

From Nazi Concentration Camp to Detention in Sweden 1945

Female Survivors, Sexuality, and Respectability

By Britta Zetterström Geschwind

Gunnarpshemmet was the name of a large stone villa in the thriving Tjörnarp parish in the south of Sweden. A highway went through the community which had also a train station. Gunnarpshemmet was however located in a secluded grove. It had nine bedrooms, a bathroom, a shower room, and three water closets. A photo reveals what looks like an average and well-maintained house with a solid stone porch. The two-acre garden had fruit trees and firs. If it were not for the fact that the place was enclosed by a two-metre high barbed wired fence, it might seem quite idyllic. When not occupied with chores and duties, the interned women sometimes stood by the fence gazing out. The locals were not allowed near, signs outside the premises prohibited contact with the internees. The enclosure was guarded by local policemen and the camp director, an elderly Red Cross nurse, kept an eye on movements and activities by the fence. Still, several of the women managed to escape the premises on more than one occasion, and local men indeed came close, although this was not permitted or approved.

Gunnarpshemmet was a closed detention camp for female refugees. Fifty-seven women were forcibly detained here between 1945 and 1946, but seldom more than fifteen at a time. This article will examine the camp, focusing on the internment of former concentration camp prisoners who had been transferred to Sweden with the “white buses” rescue operation, undertaken by the Swedish Red Cross in cooperation with the Danish government in the spring of 1945 (Lomfors 2005; Koblik 1987).

The interned women constituted a disparate group in terms of nationality, age, class, religion, and ethnicity. Usually they

had been placed in several open refugee camps before being transferred to detention. What made these females such a threatening category that they were placed behind barbed wire in a guarded detention camp? Were there differences in how the women were perceived? How did they perform agency, and what room for manoeuvre was there? How might previous experiences of Nazi camp imprisonment and war have affected their actions and experiences of detention in Sweden?

This study is part of my post-doc project aiming at investigating Swedish refugee camps and the reception of female former concentration camp prisoners. Gunnarpshemmet is important to historicize on its own, but it also serves as a case study to shed light on how gender and sexuality, intersecting with other power structures created the boundaries of citizenship for these women. The purpose of this article is to investigate the power play between the survivors and the camp institution, and to explore various tactics the women could develop to resist the detention, (re)gain respectability, and avoid repatriation. With inspiration from Beverly Skeggs’s (1997) thinking about *respectability* as a crucial capital to be counted as a citizen, the aim is to shed light on the complexity and diversity of the group of “survivors”, and to emphasize them as agents. This aim is in line with scholars who have problematized the conformist trope about the survivor subject as a victim, and especially female, as being vulnerable, weak, passive, and “innocent”, who has left some experiences of suffering that were dangerous and even “impossible” to talk about or get recognition for. In Sweden, this problematization has only begun to be recognized in relation



1. Gunnarpshemmet as it looks today. Some memories of the women linger. Still today locals call the house “the whore house”. Photo: Britta Geschwind.

to female survivors (e.g., Martinez 2021a, b; Thor Tureby 2005; 2015; Wagrell 2020).

The choice of women addressed has been guided by their differing backgrounds, the varying reasons for their detention, and the fact that they all had been imprisoned in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. To access the powerplay between individual and camp institution, material such as government directives, camp documents, personal dossiers, letters, testimonies, and interviews has been analytically combined and contrasted. The bureaucracy required to sort, handle, and place the individuals who came to Sweden during and directly after World War II has deposited a rich body of archival material. Especially important here is the archive of the Swedish State Commission for Foreigners (SUK), and the World War II Camp archives

(SUKL) at the Swedish National Archives (RA). In the official records, the voices of the women themselves are mostly silent, but this does not mean that they are absent.

Gunnarpshemmet has been briefly discussed by Tobias Berglund and Niclas Sennerteg (2009). Their presentation is primarily based on the five volumes of culled material left by the camp at SUKL (Hallberg 2017:178, 218; Rydén & Berglund 2018). Although incomplete, the camp archive is rich in information. It primarily reflects the camp management’s views on the women. For this reason, it is important to bring together materials that speak from different positions, perspectives, and with different “tones of voice”. As argued by several ethnologists, archival sources of diverse kinds can contradict or reinforce each other and give different

answers to the same question. Contrasting can thus be used as a source-critical method (Vallström & Lennartsson 2014:4). This is particularly important when seeking marginalized voices or perspectives (Bergquist & Svensson 1999; Jönsson & Nilsson 2017; Lennartsson 2014, 2001; Svensson 1993). Ethnological perspectives and bricolage approaches are thus important in the field of Holocaust studies, a field that is dominated by historians.

Apart from the Gunnarps hemmet archive, I have studied official records in SUK, such as files from the Social Bureau, the National Medical Board, and the Control Agency where I have examined the dossiers on some of the women. These contain traces of their contacts with authorities such as the police, health authorities, refugee camps, and SUK. Depending on the extent of the contacts, the files are thin or thick. Individual statements in interrogations, in letters, and a witness record from one of the women recorded by The Polish Research Institute (PIZ) in Lund contrast the documentation by the authorities. Other witness records in the PIZ collection, artefacts gathered by PIZ from survivors in the museum *Kulturen* in Lund, as well as transcribed interviews from the 1990s with survivors who became Swedish citizens, have provided useful complementary material for expanding my understanding of surviving Ravensbrück.

The Swedish Camp System

The men and women who came to Sweden to escape the violence and destitution of World War II were seen both as problematic and as potential assets by the authorities. Gender, education, marital status, nationality, political opinion, and health were reg-

istered and influenced their placement in various forms of refugee camps and institutions. The reception system included quarantine camps, hospitals, reception camps, work camps, and closed detention camps. The scholarly, as well as popular, interest in Swedish camps has mainly been directed towards detention camps for males (e.g. Berglund 2008; Berglund & Sennerteg 2009; Grahn 2012; Johansson 2004; Lihammer 2006; Lindner 1994; Lundgren 2008; Hammare 2012; Rehn 2002), with few exceptions (e.g. Geschwind 2020; Martinez 2017; Persson 2011; Rudberg 2017). Much remains to explore.

The reception system and its institutions were created to regulate, help, and stabilize the refugees' situation. They generally aimed at returning the refugees to normalcy after living in inhumane conditions. Various normalizing practices were directed at the refugee body. Female and male bodies were examined, restricted, and understood in separate ways; for example, regarding the need for protection or control, or what constituted the "normal". Health issues played a vital role as a regulating mechanism and bordering regime, in Sweden as well as on an international level (Montesino & Thor 2009:33; Idvall & Nilsson 2017). The able-bodied and fit to work were sorted from those in need of care, and those deemed problematic (Byström 2012; Olsson 1995).

Although the conditions differed between camps, open as well as closed camps were fenced in to prevent contact between the refugees and the locals. This was done both to protect the public from the diseases the refugees could carry, and to protect the refugees from the locals. Another aspect was to prevent sexual relations between refugee women and Swedish men, espe-

cially after the arrival of mostly female survivors from Nazi concentration camps in 1945. As noted by the historian Malin Thor Tureby, the Swedish men's intrusive behaviour towards the liberated women was a theme in the contemporary press in southern Sweden (Thor Tureby 2015:288).

Individuals who were considered a potential threat to Sweden could be placed in closed detention camps; politically risky, criminals, deserters, so-called observation cases, and disciplinary cases. The category "risky foreigners" changed with the course of the war, from communists or part of the anti-Nazi resistance to Nazis and Nazi-collaborators (Byström 2012:162–163). Detention camps for male refugees were set up already in 1940. The same did not officially exist for females until the instigation of Gunnarps hemmet in the spring of 1945, the only one of its kind.

The Forced Detention of "Risky" Female Refugees

The need for an internment camp especially for female refugees was emphasized in a government inquiry into a new immigration law presented early in 1945 (SOU 1945:1). One argument for detention was, as for men, that they were considered politically risky "observation cases". Mentioned were Danish and Norwegian women who had ties to the occupying forces, the Nazi party, or other intimate relations to Germans, such as love affairs, sexual relations, or having children with German soldiers. Another category was "disciplinary cases", vaguely described as "women who are unwilling to work and loose" and who "cause difficult problems" (SOU 1945:1:121). Before the special internment camp was instigated, female refugees who were considered

problematic could be housed in so-called "work homes" (ibid.). This was a kind of social relief for people who were considered a liability for society, who could not support themselves, "insane", "imbecile", and women deemed as "loose". As in other kinds of institutions of this time, the work homes would care for and foster the interned into better citizens through scheduled days, work, hygiene, and control of the body (Eivergård, Olofsson & Vallström 2012; Engwall 2000; Jönsson 1998).

The same official instructions that had been set up for male internment camps also applied to the women of Gunnarps hemmet. Everyday meals, activities, accommodation, and contacts with the outside were regulated. In practice, however, the norms and regulating practices were highly gendered as feminine, putting emphasis on domestic work abilities, such as cleaning, knitting, making the bed, doing dishes and laundry. The homelike nature of the villa was eclipsed by the steel fence with its three parallel lines of barbed wire, police guards, and watchdogs. In several ways, the everyday power relations of the internment camp was similar to the sociologist Erving Goffman's definition of a *total institution* (Goffman 1991). The term refers to a place where a group of people is cut off from the surrounding society and whose everyday life is highly formalized. On the other hand, the boundaries of the camp could be porous and negotiable. As the feminist geographer Doreen Massey puts it, "Spaces are social relations stretched out" (1994:121). If one thinks of the camp as networks of social and dynamic relations rather than a static place, it logically follows that neither spaces nor boundaries are stable and the same for everyone (Massey 1994:2–24). The

level of closedness and control was conditioned. “Wrong” behaviour was reprimanded, for example by withdrawing allowances or permission to go out. Similarly, “right” behaviour could be rewarded. The possibility to be transferred to an open camp depended on the reasons for detention but also depended heavily on assessments of the internee’s behaviour. The kitchen, garden, and laundry room made a “home-like” setting that both controlled and shaped their actions and movements, creating a time-space arena suited to form (and perform) the homemaker.

The Gunnarshemmet archive contain many accounts of activities directed towards the fence; reports on how to set it up, guard it, pay for it, repair it, how to keep females in, how they escaped it, and how interned females and Swedish men made contact alongside it. The barbed wired fence could be likened to a *material punctum*, drawing eyes and bodies towards it, and being a constant reminder of the confinement (Barthes 1982; cf. Gustafsson 2008). It was a boundary, and simultaneously a possible contact surface to the outside world. Roland Barthes has described a punctum as the element in a picture that captures the attention, evokes emotions, and lingers in the memory long after the gaze has left the object. What becomes a punctum is subjective, but it can be shared by a group of people. Judging from accounts by former concentration camp prisoners, the fences in the Swedish camps created a certain kind of traumatic affect in contact with their bodies and eyes (Gottfarb 2006:203–206).

The detained women came from Norway, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.

Remarkably, people who had reason to hate or fear each other were interned together (Berglund & Sennerteg 2008:200–210). Norwegian and Danish women who had been in relations with German soldiers were placed along with Catholic as well as Jewish survivors of Nazi concentration camps where they had held different hierarchical positions.

The survivors were among the around 30,000 individuals who had been transferred to Sweden with the Red Cross “white buses”, and the UNRRA Campaign 1945 (Åmark in Byström & Frohnert 2013:40–48; Byström 2012:23–25). Most were Polish women, and they were legally called “repatriates” by the authorities. The term from Latin, *re*: re/return, and *patria*: fatherland, shows that the state, unlike other groups, viewed them as temporary guests who were to be returned to their home countries as soon as possible.

The reasons for being detained generally appear vague and weak from a legal point of view. In some cases, the internment was a result of an unlawful escape or prolonged leave from a reception camp. Some women had been violent or committed petty crimes, but usually it was enough that a person was considered “undisciplined”, “hysterical”, or “promiscuous” and had disturbed the order in her previous refugee camp. The most common reason was that they were judged to be immoral, “unwilling to work” and above all, sexually “loose”.

Several (but not all) received treatment for sexually transmitted diseases in accordance with *Lex Veneris*. The law, instigated in 1919, meant that both male and female individuals with syphilis, gonorrhoea, and *ulcus mole* were given free care in the infectious stage of the diseases, but were

obliged by law to seek care since spreading the disease was punishable. The law gave the state a new kind of control as well as responsibility over the individual. The women at Gunnarps hemmet were subjected to gynaecological inspections, as were repatriates in other Swedish camps. Getting a certificate of health was a prerequisite to work outside the camp, or to get married (Olsson 1995:115, 133; Lundberg 2008:15, 158). The gynaecological examinations need to be put in the context of the increase of venereal diseases during the war, the emerging welfare state with its overall concern regarding health and hygiene (Johannisson 1990; Blom 2006), but also as means to control the sexual behaviour of (foreign) women.

In her dissertation on Swedish legislation concerning venereal diseases, the historian Anna Lundberg concludes that although the *Lex Veneris* had the democratic ambition to apply to all, the application of the law disadvantaged women of the lower class (Lundberg 2008). She states that the law reinforced a modern discourse where care and health were conditions for obtaining recognition of citizenship. This came to be especially true in the aftermath of World War II, regarding female repatriates. The control measures affected them in a particular way since their placement in camps made them easy to control (cf. Engwall 2000).

A matter worth addressing in relation to the forced inspections in Sweden is the Norwegian *Helseanordningen* instigated in June 1945, allowing forced gynaecological investigations of women suspected of having venereal diseases. The controls provided the Norwegian state with means to find so-called “German girls”, suspected

of having relations with German soldiers during the war. As in Denmark, venereal disease could be taken as proof of immorality and sexual contact with Germans. These women were treated as criminals. In both Denmark and Norway, they could be placed in detention camps, sometimes for months (Pedersen 2006:66–86; Papendorf 2017; Warring 1994:168). In 1945, the Norwegian government amended the Citizenship Act so that Norwegians who married Germans were stripped of their citizenship (Blom 2006:227; Olsen 1998). That caused some who had escaped to Sweden to get stuck here. Several were detained at Gunnarps hemmet. Being free of venereal disease, especially receiving “medical proof” of being a virgin, could save a woman from sexual stigma, as will be exemplified. In Nazi Germany, venereal disease could be grounds for concentration camp captivity, and resulting in a prostitute stigma.

Before their arrival in Sweden, the women we will meet in the following had been imprisoned in Ravensbrück concentration camp north of Berlin, where they had had different roles and ranks. Ravensbrück was far from the largest of the Nazi camps, the Jews were not as many as in other camps, and it was not officially a death camp (although the death rate was very high, and it became a death camp at the end). Ravensbrück do not fit well into the Holocaust narrative, but it is highly important for shedding light on the Nazis’ crimes against women and children (Helm 2015). Ravensbrück is also significant from a Swedish perspective, since most of the female survivors who came to Sweden with the white buses mission had been imprisoned there. An introduction to

Ravensbrück is needed to understand the women's responses to the Swedish camps, the norms, practices, concerns, and controls, such as the barbed wire, the health inspections, and the labelling practices.

From Ravensbrück Concentration Camp to Internment in Sweden

I was arrested and interned in a concentration camp for absconding from work. The reason I absconded was that I had two children in Poland whom I had been forcibly taken away from to work in Germany. My children were young: one was seven years old; the other, one and a half. To this day, I still don't know what happened to my children.

So begins the witness record of the Polish Catholic A., a widow in her early thirties who was one of those interned at Gunnarps hemmet. A. was arrested with her husband in 1941 for escaping forced labour to find her children. He was brutally beaten, and they were separated. After imprisonment in a female penal camp in Rheinheim she was transferred to Ravensbrück. She was later sent to Neuengamme where she was rescued with the white buses to Sweden. After arriving in Malmö, going through medical examination, delousing, sanitization, and quarantine, A. was transferred to the open camp Ronneby Brunn in Blekinge, where she got into a fight with two other Polish women, resulting in her detention in Gunnarps hemmet; the women she had fought were also sent there. After receiving an assessment of good behaviour, A. was released to Frostavallen convalescent camp nearby in Höör. Her witness record was taken there in March 1946 by Helena Miklaszewska (1906–2000), one of the Polish Research Institute's (PIZ) assis-

tants who were survivors themselves and collected over 500 witness testimonies from Polish survivors in Swedish camps (e.g., Dahl 2021, 2011, 2007; Martinez 2021; Rudny 2005).

Ravensbrück was set up in 1939 as a "Frauenlager" intended exclusively for women. It developed into a vast complex with factories, workshops, and satellite camps at external factories. It served as the principal training and recruitment centre for female Nazi camp guards and overseers, who after training were enlisted in Ravensbrück and other concentration camps. About 140,000–150,000 individuals from 30 nations were imprisoned here 1939–1945 (Beßmann & Eschebach 2013; Helm 2015:651).

Hard physical labour, humiliation, torture, killings, famine, vermin, and disease were everyday experiences. Tens of thousands died in the camp, but others were sent away to be gassed. Women were shot dead, hanged, beaten to death, bitten by dogs, given lethal injections. The conditions worsened dramatically as the camp became increasingly overcrowded. In 1945 a gas chamber was built on site. A. testified to the horrendous conditions.

Executions were carried out in the camp; prisoners were taken away and shot. Compulsory experimental operations were performed. All of this had a very dispiriting effect. Sometimes, women who were unable to bear it any longer would fling themselves on the wire fence. One woman flung herself on the wires in front of me; I saw her corpse, black all over. I heard of women hanging themselves. I know that *auzjerkas* [guards/overseers] set dogs on women at work, and that the dogs bit off chunks of flesh. Sometimes, women would come back from the bunker so badly beaten that they couldn't walk or move at all.

The seeming lack of feelings and the factual tone in A's and other PIZ witness records needs to be understood from their intent as evidence to be used in war trials (Dahl 2021; Van Orden Martinez 2021a). Other materials collected by PIZ instead reveal strong emotions and personal views. Poems, sketches, and crafted things made during the Nazi captivity bear witness to individual endurance, creativity, and collective resistance (Rydén 2018). In the Ravensbrück collection of *Kulturen* in Lund, there is a tiny white rabbit carved from a toothbrush in captivity by Zofia Sas-Hoszowska. It is a symbol of the "compulsory experimental operations" that A. mentions above, referring to medical experiments. Those experimented on were called "rabbits", "Kaninchen", or "Lapins", often in a sympathetic way by the other prisoners. Their legs were cut open and filled with rotten straw, glass, and rags, muscles and bones were surgically removed (Beßmann & Eichebach 2013: 223–238; Helm 2015). Although the subjects were relatively few compared to the total number of prisoners, the experiments were well known and dreaded, and the victims pitied.

As in the Nazi concentration camp system in general, prisoners were forced to wear colour-coded badges for identification. Their colours and shapes placed people in certain categories. Jews, who generally had the lowest status, wore yellow triangles forming a star. A red triangle meant political prisoner, green criminal, purple Jehovah's witness. A person given the designation "arbeits-scheu" (work-shy) or "asozial" (asocial) had to wear a black triangle. The category included beggars, alcoholics, or otherwise socially vulnerable, individuals of the Roma and Sinti community, and women deemed prostitutes or lesbian. The letter "P"

sewn within the triangle meant Polish, the largest group in Ravensbrück.

Some were assigned as functionaries to supervise other prisoners or carry out administrative tasks. This was an elaborate psychological abuse within the Nazi camp system intended to turn victim against victim and prevent solidarity. Brutality was encouraged. Women classified as prostitutes and criminals were used as leaders for other prisoners. In a testimony about "the horrors of Ravensbrück" in *Svensk tidskrift* 1946, 21-year-old Polish Maria Krakowska-Löwegren describes the use of prostitutes as foremen, which is telling for the stigmatization of prostitutes among the prisoners. She writes that the daily cohabitation with the mostly German prostitutes and criminals "meant humiliation for us".

...these inferior elements were used by the camp leadership as a kind of foremen. [...] One can easily understand the pleasure it was for this riffraff, at their will, to command, torment, and assault (for this was part of their powers) "die Patrioten," as they hatefully called us, and to have virtually the power of life and death over us, whom they knew stood greatly morally above them (Krakowska-Löwegren 1946:174).

The binary divide between perpetrator and victim is problematic since individuals often were made to become both. Some prisoners were forced to exercise authority and were often hated. Under threat of being punished themselves, they disciplined and punished others. Some used their position by helping other prisoners while risking their lives; others, concerned with the survival of themselves or those closest to them, did what they could to assist the SS. For the prisoners, knowing the characters of different functionaries was crucial for sur-

vival. Several women at Gunnarps hemmet had held ranks in Ravensbrück such as “Stubenälteste” (room or barracks leader), “Blockälteste” (block leader), and a “Lagerälteste” (camp leader) also pointed out as *Aufseherinnen*” (overseer/warden). We will come back to them.

The Polish woman A. described the arrival at Ravensbrück, how female guards with dogs collected her and the others on lorries to the camp where they were taken straight to the baths. There, all their personal belongings and valuables were stripped off and confiscated. Her hair was cut, and she had to change to camp uniform. Usually, arriving women had to strip naked in front of SS men and female guards and go to the icy water of the showers. Their head and pubic area were inspected for lice and often shaved. They also received medical examinations, varying from throat and dental exams to being subjected to gynaecological examinations to check for sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, but also to uncover hidden valuables (Docking 2021:434). Nazi camp prisoners typically experienced sexual vulnerability of various forms. As stated by the historian Marion Kaplan, sexual violation often started with sexual humiliation: nudity and shaving (Kaplan 2020).

Scholars have increasingly paid attention to the sexual violence within the Nazi camp system as well as forced sexual labour in “camp brothels” intended to reward higher-status prisoners and German soldiers. The women forced into sexual slavery were mainly taken from Ravensbrück (Sommer 2021, 2009). The sex slaves had better food and quarters, meaning better chances of survival, but they were under constant control, and after the war were

often subjected to hate and reprimands as traitors. Both Jewish and non-Jewish women could become sex slaves for camp guards of both sexes and for prisoners in positions of power. To trade the body for food or clothes was means to survive (Person 2015; Caplan 2010).

The Swedish Reception, Care, and Sorting Practices

So, how might various traumatic experiences of Nazi atrocities, as described above, have affected their meeting with Swedish care and reception? And how did the staff of Gunnarps hemmet and other authorities understand and react to their experiences?

Around the time A. gave her witness record, she received schooling with other illiterate repatriates in the Frostavallen camp. The camp director Karin Axell reported on their learning progress to the Social Bureau and wrote that A. had “learned something” but could not read. “She is psychopathic and extremely moody. You cannot persuade her to do something she does not want.” The judgement of her as “psychopathic and moody” stands in contrast to the conclusion of the interviewer Helena Miklaszewska: “The witness is a simple person with a good memory; her testimony is to be trusted.” Although there are many examples of expressions of empathy and respect between Swedish aid workers and survivors, the professional assessments about the survivors often appear painfully rational and unempathetic to their sufferings. Judgements such as “psychopathic”, “hysterical”, and “lazy” were not uncommon. This could be understood as trauma reactions, today described in terms of PTSD, causing anxiety, apathy and being on high alert. The authorities, camp management, and doctors had

difficulties relating to or comprehending what the survivors had gone through.

One aspect which caused the women trouble and dislike was their reluctance to be examined by doctors. Survivors have witnessed to their feelings of horror on arrival in Sweden, meeting the medical exams, sanitizing, and delousing practices and being asked to strip naked in front of men and step into showers (Nilsson & Idvall 2018). The internees of Gunnarps hemmet shared their dread of medical examinations with survivors in open camps. One who testified to this was the physician and venereologist Gerda Kjellberg (1881–1972). She had been commissioned by the National Medical Board to visit certain refugee camps for repatriates where a risk of “sexual intercourse and unwelcome conception” was suspected. Kjellberg performed gonorrhoea examinations and provided sexual counselling. As mentioned above, the Labour Market Commission demanded testing since being free of infectious venereal diseases was a prerequisite to work outside the camps. In her report on sexual hygiene among the repatriates, Kjellberg wrote to the National Medical Board:

In all the [camps] that I visited, it was completely impossible to repeat an examination that had already been done. Due to everything they have been through in the concentration camps, the patients had a panic fear of all sorts of examinations.

Polish women in a camp in Gränna “declared with one mouth that it was an insult to the entire Polish people to assume that a Polish woman could have something to do with a man to whom she was not married.” They felt repeatedly violated by the exams and wanted to put an end to the “harass-

ments”. In addition to the feelings of violation that came from the forced gynaecological exams, the discomfort and fear were also linked to the risk of losing respectability. To work, be able to move around, and perhaps to receive citizenship you had to “pass” as the right kind of female and refugee; virtuous, hardworking, and grateful. Another passage in the report is telling of the importance of being “untouched”. Kjellberg had performed examinations on 150 Polish women in Ronneby Brunn.

Here, too, I met strong opposition, mainly because a male colleague on the day of my visit happened to “deflower” 3 young women during a GC examination. This did not surprise me as the camp had a single speculum and this was of the calibre for a multipara.

A speculum is used to dilate the vagina during examination. The term “multipara” refers to someone who has given birth several times. The doctor had asked the females not to report the incident, but they did, possibly after talking to the curator Anna Zajączkowska of the Polish Social Aid. After receiving word of the incident, the Director General of the National Medical Board Axel Höjer demanded an explanation from the doctor, who responded: “Primitive conditions with sterilization, etc., as well as language confusion, was the reason that I must have lost self-control, so that I ruptured the hymen with the speculum.” The injured females got the doctor to write them a certificate, proving that they were “virgo intacta”, “untouched” at the time of examination. They asked the Polish curator to translate the documents into Polish. This meant that they got verification of their virtue, which could be “ex-

changed” into the currency of respectability (Skeggs 1998:160–162).

Kjellberg’s report to SUK seems to defend the repatriates before the authorities by assuring that they did not pose a moral threat to Sweden. After visiting various camps, she claimed to have an idea of the nature of the clientele and could testify that she found most of them to be “virgo intacta”. Today it is commonly known that it, in most cases, is impossible to gynecologically determine whether a woman had her sexual debut. She also found the orthodox Jewish women totally indifferent to male attention. She found it “difficult to imagine that these, admittedly young, but physically sloppy women with bitter and depressed appearance, could exercise any physical attraction”. Kjellberg’s report ends with the somewhat laconic remark that “The Swedes’ problem is not the foreign women but the Swedish men.”

Intrusive men lurking by camps sheltering young female survivors was a well-known problem, as noted above. Gunnarps hemmet too attracted the curiosity of local men. The vicar of Tjörnarps was approached by married women, neighbours of the camp, who requested him to write to SUK. They did not want the camp in their parish, since the married men “sneak to the fence and lure the interned women out”. The men had possibly heard rumours of the “sexually depraved” women and hoped to get a glimpse, or more.

Because they were detained on grounds of sexual morality, it is vital to consider the sexual abuse and the stigmatization of prostitutes within the concentration camp system when reflecting on their encounters with the Swedish reception. Several had been labelled as prostitutes before arriving

in Sweden, and this label followed them here. The camp report of young French woman M. states: “had been a prostitute of simpler kind, and she had made no secret of this in Ravensbrück [...] had probably been arrested for this reason.” The Polish Catholic woman K. was 18 years old when she arrived from Ravensbrück. According to SUK she was guilty of low morals and “undisciplined behaviour”. A letter from the manager of the Stråtenbro camp, Sten Jornäs, had sealed her fate.

She is already known from Poland for deviant sexual conduct and has continued to behave so since her arrival in Sweden. During inspection, male persons were found in her bed and when she was made aware of the inappropriateness of this, she was extremely unruly and rude.

Since she came to Ravensbrück 1941 as a very young girl the assertion that she was known for deviant sexual behaviour in Poland even before that is distressing. This kind of information came from other survivors, and from authorities such as the police. The passage about “male persons in her bed” raises troubling questions about power relations. Who instigated the intercourse, and how?

Categorizations such as “loose” in the host country may have painfully reflected the sorting methods performed at Ravensbrück. In a way, the Nazi hierarchies continued to act upon them. Being in Sweden did not protect a Jew from anti-semitism (e.g., Andersson & Kvist Geverts 2008; Kvist Geverts 2008; Byström 2012, 2006). A red triangle (political prisoner) had higher rank than a black triangle (asocial) or green (criminal). Identifying as political prisoner could give some dignity

after the war. In contrast, black or green triangles were connected to stigma and shaming. Black or green triangle survivors were not heard in the Hamburg War Crimes trials. It is hardly a coincidence that the striped prisoner jackets collected by PIZ, now in the museum Kulturen in Lund, have red triangles with a P. The German designation “arbeitsscheu” or “asozial” had its equivalents in Sweden (*arbetskygg*, *asocial*) and other European countries. In pre-war Sweden “asocial” marked someone who breached societal norms and was seen as a moral problem. As in Germany, it was a widespread term for sexually deviant, “abnormal” women (Engwall 2000). One can imagine the distress of being liberated from the concentration camp only to be put in a detention camp in the host country, due to a related order.

The hierarchies of the concentration camp system affected the relations between survivors. Regarding Jewish E., the camp director Edin writes to SUK, “clashes arise quite logically, when Jews, Poles, and Germans here are forced to live so close to each other, those who hate each other so.” Some were former Nazi camp prisoner functionaries, detained for this reason. Before K.’s detention, she and other Polish women in the Eckersta camp had recognized two fellow camp residents as “Anweiserin” (overseer/warden) and reported them to SUK for various forms of cruelty. The two were sent to Gunnarps hemmet. Remarkably, after some time K. was sent to detention together with them. Detained with them was also 33-year-old German-Polish B., after she had been reported for brutality in Ravensbrück and Eberswalde by several Polish women. B. had been a “Blockälteste” controlling

over 360 “asozial Volksdeutsche” (ethnic German) women wearing the black triangle, deemed as prostitutes. It seems like an irony of fate that B. in Sweden was detained along with women who had received this very stigma. B. had risen through the ranks within the camp system. In Ravensbrück she was appointed “Stubenälteste” then “Blockälteste”, controlling prostitutes, then Jews, and lastly political prisoners. She was sent to Auschwitz as a “Blockälteste” in a women’s hospital block (Kłodziński 1974). Lastly, she was “Lagerälteste” in Eberswalde and again in Ravensbrück, where she operated more directly under the camp commandant.

Tactics of Resistance and Adaptation

The authorities’ assessments of the interned women appear brutal in their division between the desirable and the abominable, the pitiful and the repulsive. In a letter to SUK, the camp director at Gunnarps hemmet responds to criticism directed at the camp from the young Pole K.

K. is highly unbalanced. When reprimanded, she becomes hysterical, stamps on the floor, slaps her hand on the table and screams, so that her face turns bluish red. When she wrote the letter to the Aliens Commission, she had just had such an outburst. She had just started as a kitchen assistant, but as she gobbled from all the bowls, drank from sauce and soup bowls, and lipstick on the housewives and my own jug revealed that she had filled herself by drinking directly from our milk – I said – not the housewife, that we did not want her in the kitchen. The first time she showed her temper was at our doctor, when she refused to let him take a sample during examination. He said that she was hysterical and intellectually inferior [...] You must treat K. like the child she is, now 19 years old, she came to concentration camp at the age of 13.

K. “gobbles”, she does not eat. She “fills herself”, she does not drink. She is “hysterical” not furious or desperate, and her face is “bluish-red”. When she refuses to let the doctor take samples, she is considered intellectually inferior, “like a child”. The choice of words and tone about K. exemplify the reviews of many of the women. It is markedly dichotomous, and often infantilizing. When taboos and norms are challenged, it can arouse discomfort and disgust. What is considered deviant is culturally conditioned and changeable, but at the same time tenacious. The deviant is described as “animal”, “dirty”, and “sick” in contrast to “human”, “clean”, and “healthy”. The animal gives in to the body’s desires and cannot be restrained, as does the child in contrast to the rational adult. The honour, respectability, and well-being of women has continued to be bound to their bodies. The way in which many of the detained women were labelled is in line with how Beverly Skeggs shows how women of the working class have persistently been “othered”, sexualized, and pathologized (Skeggs 1997). As in Skeggs’s study of working-class women, the interned women’s perceived lack of, or possession of, respectability was essential, and functioned as a boundary practice.

Young K., and the other interned women were however not passively accepting their fate. Their vulnerability and stigma made them develop various tactics in opposition to, and in line with, the power structures, depending on their individual situations and assets (or, as Skeggs and Bourdieu would put it, “cultural capital”). I call their acts of resistance *intellectual*, *bodily*, and *relational*. According to Michel de Certeau, *strategies* belong to dominant places and

institutions, such as the overarching efforts of Gunnarshemmet to create predictability, to control, guide, and guard the females. *Tactics* on the other hand are individual’s creative resistance to these structures, their everyday actions, coping, and attempts to break loose from representations and restraints imposed on them by the dominant institution, no matter how futile (de Certeau 1984:36–37). Tactics have to do with hope (Buchanan 2000:86–107).

The first tactic I call *intellectual*, such as writing letters of complaints to the authorities. The reason for the defensive letter about the Polish woman K., cited above, was that she had written a complaint to SUK about how she and the other internees were treated. She wrote:

I turn to you Honourable Gentlemen, for I have some sadness. There is a Swede here who works in the kitchen, she criticizes us all and does not want to leave us alone. She punishes us with the food, and it will probably not be long before she beats me. She thinks she can do what she wants because I’m the youngest. Should she start beating me, have I not suffered enough in the camp, should I have to suffer again? [...] The one who is now here is treating us as the “Aufseherinnen” in the German camps and I have had enough of this. I have been imprisoned in camps since I was 13 years old.

By writing letters K. tried to improve the situation for herself, and for others. Her letters can be seen as traces of resilience. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that letters were read by the camp management, and therefore possibly self-censored.

The French women M. and S. opposed what they had learned was written of them in the camp reports and wrote to the French legation to get help to restore their repu-

tation. It was reported that M. had been a prostitute “of simpler kind” and had sexual relations with Germans in Ravensbrück. M. rejected this as untruthful gossip and wrote that her virtue could be validated by her relatives in France. S. had been in the French resistance as a spy. Her camp report states that she “already on the train to Ravensbrück had intercourse with three SS men in front of everyone”, and that she thereafter openly had sexual relations with the Germans in Ravensbrück. In a well-formulated letter to the French legation, S. contested these accusations. She resolutely denied any misconduct by the SS men, explaining the reason she was taken away with them to another train carrier was out of their respect for her, since she had her period. If she was raped, telling about this would not likely have benefitted her attempt to restore her respectability in the eyes of the authorities.

It seems that the tactical way to reject accusations of promiscuity was to oppose sexual experiences, rape, and other sexual abuse altogether, and send the accusations back as unfriendly gossip, resulting in a kind of self-surveillance (Skeggs 1997:72). Many survivors saw women’s sexual victimization as a stigma that needed to be concealed (Kaplan 2019:44). Survivors who wanted to talk about sexual violence were silenced after the war. These stories were too problematic and disturbing to hear, and could strike back at the victim, resulting in shaming and stigmatization; this silencing has also involved historians and museums (Summer 2009; Waxman 2009; Sinnreich 2008).

Sexual violence became a taboo subject and a stigma also in their host country, Sweden. As Skeggs puts it, sexuality was

not compatible with being feminine and respectable (1997:99, 115–116). This is also evident in the report of Gerda Kjellberg above, showing the importance of being a “virgo intacta”. The women who got the doctor to write them a certificate of being “untouched” were using the controlling practices in their favour. By having the documents translated into Polish, they strategically turned their vulnerability into a strength and performed a kind of intellectual resistance. This resistance, operating in line with the power structures, can be understood as tactic in de Certeau’s sense. But this was not always an available choice.

A tactic of more open and defiant resistance was *physical*. The most obvious was to escape the camp. Women jumped out of the window with sheets, cut the fence, escaped on the road or by train. The fence had to be fixed constantly, and extra police guards were hired to keep them in during night. A Dutch woman tried to escape using sheets but fell and hurt her back. Another was caught by her ankles while climbing the fence. Several who managed to escape came back, voluntarily or by police force. It was hard to cope outside without contacts, money, or somewhere to stay.

Other forms of bodily resistance could be refusal to eat or work, or to undergo medical examinations. For example, K.’s refusal to be examined as mentioned above. She also performed hunger strikes and tried to get others to join her. Several women tried to refuse to let doctors examine and treat them. The Dutch woman M., rescued from Ravensbrück in April, was placed in Gunnarps hemmet after various refugee camps and hospital stays. Her medical card shows that three samples to

discover venereal disease were taken on different dates, and that she received injections against syphilis. A note reveals that the treating doctor refused to give her more treatments since she was rowdy, “making a big fuss during the injections”. The bodily resistance worked. She did not get any more treatment, although that might not have favoured her situation in the long run.

There was a noticeable dualism between appraised “gratefulness” and detested “ungratefulness”. Competences and behaviours coded feminine were constantly assessed. K.’s opposition in words and bodily actions such as hunger strike, fury, and written complaints, made her ungrateful and rude in the eyes of the camp management. Playing along, looking clean and tidy, being on time, and never complaining about chores was the grateful, feminine, and hence rewarded opposite.

Unlike that of Polish K., the evaluation of former “Lagerälteste” German-Polish B.’s behaviour is benevolent, with epithets like “proper”, “tidy” and “polite”. She was punctual, considered diligent in needlework, and quick to learn at cooking. V. whom K. had recognized as Anweiserin, was assessed as “neat”, and “the most self-controlled of the Polish”, and being “able and brisk at cleaning and doing laundry”. The middle-aged German Jewish widow M. was described in a positive tone as being lively at housework and “humble”. The Czechoslovakian Jewish H. who was married but had been separated from her “Aryan” husband also had the camp manager’s liking, taking on duties of cooking, cleaning, carrying firewood, or shovelling snow without complaints. She was called “the most sensible, despite her southern temperament”, since in “con-

flicts” between Jews and non-Jews “it is often Mrs. H. who takes the first step to reconciliation. In an answer to the Control Agency about her sexual morality, due to her engagement to a Swedish man, Edin vouched for her respectability.

The assessments of the women can be understood in several ways. First, that the camp administration did not seem to take notice of their experiences of suffering in the concentration camps, nor their inter-relations, but rather, paid attention to their behaviour, and their self-control. Secondly, judging from and comparing statements about the women, their nationality or ethnicity does not seem to have been very significant; whether she was a Jew or a Catholic, Polish or Norwegian. The women receiving kinder remarks were mostly educated, somewhat older women, married or widowed. What mattered most was the degree to which they could uphold feminine competences and respectability, such as making the bed, cooking, cleaning, and display virtuous and “grateful” behaviour. The assessments affected their room for manoeuvre. Being less educated, young, and with a sexual stigma made it hard to perform the right kind of femininity, and thereby being granted leave of absence and citizenship. On their own, respectability was out of reach. These women had to deploy other tactics to improve their situation, such as bodily resistance, escaping, or the prime heterosexual signifier of respectability: engagement or marriage (Skeggs 1997:126). This tactic to resist a bleak fate could be called *relational*. Getting married to a Swedish man seems to have been a successful tactic for those who wanted to stay in Sweden, if they succeeded in finding a spouse, which was a precarious balancing act.

Repatriation or Citizenship, Balancing Acts

Some women pursued Swedish men by writing letters, answering contact ads, or using other ways to make contacts. The internees could only be granted leave of absence from the camp if escorted by camp staff. Their applications were mostly denied either by the camp management or by SUK. When denied, some took great risks to meet men. The fence stands out as a material punctum shared by the internees, the camp management, as well as the local men, although inscribed with different meanings: Hope, fear, lust, and risk. Drawn to the fence, men offered the women cigarettes and alcohol. Some took the opportunity when courting to escape in the night. One Dutch woman even managed a rendezvous with a soldier on the other side of the fence. By lying on either side of a hole and pressing their bodies towards one another, they had an intimate moment. The judgement on her after the event is harsh. The camp report states she: “seemed partly like a child but ran over logs and rocks when she saw a male individual.”

One might ask why they took these risks to meet men. In the eyes of the authorities such behaviour was a proof of the low morals. It was a hard balancing act to find opportunities to meet a man to marry without losing respectability. Some succeeded, many did not. They met men, sometimes had sex, but failed to get a marriage proposal. At other times their marriage was hindered by the SUK. Merely being a repatriate meant being considered “morally risky”, and the ability to adjust to Swedish society was doubted. A common view was that the concentration camp captivity had “morally corrupted” them. A Swedish



2. Hidden in a grove are remains of what locals call “the whore steps”. That is where the women could meet up with Swedish men. At the top of the steps was the main road, hidden from the house and making the men invisible. Photo: Britta Geschwind.

newspaper article about repatriates getting work, claimed that their inability to adjust was not only due to physical and psychological weakness, but also to “moral factors”. “Especially regarding the vast number of young women among the repatriates, the risk of placing them in work is obvious.” For the interned the stakes were even higher, being not only repatriates but also carrying the stigma of sexual deviance.

I suggest that seizing the moment by getting the attention of men was a logical tactic to gain freedom and for some the last remaining chance to earn citizenship in the host country. Marriage to a Swedish man automatically gave a woman Swedish citi-

zenship. The only way to get rid of the stigma was, for some, to risk enhancing it. The government promise that no Polish refugee would be forced to go back if they did not want to do so was in fact conditional. Some “unwanted” refugees who were forcibly taken to the ferry back to Poland tried to escape by jumping off it as it left the docks (Bogatic 2011:185).

Young K. did not want to go back to Poland. Her parents and siblings had all been imprisoned in concentration camps and not heard from since. Her right knee was unusable due to a bombing. It was however decided that she was to be expelled from the country. Her appeals to the foreign committee were not heard. The camp director had advised SUK not to take her pleas into consideration. K. also wrote to the National Medical Board asking for consent to stay to get help with her knee. The camp director Anna Edin then sent a letter herself, stressing the doctor’s opinion that nothing could be done about the knee, “in the event that she should raise the issue again in order to stay in Sweden”. Her opinion was that K. would not fit into the society, and that the best place “for the poor girl would be a reformatory”. K. also tried to find a Swedish man, with no luck. Like K., the Polish-German B. did not want to go back to Poland either. She was granted permission for her engagement with a Swedish man, but after interventions from the man’s brother, opposing it to SUK, it was revoked. The brother stated that B. had manipulated his “simple-minded” brother into marriage to gain citizenship, and that he had no means to support a wife. The authorities concurred. Pleas from the spouse-to-be did not help. Nor did the help of camp manager Edin, testifying be-

fore the Foreign Committee about her high morality. B. was to be deported for her acts of cruelty in the Nazi concentration camps. The two women whom K. had accused of brutality in Ravensbrück were to be deported too. So was K. The four women were scheduled to be deported on the same transport. The camp director opposed this, but not out of concern for K.

For the 3 other Polish women, I ask that, if possible, K. is not sent with the same transport as them, as she will most certainly tell everyone on the ship the accusations against the three. She was (underlined) one of those who exposed 2 of them so that they were detained here, and for every new one who comes here, she willingly tells about it. The 3 Polish women humbly ask to avoid having her as a travel companion, if they must travel back to Poland.

Edin acted according to her view that the detention of the former camp overseers was a protection from hate and retributions from other survivors. K. was deported on 13 May, the others on 6 May 1946.

Although marriage could be a successful tactic to gain citizenship, it did not always come easy, or without sacrifices. This can be exemplified with the words of two well-educated Polish Catholic survivors who succeeded in obtaining Swedish citizenship. They were not among those detained but shared their experiences of concentration camps and transport to Sweden.

G. had dreamt of being a cosmetologist, a career for which she had studied in Poland. She had been captured during the Warsaw uprising in 1944 after witnessing rapes and herself being subjected to violence and attempted rape. Soon after her rescue from Bergen-Belsen, she married a Swedish man and became a mother and

housewife. G. could not pursue her career in cosmetology in Sweden since she had lost all her papers, and her husband did not want her to work.

I am free since I married. First and foremost, that. He did not want me to work. And it was what it was. Then I had it relatively good. He did as well as he...he worked in three places, just so that I could relax. I should be free. I should be able to live like a normal person.

The intimacy of marriage was psychologically demanding. G. had a tough time getting pregnant, “the poison was in me”, she said. Asked about her feelings when meeting her husband, she replied: “I was very cold, and it was a pity for him, and he asked me to get used to it.” But with her new life, she explained, she got to go to Poland and visit her closest ones, friends from college.

L. had been a Red Cross Nurse in Poland and was imprisoned in Ravensbrück from 1940 until her rescue. She met her Swedish husband, a businessman, at a dinner.

He liked me and asked me if I wanted to be his wife. I laughed. He was older than me. So, I told the superintendent at the children’s hospital [her workplace] and she said, “L., you shouldn’t think about the fact that he is older. You should think that you will get a home, a husband. You can’t always live here. You’re getting older. You should take him with all your arms [sic] and say yes.”

L. also had problems getting pregnant. When struggling she had thought: “they fixed me, the Germans, they injured me in one of the many inspections in the concentration camp.” But eventually she had two boys whom she raised on her own when her old husband died.

Conclusions

By following the internees, we have gained insight into how the female survivor was constructed as a social category formed by views on gender, sexuality, class, age, and ethnicity. By relating the official authorities’ statements to women’s dossiers and letters, the view of “right” and “wrong” female behaviour has emerged. The qualities considered desirable were juxtaposed with what was classified as the unwanted. It has shed light on tactics the women could develop to improve their situation: intellectual, bodily, and relational. The tactics depended on the degree to which a woman could pass as feminine and respectable. We have also seen how the humiliations from the concentration camps could follow the women to Sweden. This affected both how they were viewed by the authorities and how they reacted to the reception practices and categorizations. Their experiences of trauma are vital in understanding their possibilities to adjust, to “pass” as respectable females, and to gain Swedish citizenship.

Gunnarpshemmet is on the one hand remarkable, on the other it has similarities to other kinds of institutions for “deviant” women in Scandinavia. The gendered praxis – the care, segregation and ordering of bodies and spaces – needs to be understood in relation to the care and control of the emerging welfare state. Gunnarpshemmet is a kind of litmus test for how gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity formed women’s lives in Sweden at this time. But these women faced even greater challenges to prove themselves as “good” and respectable women, being repatriates and some also carrying the stigma of “asocial” from the Nazi classification system with them. The control and concern for general health

and sexual morals simultaneously served as tools in controlling the female reproductive body, and especially the foreign and deviant body. Although with vastly diverse consequences, the underlying ideas on which the controlling practices built, were closely related in Sweden and Nazi Germany.

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Notes

- 1 Previously the villa had functioned as an orphanage for 24 Jewish refugee children who had come to Sweden with the rescue operation “Kindertransport”. In an advertisement from the Jewish congregation to sell the property, it is described as “well suited for holiday-home or orphanage” (*Judisk krönika*, sept. 1943 no. 7, p. 102).
- 2 *Malmö Museer*, Berndt Jonsson’s collection, Photo BJ 001101.
- 3 National Archives (Sw. Riksarkivet, RA), World War II Camp archives (Sw. Andra världskrigets lägerarkiv), Gunnarpshemmet, correspondence, vol. 4.
- 4 The diverse group were given various descriptions: refugees, foreigners, repatriandi, and the rescued of 1945. I use the term detainees when I talk of all the women who were incarcerated. When talking of the former Nazi concentration camp prisoners I refer to them as repatriates when discussing the perspective of the authorities, and as survivors when discussing the Jewish as well as non-Jewish individuals. They might also be called displaced persons, but this term was not commonly used in Sweden at that time.
- 5 Skeggs’s work focuses on respectability linked to gender, sexuality, and the working class, but her theoretical framework, expanding on Bourdieu’s thinking about cultural and symbolic capital, is applicable to other power relations for example, ethnicity, nationality, civil status, and age.
- 6 Sw. Statens utlänningskommission (SUK)
- 7 Sw. Andra världskrigets lägerarkiv (SUKL).
- 8 Sw. Riksarkivet (RA).
- 9 Also called the Tjörnarps detention camp.
- 10 Sw. Sociala byrån.
- 11 Sw. Medicinalstyrelsen.
- 12 Sw. Kontrollbyrån.
- 13 Sw. Polska Källinstitutet i Lund, Pol. “Polski Instytut Zrodlowy w Lund”. The PIZ witness collection *Witnessing Genocide* in the Library of Lund University (LUB) has been digitized and to a large extent translated into English. Thanks to Tomasz Lesniak at the department of collections at LUB for swift help with speeding up the translation of the document in question. There are several works on PIZ, its leader Zygmunt Łakociński (1905–1987), and the team of survivors collecting the 514 in-depth interviews mostly in 1945–46 (e.g. Dahl 2021, 2011, 2007; Martinez 2021a, b; Rudny 2005).
- 14 For an overview of Swedish refugee policy, see Byström 2012; Byström & Frohnert 2013; Åmark 2011.
- 15 Copy with “Gunnarpshemmet” written on it. Regulations (Reglemente) concerning detention camps, signed Gustav Möller. SUKL, Gunnarpshemmet, vol. 4. See also SUK, the Social Bureau A1:2. Protocol stating that the regulations should also apply to Gunnarpshemmet.
- 16 RA, SUKL, Gunnarpshemmet, vols. 1–5.
- 17 Barthes’ analysis is about photographs, but as argued by the ethnologist Lotten Gustafsson Reinius, the concept can be applied to material objects.
- 18 Several interviews in the Ravensbrück archive at Kulturen refer to the feelings of fear of the washing and delousing procedures and fenced camps. See also a quotation from Livia Fränkel’s diary about coming to a barbed wired Swedish camp quoted in the exhibition “Speaking Memories, the Last Witness of the

- Holocaust” at the Swedish History Museum (cited in Geschwind 2020:150).
- 19 The number differ between sources, stating 25,000–31,000 people.
 - 20 This was the case also with other kinds of detained “deviant” women at this time, deemed “asocial” and “imbecile” at mental institutions such as Västra Mark as described by Kristina Engwall. While reading her thesis, as well as Lars-Eric Jönsson’s (1998) thesis about other mental institutions, I could see parallels to the women at Gunnarps hemmet regarding Swedish sexual policy.
 - 21 Danish and Norwegian women who had been with Germans became victims of extensive hate, violent “street justice”, and subjected to social stigma and humiliations, as were their children.
 - 22 LUB, PIZ, Witnessing genocide, Witness record 232, Lund University Library (LUB).
 - 23 RA, SUKL, Ronneby Brunn, vol. 1., SUKL Gunnarps hemmet, vol. 3.
 - 24 There were also children. Most died of starvation, neglect, or were killed, although mothers and other prisoners did what they could to keep them alive. There was also a smaller, separate camp for men who conducted construction works, and a youth camp (Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück, Ravensbrück memorial website).
 - 25 The “bunker” was the dreaded punishment block, where prisoners were isolated and tortured.
 - 26 Poems and art circulated and were vital for resilience, resistance, and keeping hope. Objects in the collections of LUB, and in the Ravensbrück collection of Kulturen in Lund, need to be researched and translated with more interest and regarding their materiality, methodologically and analytically, something I hope to explore further.
 - 27 Sas-Hoszowska gave the rabbit as a gift to Ludwika Broel Plater 1944 (1885–1972), later one of the most devoted survivors working for PIZ. Sas-Hoszowska has left a witness record in the online witness database “39–45, chronicles of terror”, Witold Pilecki Institute of Solidarity and Valor. Archive provider, Institute of National Remembrance.
 - 28 Concentration camps used for medical experiments had different “specialities”, Ravensbrück’s being limbs.
 - 29 Most survived but were crippled for life. See the testimonies of Zofia Sokulska and Maria Broel-Plate at the Nuremberg trials (transcripts 920, 811), available at the Nuremberg project at Harvard University Library. See also Cousins 1959.
 - 30 There were also other atrocities within the hospital block, inflicted on women of various backgrounds: amputation, sterilisation, and abortion.
 - 31 This dread was described by a Ravensbrück survivor interviewed in the 1990s: “It was hell. One lived under constant threat; would one be taken out for these medical experiments? Would they come and pick you out?” The interviewee explains they picked the girls out at night, and that they choose healthy Polish girls from Lublin (Kulturen, Ravensbrück archives, interview CCIX:1, 6).
 - 32 This categorization was arbitrary. It could be enough to be found in the wrong place at the wrong time to be deemed a prostitute. Similarly, “criminal” could mean someone who had broken Nazi laws.
 - 33 Translated from Swedish by the author.
 - 34 A., like many other witnesses’, points out which prisoner functionaries and guards were cruel, and which were gentler.
 - 35 Letter from Karin Axell to central curator Rina Branting, RA, SUKL, Frostavallen 1943–1946, vol. 2.
 - 36 LUB, PIZ, Witnessing Genocide, Witness Testimony 232, 1946.
 - 37 See also Kulturen, Ravensbrück archive, interviews no. CCIX:1,25, p. 4, CCIX:1,18, pp.14–15, CCIX:1,23, p. 6.
 - 38 Kjellberg was one of Sweden’s first female doctors. She was committed to the right to sexual education and had a long career working against prostitution and venereal diseases

- (RA, The Dictionary of Swedish National Biography, "Gerda Kjellberg", Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, accessed 14 December 2021).
- 39 Report, Gerda Kjellberg "Angående vissa flyktingläger för kvinnor" September 1945. SUK, SoS, the National Medical Board 8, Investigations (Utredningar).
- 40 PM 24/8 to Axel Höjer, SUK, the Social Bureau (Sociala Byrån) b2:1.
- 41 The doctor stated that the incident was due to stress, since he had only two hours to take 50 gynaecological samples and send them to the bacteriology department in Lund for cultivation (the National Medicinal Board, the Director General, incoming letters (Generaldirektören, inkommande brev, 1945-46, E 2:1.).
- 42 RA, SUKL, Gunnarshemmet, vol. 5.
- 43 Camp report signed Anna Edin, SUKL, Gunnarshemmet, vol. 2.
- 44 Letter signed Sten Jornäs, 2 February 1946, to SUK Notarie Senning, on the topic of having K. transferred. Copy in SUKL Gunnarshemmet, vol. 3.
- 45 Antagonism between refugees was widespread in the Swedish refugee camps, not least due to anti-Semitism (Kvist Geverts 2008; Gottfarb 2006; Olsson 1995:112; Giloh 2016).
- 46 Several witness records kept at the PIZ archive at LUB attest to brutal acts and deadly abuse carried out by her hand (LUB, PIZ, witness testimonies 47,77, 173). B. had lived most of her time in Germany and spoke German fluently. Her father had managed to get a certificate as "Volksdeutsche" (ethnic German), but not the mother. Some survivors witnessed that B. had a red triangle with a P., but that she had also worn the triangle without the P., marking her as "Volksdeutsche".
- 47 RA, SUKL, Gunnarshemmet, vols. 1, 2, Dossier of B., SUK, the Control Agency, H1.
- 48 Due to the sensitive nature of the subject, I have chosen to anonymize all internees at Gunnarshemmet. The opposite approach is taken for individuals who have chosen to witness in the media to make their story heard, and anonymization would work against that.
- State officials and professionals acting within the camp organization appear under their own name since their statements were made as part of their professional role, not as individuals.
- 49 My translation from Swedish. Letter to SUK from the camp director. RA, SUKL, Gunnarshemmet Vol. 2
- 50 SUK, Kanslibyrån, vol. F1 AC:12095.
- 51 Thanks to Florence Fröhlig for the translation from French. RA, SUKL, Gunnarshemmet, vol. 3.
- 52 SUK, Andra världskrigets lägerarkiv (SUKL), Gunnarshemmet, vol. 2.
- 53 Gunnarshemmet protokoll 26 November 1945.
- 54 Sven Laurell at the Control Agency had asked Edin about the (questioned) sincerity of the relationship between H. and a Swedish man she was engaged to. Edin wrote that she could vouch for H.'s respectability since she had controlled the correspondence between H. and her fiancé. RA, SUKL, Gunnarshemmet, vol. 3.
- 55 Most of the female survivors interviewed in the late 1990s married Swedish men shortly after their arrival (Kulturen, the Ravensbrück archive).
- 56 Report signed A. Edin to Sam Ahlford, the Control Agency (Kontrollbyrå) SUKL, Gunnarshemmet, vol. 2.
- 57 Report signed A. Edin to SUK. SUKL, Gunnarshemmet, vol. 1.
- 58 *Expressen*, 10 August 1945. Delikat "omskolning": Konzentrationslägerfångarna får gå ut i förvärvsarbetet ("Delicate" retraining, Concentration Camp prisoners may go to gainful work.) The Royal Library (Kungliga biblioteket) KB, News archives, search terms: "repatriandi" and "concentration camp."
- 59 Interview CCIX:1,32, p. 15, Kulturen, Ravensbrück archives.
- 60 Interview CCX1:1,23, Kulturen, Ravensbrück archives.

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