municipalities, met in Hamburg and discussed the details of a projected correctional custody law. One topic was the inclusion of prostitutes in the provisions of the law. During the debate, a Hanover official pointed out that "in our province, there exist numerous military training camps. The military command has declared that the establishment of brothels is an urgent necessity. . . . Therefore we have to be more lenient in the control [*Erfassung*] of prostitutes."⁹⁰ The vital importance of regulated prostitution for Germany's military goals ultimately overruled concerns about the need to eradicate "vice."

The Radicalization of Nazi Prostitution Policies during the Second World War

Immediately after the beginning of war, the government issued several decrees for the control of prostitution and STDs. On September 9, 1939, the Reich Ministry of the Interior ordered the strict supervision of prostitutes through the police "to protect members of the Wehrmacht and the civilian

⁸⁹See Hans Buchheim, "Die SS—Das Herrschaftsinstrument," *Anatomie des SS-Staates*, vol. 1 (Munich, 1989), esp. 50–59. On the rise of Himmler and the SS, see also Franz Neumann, *Behemoth: Struktur und Praxis des Nationalsozialismus, 1933–1944* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984 [originally published in English, 1942]), 572–81.

⁹⁰See the minutes of the meeting of the Gemeindetag's committee on social welfare on February 27, 1936, in BArch R36/1827, quoted in Detlev Peukert, *Grenzen der Sozialdisziplinierung: Aufstieg und Krise der deutschen Jugendfürsorge von 1878 bis 1932* (Cologne, 1986), 281. See also Paul, 12; Annette Timm, "The Ambivalent Outsider: Prostitution, Promiscuity, and VD Control in Nazi Berlin," in *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*, ed. Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus (Princeton, 2001), 195.

population against the dangers emanating from prostitution, especially in relation to health.”⁹¹ The decree called for the suppression of street soliciting and for the establishment of licensed brothels: “Where special houses for prostitutes do not exist, the police have to [establish] them in the appropriate neighborhoods.” The brothels had to comply with Nazi racial policies. At least officially, Jewish prostitutes were entirely banned.⁹² In cities with a considerable contingent of foreigners, certain brothels had to house non-German prostitutes to protect “racial purity.” New regulations, clearly directed against sadomasochism, outlawed certain sexual toys and instruments.⁹³ The decree authorized the police to impose curfews and numerous other restrictions on streetwalkers. Women who violated these regulations could be taken into “preventive detention” (*Vorbewegungshaft*), which generally meant internment in a concentration camp.⁹⁴

A subsequent decree of September 18, 1939, greatly extended the scope of medical supervision of women suspected of prostitution. It called on the police and the health offices to organize special “social welfare patrols” (*Fürsorgestreifen*) for the surveillance of people who engaged in “frequent promiscuity” (*häufig wechselnder Geschlechtsverkehr*, or hwG), a term that referred primarily to women accused of prostitution. “HwG persons” infected with a venereal disease were subject to compulsory medical treatment and hospitalization. The decree stipulated that “persons who resist or disregard the orders of the health office can be taken into protective detention on account of their antisocial behavior.” The decrees of September 1939 marked the radicalization of Nazi prostitution policies. Despite the continued illegality of *Kasernierung*, the regime now openly promoted the massive proliferation of police-controlled brothels.⁹⁵ The parallel brutal repression of unlicensed streetwalkers served to buttress

⁹¹*Erlaßsammlung vorbeugende Verbrechensbekämpfung*, Schriftenreihe des Reichskriminalpolizeiamtes Berlin, no. 15 (Berlin, 1941), 144–45. (Page numbers indicated in the text refer to the copy of the *Erlaßsammlung* in the possession of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich.) The decree of September 9, 1939, initially pertained only to those areas within the German Reich affected by military operations (*Operationsgebiet des Heeres*). On March 16, 1940, the decree was extended to include the entire Reich territory. See *ibid.*, 173.

⁹²In reality, Jewish women were often forced to work in military brothels. See Paul, 104–5; see also Franz Seidler, *Prostitution-Homosexualität-Selbstverstümmelung: Probleme der deutschen Sanitätsführung, 1939–1945* (Neckargemünd, 1977), 181–82.

⁹³The decree of September 9, 1939, forbade prostitutes to manufacture, own, or distribute instruments “that can be used for sadistic or masochistic purposes.”

⁹⁴On the growing importance of preventive detention in the persecution of “antisocials,” see Martin Broszat, “Nationalsozialistische Konzentrationslager, 1933–1945,” in *Anatomie des SS-Staates*, vol. 2 (Munich, 1989), esp. 66–67. See also Wolfgang Ayaß, “Asoziale” in *Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart, 1995), chap. 6.

⁹⁵Only in November of 1940 was Paragraph 17 of the anti-VD law, which outlawed *Kasernierung*, formally repealed. See Ayaß, 192.

the monopoly of the regulated brothel as the only legitimate form of prostitution.⁹⁶ The severe penalties for “hwG” persons who violated the health offices’ regulations for the control of STDs effectively undermined sociohygienic criticisms of *Reglementierung*. Opponents of state-regulated prostitution like Bodo Spiethoff of the anti-VD society argued that the system failed to curb the spread of STDs because it only controlled the small minority of licensed prostitutes, while so-called clandestine streetwalkers continued to spread venereal infections. But under the conditions of an increasingly ruthless dictatorship that confined “unruly” streetwalkers to concentration camps, this argument lost much of its power. After 1939 it seemed more and more feasible that unlicensed prostitution would be eradicated in the near future.

In their efforts to make the regulated brothel the exclusive site of prostitution, Nazi leaders completely disregarded conventional moral concerns. They were also unresponsive to the objections of city officials who argued that the establishment of new brothels would greatly exacerbate the housing shortage. The example of Würzburg illustrates the single-mindedness with which the Nazis and the police pursued their goal. At a meeting in November 1936, leading Würzburg officials and politicians had decided that regulated brothels were “neither useful nor successful in the containment of venereal diseases.” This position conflicted with the decree of September 9, 1939, which made the establishment of brothels compulsory for cities that lacked them. On May 30, 1940, the chief of the Bavarian police reprimanded Würzburg’s mayor for the city’s refusal to open a licensed brothel.⁹⁷ In his response, the mayor emphasized his general support for the measure but objected that he faced great difficulties. “An apartment building rented to a number of tenants cannot be vacated in light of the well-established housing shortage in Würzburg.” He suggested instead the use of a house “currently serving as a shelter for Jews. . . . Under no circumstances must the general housing market be affected.”⁹⁸

However, when the house was designated officially as the future site of Würzburg’s regulated brothel, neighbors mobilized public protests. In a letter to the Nazi Welfare Organization for War Victims (Nationalsozialistische Kriegsopferversorgung) of March 1942, one neighbor complained that the buildings adjacent to the prospective brothel housed “eight families, four of whose sons thus far have sacrificed their young hopeful lives on the altar of the fatherland, three others have been wounded seriously. . . .

⁹⁶For a detailed discussion of how policies against so-called antisocials affected prostitutes, see *ibid.*, 184–96; Zürn; Gisela Bock, *Zwangsterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und zur Frauenpolitik* (Opladen, 1986), esp. 401–10, 417–19.

⁹⁷See the letter of Würzburg’s mayor to the chief of the Bavarian police of May 21, 1940, as well as the police chief’s response of May 30, 1940, in BayHStAM, M-Inn/72645.

⁹⁸See *ibid.*, as well as the mayor’s letter of May 31, 1940.

We cannot believe that the Führer . . . would give his approval that the holiest feelings of the parents of fallen soldiers are violated . . . this way.”⁹⁹ The Catholic bishop of Würzburg supported the protests against the brothel: “The preservation of the people’s *moral* health is equally important and as necessary as the preservation of its *physical* health. . . . From the beginning, the Third Reich has fought the excesses of pornography [*Nacktkultur*] and brothels.”¹⁰⁰ But times had changed. In a report to the head of the SS (Reichsführer SS, RFSS), Heinrich Himmler, the Bavarian chief of police pointed out “that the opposition to the establishment of a brothel originates mainly in church-affiliated circles.” This clearly discredited the Würzburg protesters. The letter emphasized that the city urgently needed a public brothel since large military contingents were stationed there.¹⁰¹ On August 16, 1942, Himmler authorized the opening of the Würzburg brothel.¹⁰²

For the Reichsführer SS and other Nazi leaders, the need to provide German men with a “safe” sexual outlet was paramount, superseding concerns about “immorality.” In fact, Himmler resented the churches’ “moralistic” stance on extramarital sex, which he believed was conducive to the spread of male homosexual relations. In a speech before SS commanders (Gruppenführer) during February 1937, the RFSS defended the use of female prostitution as a weapon in the fight against male homosexuality.

You see, it is possible to regulate all kinds of things by means of the state and through police measures. One can organize the question of female prostitution [*Dirnenfrage*], which by comparison with this question [of male homosexuality] in principle is completely harmless, in a way that is acceptable for a civilized people [*Kulturvolk*]. In this area, we will be generous beyond bounds. One cannot prevent the entire youth from drifting toward homosexuality if at the same time one blocks all the alternatives. That is madness. After all, every barred opportunity to get together with girls in the big cities—even if it is for money—will motivate a large contingent to join the other side.¹⁰³

Himmler’s toleration of female prostitution was not, as George Mosse suggested, “in direct conflict with the official policy of the Third Reich.”¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹See BArch NS 19/1598, 2.

¹⁰⁰See the bishop’s letter of November 22, 1940, in BayHStAM, M-Inn/72645, emphasis in the original.

¹⁰¹See BArch NS 19/1598, 8.

¹⁰²See *ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰³See Himmler’s speech before SS commanders on February 18, 1937, reprinted in excerpts in Heinrich Himmler, *Geheimreden 1933 bis 1945 und andere Ansprachen*, ed. Bradley F. Smith and Agnes F. Peterson (Ludwigsburg, 1974), 93–104, 98.

¹⁰⁴George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison, 1985), 167.

By the time the Reichsführer SS gave his speech, *Reglementierung* was firmly established in many of Germany's major cities. As the example of Würzburg showed, after the onset of war even cities initially opposed to the establishment of regulated brothels had to fall in line. In wartime Nazi Germany, the regulated brothel became a thriving state institution under the special care and protection of the police.

The attitude of Munich's police was typical. In the summer of 1940, the Munich police converted a former hotel into a brothel "for more distinguished tastes [*bessere Ansprüche*]." ¹⁰⁵ The brothel was officially run by a madam with a long experience "of renting her rooms to prostitutes," yet the police fixed the rates at no more than fifteen Reichmarks per customer. The prostitutes were subject to regular medical controls for STDs through the health office. Munich's police also planned to establish a second "public house" that would cater specifically to a working-class clientele. This brothel, a police report stressed, aimed to provide a sexual outlet for "the less affluent workers and soldiers" and had to comply with the standards of excellence typical of public services in the Third Reich. "It must not be a brothel of the old style in a decayed, filthy . . . building. With this house . . . something has to be offered to the ordinary worker and soldier . . . which compares well indeed with all the other institutions which the new time has created for him." How much the Munich police considered the regulated brothel an exemplary state institution is reflected in their inquiry with the Reich minister of the interior "whether the raising of the flag during general occasions should be tolerated at the public houses?"

Regulated brothels fulfilled a key function in upholding Nazi racial policies. This becomes especially apparent in the case of the brothels for foreign and forced laborers (*fremdvölkische Arbeiter*) established after 1940. The Nazis' solution to Germany's acute wartime labor shortage was the massive deployment of mostly forced foreign workers and prisoners of war (POWs). ¹⁰⁶ By mid-1940 approximately 700,000 forcefully conscripted Poles worked in Germany. In the course of the war, the number of foreign workers within the German Reich increased dramatically. Ulrich Herbert has estimated that by the end of the war "there were . . . some seven million foreigners laboring for the Germans inside the Reich." Of the civilian foreign workers, roughly one third were women. ¹⁰⁷ Nazi authorities were especially concerned about the danger of "miscegenation," the so-called crimes of intercourse (*Geschlechtsverkehr-Verbrechen*) between foreign workers and German women. Poles and Russians, who occupied the lowest ranks within the Nazi racial hierarchy of foreign workers, were punished with death if

¹⁰⁵See the report by the Munich police to the Reich Minister of the Interior of June 29, 1940, in BayHStAM, M-Inn/72645.

¹⁰⁶See Ulrich Herbert, *A History of Foreign Labor in Germany, 1880-1980* (Ann Arbor, 1990), chap. 4; see also Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1997).

¹⁰⁷See Herbert, *History of Foreign Labor*, 152-53.

they engaged in sexual relations with German women. German women who had sexual contacts with Polish workers were sent to prison or to a concentration camp in addition to humiliating public shaming.¹⁰⁸

Despite these harsh penalties, incidents of “forbidden contact” between German women and foreign workers remained numerous. To preserve the “purity of the German blood,” Hitler himself ordered the establishment of special brothels for foreign workers in December 1940.¹⁰⁹ The first brothel for *fremdvölkische Arbeiter* was opened at the Hermann Göring Works in Linz.¹¹⁰ The Linz operation served as a model for other cities throughout the Reich. A report of the Gauleitung Oberdonau of December 21, 1940, stated that “the labor force of the Reichswerke Hermann Göring in Linz is comprised to a substantial part of Czechs, Slovaks, Bulgarians, and Italians. To combat recurrent unwelcome contacts between foreign workers and German women, the *Gauleitung* . . . decided to establish a brothel.” The police were responsible for the recruitment and supervision of the foreign prostitutes working in the brothel. As the report about Linz stressed, the prostitutes belonged to the same nationality as the workers who had access to the brothel. “It is to be strictly enforced that no Germans go to the houses staffed with foreign girls, and that no foreign workers get into the German houses already existing in the city.” Similarly, a circular of January 16, 1941, issued by Reinhardt Heydrich, the chief of the Security Service (Sicherheitsdienst, or SD), emphasized that “the houses cannot be staffed with German prostitutes [*Prostituierte deutschen Volkstums*] but only with foreign prostitutes and gypsies.”¹¹¹ In Bremen foreign prostitutes were handed guidelines that expressly forbade them to engage in sexual relations with German men. The prostitutes were not allowed to solicit outside the brothel and needed a special pass to leave the brothel barracks. Any violation of the regulations could lead to internment in a concentration camp.¹¹²

By 1939 at the latest, Nazi prostitution policies diverged in important ways from previous systems of regulationism. Conventionally, state-regulated prostitution aimed to protect “respectable” society against moral “pollution” by prostitutes. The Nazis also strove to eradicate street soliciting and to confine prostitutes to tightly supervised brothels. However, their primary motivation was not concern about the suppression of “immorality.” For the first time, a German government made the establishment of supervised brothels compulsory for all cities and issued standardized regulations for the operation of “public houses.” What was new about the Nazi system of *Reglementierung* was the attempt to use the state in this direct

¹⁰⁸See Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers*, esp. 75, 131–33.

¹⁰⁹See Paul, 117–18; Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers*, esp. 130–31.

¹¹⁰See the circular of Hitler's deputy, Rudolf Hess, of December 7, 1940, in StAB 4,130/1-R.I.3.-9, vol. 1.

¹¹¹See Heydrich's circular of January 16, 1941, in *ibid.*

¹¹²See “Merkblatt für ausländische Prostituierte,” in *ibid.*, vol. 2.

way to create a certain form of human sexuality. Nazi brothels aimed to maintain the physical fitness and morale of “Aryan” men.¹¹³ At the same time, the persecution of prostitutes intensified greatly. Previously, prostitutes who violated police orders were punished with fines or short prison and workhouse sentences. In the Third Reich, such violations frequently led to streetwalkers’ internment in a concentration camp. The brutality of the suppression of prostitutes in Nazi Germany marks an important break with older forms of state-regulated prostitution. Another key difference is the racialization of Nazi regulationism. As the campaign to establish special brothels for foreign workers shows, regulated prostitution played a crucial role in upholding racist hierarchies between Germans and nationalities the Nazis considered “racially inferior.”

CONCLUSION

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt argued that the key function of the Nazi concentration camps was to eradicate human individuality.

The concentration and extermination camps of totalitarian regimes serve as the laboratories in which the fundamental belief of totalitarianism that everything is possible is being verified. . . . Total domination, which strives to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all of humanity were just one individual, is possible only if each and every person can be reduced to a never-changing identity of reactions, so that each of these bundles of reactions can be exchanged at random for any other. . . . The camps are meant not only to exterminate people and degrade human beings, but also serve the ghastly experiment of eliminating . . . spontaneity itself as an expression of human behavior and of transforming the human personality into a mere thing, into something that even animals are not; for Pavlov’s dog, which . . . was trained to eat not when it was hungry but when a bell rang, was a perverted animal.¹¹⁴

According to Arendt, total domination required the transformation of human beings into lifeless “bundles of reactions.” This dynamic had serious implications for sexuality. The history of prostitution in Nazi Germany during the Second World War provides preliminary evidence that the Nazis radically tried to alter sexual behavior. Thus, regulated brothels for “Aryan” men were supposed to eradicate homosexual and sadomasochistic “perversions” and instead foster a concept of (male) sexuality as mechanical physical need. The misogynistic rationale of Nazi sexual policies reduced prostitutes to the status of instruments for the satisfaction of this need.

¹¹³On this point, see also Timm, this volume.

¹¹⁴See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1973), 437–38.

The concentration camp brothels came closest to representing a laboratory where human sexuality was transformed into a mere animal function devoid of spontaneity, individuality, and eroticism. In March 1942 Himmler first issued orders that “industrious” prisoners in concentration camps should be rewarded with a visit to the brothel.¹¹⁵ After an inspection of Buchenwald during March 1943, the RFSS criticized the lack of a brothel within the confines of the camp. Like special monetary payments and rations in cigarettes, sex was a key incentive to stimulate productivity among the prisoners. “This whole issue is not particularly pretty, but it is natural, and if I can use nature as an incentive for higher performance, then I think we have to take advantage of this incentive.”¹¹⁶ By the summer of 1944, brothels had been opened in eight major concentration camps, including Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, and Dachau.¹¹⁷ Sex in these brothels indeed reduced intercourse to a mere animal function. As one woman forced to work in the camp brothel at Buchenwald told historian Christa Paul, “It was nothing personal, one felt like a robot. They did not take notice of us; we were the lowest of the low. We were only good for this. No conversation or small talk, not even the weather was on the agenda. Everything was so mechanical and indifferent. . . . They finished their business and left.”¹¹⁸

Of course, traditional regulationism had always entailed the degradation of prostitutes. But by hinting at the dystopian possibility of a perfectly mechanized system of sexuality organized according to misogynistic and racist ideas, Nazi prostitution shed the traditional confines of earlier forms of regulationism.

¹¹⁵See Paul, 23.

¹¹⁶See Himmler’s letter to Oswald Pohl of March 5, 1943, in *Reichsführer! Briefe an und von Himmler*, ed. Helmut Heiber (Stuttgart, 1968), 194–96.

¹¹⁷See Paul, 23–26.

¹¹⁸See *ibid.*, 107.