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Abstracts

Katja Sabisch, On the Origin and Development of a Scientific Fact: The Prostitute in the 19th Century

Based on the 18th century commencement of the human science study in pathogenesis of women, a concept shows how in common ways of thinking, prostitutes were a 'scientific fact', as observed by the sociologist Ludwig Fleck. A closer look reveals two trains of thought: one which began in the first half of the 19th century, where the concept was seen as a sexually transmitted disease (STD), whereby the prostitute was considered genuinely infected; and the other from a psychiatric point of view, conceived towards the end of the 19th century, whereby the venereal infection of the body was seen as a degenerative infection of the soul.

Petra de Vries, From Slave to Sex Worker. Feminist Debates and Prostitution Politics in the Netherlands, 1880–2000

The so-called second wave feminist has witnessed the rise of a prostitute's rights campaign that advocated sexual autonomy and human rights for 'sex workers'. Defining prostitution as 'labour', their advocates broke away from the discourse of nineteenth century feminists who were engaged in a European-wide struggle against the regulation of prostitution by the state and the disciplinary and notorious activities of a morality police. This article investigates the different feminist debates through an historical analysis of prostitution politics in the Netherlands in the 19th and 20th century. Religious and secular feminists shared a common vision of prostitution as being a form of sexual 'slavery', their ideological differences notwithstanding. In particular the contradictory relationship between feminists and their 'fallen sisters' is discussed. It is also shown how the discourse about prostitution and women's rights contributed to the prohibition of brothel-keeping in 1911 and how this very prohibition of the bordello has been repealed in turn in the year 2000 with the support of second wave feminists.

Martin Lücke, Hierarchies of Sex. Rules of Male and Female Prostitution in Germany, 1871–1933

The article points out in which way two different judicial rules for punishing female-heterosexual and male-homosexual prostitution were established in Germany during the German Empire and the Republic of Weimar (1871–1933) – and why this is a matter of concern for analysing gender history. The initial point of the article is the description of the aspects of offences regarding prostitution (§ 361 RStGB) and male homosexuality (§ 175) declared in the German Criminal Code of the year 1870/71. According to a structure of judicial and social rules of prostitution recently presented by the political scientist Birgit Sauer, female-heterosexual prostitution will be described as a regular system, whereas male-homosexual prostitution appears as a prohibitive system. The legal texts and their comments given by legal scientists and ministry officials will not simply be interpreted as information on offences and the extent of punishment, but as sources which give an insight into basic ideas and structures of the German society and its moral and sexual values at the beginning of the 20th century. The development and the differentiation of the rules for female-heterosexual prostitution on the one hand and for male-homosexual prostitution on the other hand, can be read as contribution to the stabilisation of the hetero-normative and sexist character of the German legal system.

Insa Eschebach, Forced Sex Labour in Nazi Concentration Camps: History, Interpretations and Representations

Between 1942 and 1945, brothels were established in ten concentration camps. Female prisoners from the Ravensbrück Concentration Camp were recruited for the “Arbeitseinsatz im Bordell” (labour duty in the brothel). Visiting a brothel was, apart from other benefits, part of a reward system whereby the productivity of male prisoners in the area of forced labour would increase. The article examines the gender codes behind the establishment of brothels in concentration camps and how they were operated. What concepts of masculinity and femininity are expressed through the SS documentation on the topic? The subject of how the brothel visitors expressed their experience after 1945 is also discussed. One assumption claims that brothels gave male prisoners the chance to restore their masculinity which had been undermined and damaged through imprisonment in concentration camps. According to some sources, it is suggested that a specific discourse existed among prisoners about visiting brothels in the camp. This discourse secured their male identity and continued after 1945. Whereas there are hardly any comments handed down by the women involved. They seem to have suppressed their memories in shame and pushed them aside as forgotten.

The idea of a link between concentration camps, violence and sexuality became an issue which recurs in many popular movies about women’s camps and prisons. The article also discusses sexualised representations of Nazi concentration camps in the Israeli “Stalag Literature” of the 1960s and in some Italian movies. On the one hand the retrospective sexualisation of concentration camp imprisonment took place in popular culture, whereas on the other hand, there has been no historical information for decades regarding brothels for male prisoners. The question remains if, and indeed how, the fact that the fanciful deluge of images in popular culture contributed to forgetting the true reality of concentration camp brothels.