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Male Homosexual Relations in the Concentration Camp. Strategies of Discursivization (Summary)

The dissertation aligns with the notion of “queering Holocaust studies” (Spurlin 2020; Hájková 2023) and implements the demand for analyzing male experiences—dominant in the discourse on war and the Holocaust, universalized as human—through the “gendered” lens (Schweitzer 2016; Krondorfer, Creangă 2020). The author examines the Polish discourse surrounding non-heteronormativity in concentration camps, focusing on narratives of former Polish political prisoners of Nazi concentration camps. By concentrating on the dominant group within the “good company of victims” (Stańczak-Wislicz 2011) rather than the perspective of the marginalized and underrepresented group (prisoners with the pink triangle), the author tries not to reproduce exclusions but to draw attention to issues that have been overlooked and require analysis. The research scope is thus expanded to include potentially controversial and non-conforming topics, themes, and problems outside the mainstream camp master narratives (hunger, physical violence, prisoners’ self-help, the role of religion or art in the survival process).

To demonstrate the internal diversity of the Polish concentration camp discourse—largely shaped by former Polish political prisoners—the author identifies five discursive strategies: *marginalizing* (no mention of camp homosexuality and/or prisoners with the pink triangle), *rationalizing* (presenting such relationships as a result of a long stay in the camp, the absence of women, and the impossibility of fulfilling a heteronormative scenario), *purifying* (presenting such relationships as belonging to a specific national group and a specific category of prisoners, usually German criminal prisoners), *homophobic* (criminalizing the phenomenon, using pejorative language), and *transgressive* (all kinds of deviations from accepted discursive norms, such as describing one’s own experiences with various forms of camp homosexuality). Numerous examples demonstrate that individual strategies—even seemingly irreconcilable ones—can coexist simultaneously.

Chapter 1 – *Queering the Polish Camp Discourse* – opens with a reconnaissance of the research field and commenting on key issues in the areas of gender studies, queer studies, masculinity studies, Holocaust studies, and war studies. Polish political prisoners – an internally diverse group – are meticulously characterized (Wóycicka 2009, Wawrzyniak 2009), also using the category of “entangled subjects” (Rothberg 2019). The author discusses contemporary conceptualizations of wartime sexuality and sexual violence (Heineman 2002; Herzog 2009, 2011; Shik 2009) as well as homosexuality itself, pointing out its problematic nature (McIntosh 1968; Mayer 2005; Foucault 2010; Kochanowski 2010) while justifying its application in the dissertation. The portrayal of the socio-cultural panorama of twentieth-century Poland in relation to homosexuality aims to show that individual perspectives were largely shaped by prevailing cultural patterns and stereotypes (especially regarding masculinity). The research subject, scope, and main objectives, the category of discursive strategies, and individual strategies are also closely examined. After presenting significant theoretical and terminological contexts (Mosse 1988, 2001; Kosofsky Sedgwick 1985; Bersani 1996; Mills 1997; Howarth 2008), the author refers to the notion of “rescue history” (Domańska 2014), highlighting the desire to recover marginalized camp themes.

Chapter 2 – *Camp Homosexuality in Archival Materials* – begins with a recapitulation of contemporary reflections on the category of the archive (Ernst 2005, Ulicka 2014, Wichrowska 2021) and a commentary on the corpus of analyzed materials. The analysis first focuses on texts representing marginalizing strategies (generalizing the issue, avoiding detailed discussions), followed by rationalizing and purifying strategies (rhetoric of “fighting for the right to live” on one side and “moral strength” on the other), then homophobic strategies (criminalizing the phenomenon, equating homosexuality with abnormal, brutal behaviors). The next subsection discusses examples of transgressive discourses, referring to the “topic difficult for a Pole writing memoirs” (Duszyński 1966). Following that, the chapter describes the contexts of such characteristics: phenomena of sexual barter, violence, and privilege (Hájková 2013, 2021; Levenkron 2010). A separate part of the chapter is dedicated to examples of narratives by former Polish political prisoners portraying themselves as would-be pipels. In this context, the author refers, among other things, to the category of “unreadability” derived from literary studies (Lang 2017).

Chapter 3 – *Camp Homosexuality in Oral Accounts* – begins by discussing the specificity of video testimonies and archives, along with the credibility issues of oral narratives (Assmann 2006; Pinchevski 2012). Institutional frameworks of testimony and the issue of co-

responsibility for them are also described – in the context of interviewee and the interviewer, as well as the entity commissioning the interview. The focus is on the policies of the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, the “KARTA” Center, and the History Meeting House. The chapter then introduces the corpus of materials and search indices. Oral accounts regarding prisoners with the pink triangle are the first to undergo analysis, revealing vastly different discursive strategies – marginalizing and transgressive. The next subsection discusses the transgressive dimension of personal narratives about pipels and sexual violence, emphasizing the importance of the “Ausblendung” category (Schütze, Kaźmierska 2013; Czyżewski, Piotrowski, Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1996) in this context. Testimonies of August Kowalczyk and Andrzej Kotarski, who provided two oral accounts each, addressing their own homosexual experiences during their time in concentration camps, are separately analyzed. The chapter concludes with homophobic discourses, where pipels are labeled “privileged boys,” and prisoners with the pink triangle are called “fags.” The chapter ends with a reflection on the problematic nature of queer (in)visibility and the subjectivity of memory (Fejes, Balogh 2013; Passerini 2018).

Chapter 4 – *Male Homosexual Relationships in Published Memoirs* – is dedicated to analyzing the discourse on various forms of male camp homosexuality in published memoirs of former Polish political prisoners (the corpus consists of a total of 212 publications). The chapter begins with a reflection on the issues of (self)censorship and awareness of social norms. The category of the “dignity of a Polish political prisoner” is characterized, with the concept of the “heterosexual matrix” (Butler 1999, 2018) proving significant, along with the role of asexual male friendship. The analysis starts with excerpts from memoirs where, within marginalizing, purifying, and homophobic discourses, prisoners with the pink triangle are mentioned. Subsequently, examples of homophobic narratives are analyzed, where non-heteronormative relationships are referred to as “a peculiar sexual perversion,” subjected to discursive criminalization, medicalization, and pathologization. Further, examples of purifying discourses are examined, associating the phenomenon mainly with Germanness, especially with German criminal prisoners in camps. Critical scrutiny is also given to examples of rationalizing discourses and, lastly, transgressive discourses, which describe intimate, consensual, and positively valued homosexual relationships of former Polish prisoners. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the “double bind” trap (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1985).

Chapter 5 – *The Pipel Figure in Published Camp Memoirs* – is entirely devoted to a specific group of forgotten victims of Nazism. The author introduces their place in scholarly

reflection on the Holocaust and discusses the pipel figure in global Holocaust literature and the published memoirs of former prisoners. After providing a summary of the pipel figure in the memoirs of former Polish political prisoners, the author indicates correlations between the absence of the sexual component and positive characteristics of the pipel, as well as the presence of the sexual aspect and negative portrayals. The chapter then explores the motif of the “battle for youth” present in many memoirs, depicting pipels as objects of depravity (by German criminal prisoners) and rehabilitation (by Polish political prisoners). A subsection is dedicated to narratives illustrating personal interactions with pipels, and finally, transgressive narratives of former Polish prisoners as would-be pipels are analyzed. The conclusion critically reflects on the long-standing reluctance of the prisoners and academics communities to engage with such topics (Ringelheim 1999; Mühlhäuser 2021; Zabransky 2021).

Chapter 6 is a case study focused on the figure of “Bubi” in the Polish camp discourse. The initial part of the chapter introduces the infamous Jewish pipel from KL Lublin and the reasons for dedicating a case study to him, despite the glaring lack of specific biographical details. An attempt to historicize this figure includes a characterization of the specifics of KL Lublin and the situation of young Jewish prisoners detained there, juxtaposed with chronologically earliest sources mentioning “Bubi.” Based on published memoirs, archival accounts, oral narratives, and other sources, characteristics of the pipel’s identity, behavior, and external appearance are recapitulated, leading to the identification of three tropes crucial for the formation of this figure: Jewish, queer, and patricidal, along with their intersections (Boyarin, Itzkovitz, Pellegrini 2003; Carey 2017; Huebel 2022). The author contextually refers to the figure of “Bubi” in the memoirs of Jewish survivors of Majdanek. In conclusion, the author proposes treating “Bubi” as a discursive figure rather than strictly historical and justifies further research.

Chapter 7 – *The Pipel Figure in Polish Stories and Dramas about Camps. Identity and Universalizing Discourses* – analyzes representations of pipels in Polish camp literature. It begins with the introduction of the authors of the analyzed works: Tadeusz Borowski, Roman Bratny, Marian Pankowski, and Mieczysław Lurczyński. In the section dedicated to the figure of the Polish pipel as a German executioner, the author critically discusses the story *Here in Our Auschwitz* (Witek, a pipel portrayed as an arch-criminal) and the drama *Teatrowanie nad świętym barszczem* (Zdzisiu, an intelligent pipel with traditions). The analysis then focuses on the story *Większa szansa*, presenting the relationship between a Jewish pipel and a German SS man in the style of a queer romance (Ahmed 2010; Trušník 2009). The chapter concludes by

interpreting Borowski's story *A Day at Harmenz* and both versions of Lurczyński's drama *Stara Gwardia/Alte Garde/Die Alte Garde*, illustrating the process of pipel unification.

Chapter 8 – *Camp Homosexuality and the Figure of the Homosexual in the Play Akropolis to the Words of St. Wyspiański (1968) by Jerzy Grotowski and Józef Szajna* – the author provides a recapitulation of the research on the play, pointing out interpretive “cocoon,” and justifying the need for new readings (Kosiński 2014, 2015; Niziołek 2013). The analysis focuses on three main motifs: the camp motif (Akropolis as Auschwitz), the homosexual motif (the rhetoric of absence and degenerative potential), and the abject motif (“anthropological machine” by Agamben and the repulsion effect). The author presents in detail the figure of the camp homosexual and contrasts it with the figure of the Muslim prevailing in the critical reception of the play (Swat-Pawlicka 2004; Domańska 2009). In conclusion, the author points out the profanatory potential (Agamben 2006) and the “resurrection” potential (Aronson-Lehavi 2023) of the play in the context of the motif of camp homosexuality.

Chapter 9 – *Camp Homosexuality on Screen: Olimpiada 40 (1980) and Kornblumenblau (1989)* – is dedicated to representations of camp homosexuality in 20th-century Polish cinema. The author begins by discussing the poetics of representing homosexual experiences in Polish cinematography (Mazierska 2009; Kaźmierska 2012). The plot of *Olimpiada 40* and its reception as a movie “about broader matters,” praising a “beautiful theme,” a “sense of dignity,” and “spiritual victory” is recapitulated. The author also proposes an interpretation of the homoerotic theme, justifying its previous absence in scholarly reflection through the poetics of the Olympics as an “aperture” for homoeroticism. The concept of “masculinity as spectacle” (Neale 2001) is referred to, along with observations on intimate, coded feminine behaviors within camaraderie (Kühne 2017). The chapter then discusses the plot and reception of the film *Kornblumenblau* (1989), pointing out common interpretative tropes (e.g., presenting the film as a parable of the “gray zone”). The previously discussed (Jagielski 2013, Borowicz 2020, Kwieciński 2021) homoerotic theme is analyzed, and the director's projection of readings of the film is examined. The existing interpretations are expanded with additional queer tropes and motifs (Doan 2006). The chapter then extensively explores the similarities and differences between Wosiewicz's vision and the memoir of Kazimierz Tymiński (Tymiński 1985), on which the director was supposed to base the movie. In consequence, homosexuality is treated as a cinematic counter-narrative. In conclusion, attention is drawn to the “Eastern front” motif as part of the discourse on camp homosexuality, and both film narratives are examined in terms of reproducing communal symbols (Saryusz-Wolska 2010).

Chapter 10 – *Conclusion. “Bright Colors, Dark Colors”* – the author refers to the contemporary memory of Polish political prisoners (documentary films, exhibitions, remembrance days), the problem of its instrumentalization, and the need for a critical revision of the image of this victim group, which holds a dominant position in the Polish camp discourse. The author also points out instances of critical self-reflection by its members and, referring to contemporary reflections (Kuba 2019), emphasizes the need to expand the range of issues and topics analyzed in this context. Additionally, the author highlights further queer tropes that have been overlooked or marginalized over the years.