Introduction

From August 1942 to April 1945, Siemens & Halske AG maintained its own so-called production facility right next to the Ravensbrück women's concentration camp. Up to 2,300 female prisoners were deployed in forced labor there at the same time. At the center of this volume are excerpts from numerous texts of survivor memories and reports by Ravensbrück survivors who were forced to work in the armaments factory. It contains a cross section of the extensive genre of autobiographical texts: letters, witness statements, arrest reports, diaries, claims for compensation, autobiographies, and interviews.

A key concern of the editors was to track down and publish less well-known reports that have to date hardly been taken into proper account in Ravensbrück research in the German language. In advance, several researchers examined, and compiled testimonials from various different countries and in different languages. In this way, reports were collected from former prisoners in Germany, Austria, Poland, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Denmark, Slovenia, Croatia, France, Luxembourg, Russia, Ukraine, Belgium, Italy, and Hungary. Some of them were translated into German for the first time for this publication. The different perceptions create a differentiated picture that refers to complex historical realities and is able to reflect a spectrum of working and living conditions. The texts shed light on the system of forced labor in the context of the concentration camp, questions of discouragement and hope, and the women's will for self-assertion and resistance.

Today, only a few people can report in detail about forced labor at Siemens. The annotated publication of autobiographical reports from survivors can—especially due to the subjective nature of the memories—provide future generations with a clear understanding of what happened. This volume aims to make a contribution to better understanding the his-

Forced Labor for Siemens in the Women's Concentration Camp Ravensbrück
Reports from Contemporary Witnesses
Edited by International Friends Association of the Ravensbrück Memorial
https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/PlieningerForced
Not for Resale

tory of the Siemens production facility from the perspective of the forced laborers. The testimonies of survivors should also be made usable for educational practice. In addition to imparting historical knowledge, the examination of the sources and biographies collected here is intended to strengthen the development of historical skills, such as the ability to interpret and analyze personal testimonies and their narrative patterns. The multi-perspectivity of the different memories serves to spur readers to ask their own questions about the reports and thus to promote a reflective critical engagement with history. The first suggestions for such pedagogical work are provided by a film about a workshop in which the participants of the Ravensbrück Generations Forum August 2015 had already dealt with excerpts from the source material in advance.[1]

Forced Labor for Siemens & Halske AG

If one looks at the history of the Siemens armaments plant in Ravensbrück, the first question that arises is how it came about that Siemens & Halske AG moved part of its production to the immediate vicinity of the women's concentration camp in 1942. This development was closely linked to the company's important role in the German war economy as well as to the steadily increasing exploitation of concentration camp prisoners in armaments production from 1942 on. Siemens was one of the leading industrial companies in the German Empire. Founded in 1847, the company rose to become one of the world's largest and most important electrical companies within just a few decades.

As early as the mid-1930s, Siemens was greatly benefiting from the arms industry and the enormous increase in orders associated with it. In the following years, numerous new plants were set up to meet the required and targeted expansion of production. With the beginning of the war, the German Wehrmacht invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, and the requirements for production performance continued to increase due to government orders, but at the same time around a tenth of Siemens's core workforce was drafted into the Wehrmacht.[2] The shortage, in particular of workers and unskilled staff, was to be filled by the recruitment of new workers. However, unlike during World War I, civilian women's work was not primarily used because the National Socialist ideology was against a greater involvement of married German women in production. The number of German workers at Siemens actually declined during the war years.[3] Instead, the company used forced laborers.

The provision of the requested workforce depended on the approval of the responsible employment offices, which decided on the basis of the

importance of the respective production for the war economy: according to the personnel documents that have been preserved, at least 80,000, but it is estimated that up to 120,000, persons worked in forced labor for the Siemens company in the period 1940–45. The forced laborers were deployed in almost all factories, both within the German Reich and in the occupied territories.[4]

From the end of 1940 on, initially more and more foreign civilian workers were employed by Siemens. Most of them only came to work in the German Reich voluntarily on a conditional basis because, for example, they had fallen into economic hardship as a result of the war and the occupation of their home countries, had been recruited with false promises, or had been forced to work by the German occupying power. By far the largest group of Siemens forced laborers were the so-called Eastern workers. *Ostarbeiter* was the National Socialist term for civilian workers who came from the areas of the Soviet Union occupied from 22 June 1941 and who were forcibly deported to the German Reich in their millions.[5] They were obliged to wear the "OST" badge and were mostly housed in separate camps and treated much worse than forced laborers from other countries.[6]

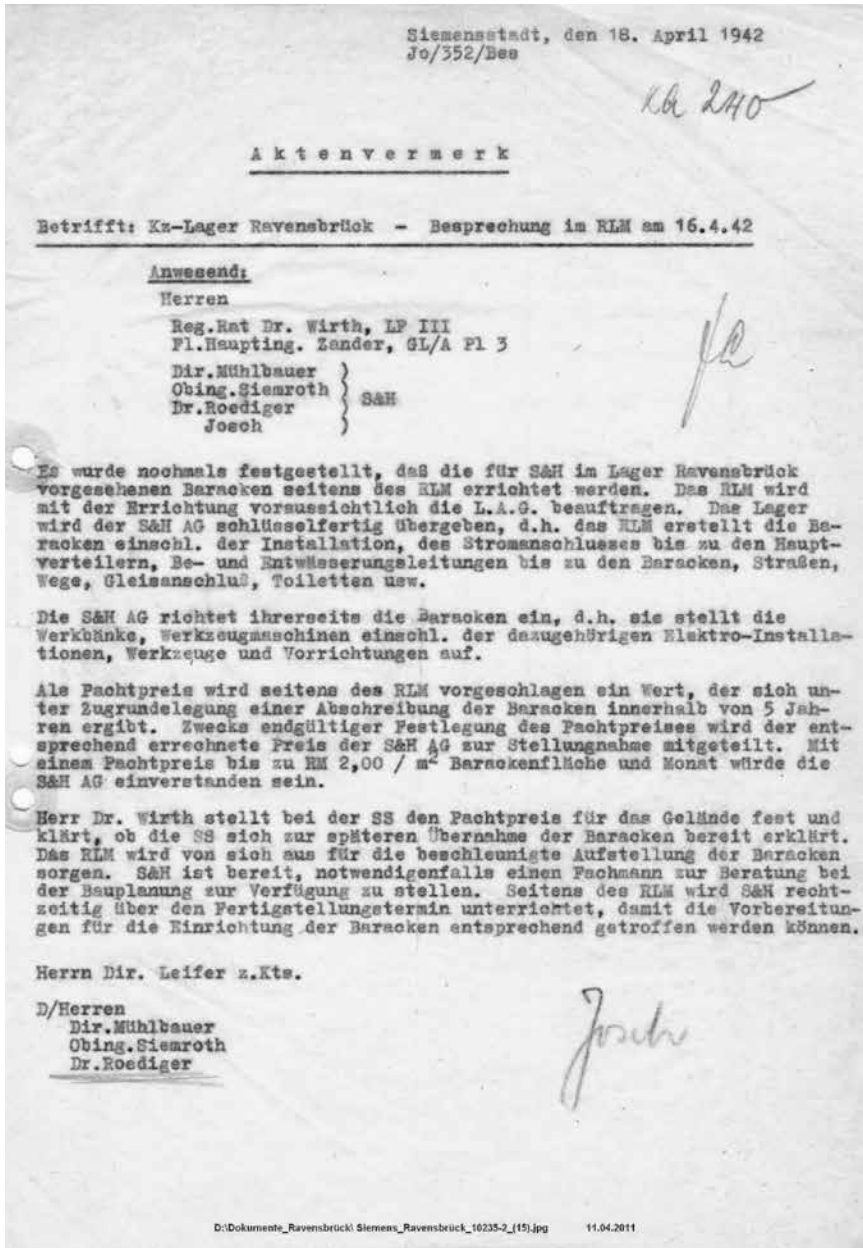
Also from the end of 1940, Siemens & Halske AG employed a large number of German Jews in its Berlin factories who had been forcibly con-

Figure 0.1. Forced laborer in Berlin-Siemensstadt with a badge "OST," 1943, photographer unknown. *Source: Siemens Historical Institute, SAA 32 526.*

scripted by the authorities.[7] They worked separately from the rest of the workforce in separate departments. The Jewish workers were paid significantly less than others and were also additionally subject to a particularly great mounting pressure, since working in a company that was important for armaments could protect them, at least for a while, from the deportations that began at the end of 1941. The company was very satisfied with the correspondingly high performance and successfully intervened against planned deportations on several occasions of "its" forced laborers, for the last time in August 1942.[8] In February 1943, however, all of the remaining 1,200 Jews who had worked at Siemens up to that point were arrested at their workplaces by the Gestapo as part of the so-called Factory Action and sent on transports to the extermination camps.[9]

Parallel to the steadily increasing number of deportations of Jewish forced laborers from the German Reich, negotiations began between the SS, the Reich Aviation Ministry (RLM), and Siemens management about the employment of concentration camp prisoners.[10] By the spring 1942 at the latest the first agreements were reached on this matter.[11] That was based on a decision by the Führer's headquarters that the concentration camps should from now on be more closely integrated into armaments production. As part of an internal meeting between the SS and the Ministry of Armaments on 16 March 1942, Richard Glücks, the head of the central authority for the administration of the concentration camps—Office Group D of the SS Economic Administration Main Office—announced that at that time several thousand concentration camp prisoners were being considered to be used for military-economic purposes, including six thousand women from the Ravensbrück concentration camp. In this context, however, the Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, who wanted the SS to have a stronger influence in armaments production, had ordered it was necessary that "the support companies . . . relocate their production to the area of the camp, with temporary provisioning of engineers, forepersons, and *Meister* [master craftspersons in their specialty] to train the prisoners."[12]

Siemens was one of the first companies to agree to move their production to a concentration camp. The Reich Aviation Ministry granted the company favorable conditions for setting up the production facility adjacent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. The result of the negotiations was that the RLM took over the complete construction of the factory barracks, including the connections for electricity, water, and telephone. They handed the buildings over to Siemens "ready for occupancy." Siemens, for its part, was responsible for furnishing the buildings and workshops with machines and tools and had to pay a monthly rent



Siemensstadt, den 18. April 1942
Jo/352/Bee

Kb 240

A k t e n v e r m e r k

Betrifft: Kz-Lager Ravensbrück - Besprechung im RLM am 16.4.42

Anwesend:
Herren
Reg.Rat Dr. Wirth, LP III
Fl.Haupting. Zander, GL/A Pl 3
Dir.Mühlbauer, Obing.Siemroth, Dr.Roediger, Josch } S&H

Es wurde nochmals festgestellt, daß die für S&H im Lager Ravensbrück vorgesehenen Baracken seitens des RLM errichtet werden. Das RLM wird mit der Errichtung voraussichtlich die L.A.G. beauftragen. Das Lager wird der S&H AG schlüsselfertig übergeben, d.h. das RLM erstellt die Baracken einschl. der Installation, des Stromanschlusses bis zu den Hauptverteilern, Be- und Entwässerungsleitungen bis zu den Baracken, Straßen, Wege, Gleisanschluß, Toiletten usw.

Die S&H AG richtet ihrerseits die Baracken ein, d.h. sie stellt die Werkbänke, Werkzeugmaschinen einschl. der dazugehörigen Elektro-Installationen, Werkzeuge und Vorrichtungen auf.

Als Pachtpreis wird seitens des RLM vorgeschlagen ein Wert, der sich unter Zugrundelegung einer Abschreibung der Baracken innerhalb von 5 Jahren ergibt. Zwecks endgültiger Festlegung des Pachtpreises wird der entsprechend errechnete Preis der S&H AG zur Stellungnahme mitgeteilt. Mit einem Pachtpreis bis zu RM 2,00 / m² Barackenfläche und Monat würde die S&H AG einverstanden sein.

Herr Dr. Wirth stellt bei der SS den Pachtpreis für das Gelände fest und klärt, ob die SS sich zur späteren Übernahme der Baracken bereit erklärt. Das RLM wird von sich aus für die beschleunigte Aufstellung der Baracken sorgen. S&H ist bereit, notwendigenfalls einen Fachmann zur Beratung bei der Bauplanung zur Verfügung zu stellen. Seitens des RLM wird S&H rechtzeitig über den Fertigstellungstermin unterrichtet, damit die Vorbereitungen für die Einrichtung der Baracken entsprechend getroffen werden können.

Herrn Dir. Leifer z.Kts.

D/Herren
Dir.Mühlbauer
Obing.Siemroth
Dr.Roediger

Josch

D:\Dokumente_Ravensbrück\ Siemens_Ravensbrück_10235-2_(15).jpg 11.04.2011

Figure 0.2. Memo on the state of preparations at the Siemens production site, 18 April 1942. *Source: Siemens Historical Institute, SAA 10235–2.*

for the use of the barracks. Female guards from the Ravensbrück concentration camp were to take over the disciplinary supervision of the prisoners during forced labor, while civilian *Meister*, fitters, and forepersons from Siemens were responsible for directing the work and monitoring the results.

The availability of a large number of female workers played a crucial role in the decision to locate in Ravensbrück. This was also based on the gender-stereotypical assumption that women had "light and skillful hands" and were therefore particularly qualified for the precision mechanical work that was to be carried out at Siemens.[13] The plan was to produce electrical circuits, telephones, microphones, and measuring devices. The location of the Ravensbrück concentration camp was also important for the choice of site. The proximity to Berlin as well as the convenient transport routes by rail and ship enabled quick transport between Berlin-Siemensstadt and the production site. At the same time, Ravensbrück, about 90 km to the north of Berlin, was far enough away from the Reich capital to ensure sufficient security from air raids. By the end of 1944, Siemens & Halske AG had moved three of its branches to Ravensbrück: the Werner Works for Telephones (WWFg), the Werner Works for Radio Equipment and Components (WWR), and the Werner Works for Measuring Devices (WWM).[14] A separate Siemens facility with residential barracks for the prisoners of the work detachment was set up and outfitted directly next to the production site in December 1944.

As early as September 1942, there was a major change in the organization of the forced labor of concentration camp prisoners for the armaments industry: the transfer of production to the main concentration camps had not proven successful in the long term; too few companies were willing to take this step.[15] From then on, companies were encouraged to set up concentration camp subcamps, and in a short time over one thousand such camps were set up throughout the entire Reich.[16] Himmler's order from March 1942 was therefore only valid for just under six months as default specification. Of the few projects initiated, only the Siemens production facility in Ravensbrück was economically successful and remained in operation until the end of the war.[17]

From 1943 on, the company also had concentration camp subcamps built for further prisoner deployments at existing factories or at relocation companies that had been newly set up due to the Allied air raids, for example in Kraslice (Graslitz) and Svatava (Zwodau).[18] In addition to the prisoner deployment in Ravensbrück, which was one of the most extensive for Siemens with a maximum of some 2,300 women, the company had prisoners from the Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Flossenbürg, and Sachsenhausen concentration camps working for them.[19]

Source Material and Source Criticism

Many Siemens forced laborers testified about their experiences during their imprisonment. A wide range of written memories were examined for this volume. In addition to autobiographical testimonies from survivors, contemporary Nazi and company documents were also evaluated. The information contained therein supplements the information provided by the former prisoners and is critically compared in the individual chapter introductions. In addition, it was possible to include image material—for example, historical photos and prisoner drawings. The most important sources are briefly presented below:

1. Among the earliest reports are the protocols of interviews conducted by the Polish Research Institute (PIZ) in Lund with concentration camp survivors after they were evacuated to Sweden.[20] The collection includes a total of five hundred witness reports from Polish prisoners from Ravensbrück and other concentration camps that were written down between October 1945 and November 1946. These included seven interviews with survivors who had worked in the Siemens labor detachment in Ravensbrück. The interviews were conducted in Polish and some of them were later translated into English and German.
2. Another set of sources from the early postwar period consists of witness statements and affidavits from the trial and investigation files of the court cases carried out by the British occupation authorities in Hamburg between 1946 and 1948 against members of the camp SS and the guards as well as against prison functionaries in Ravensbrück concentration camp. The English-language documents are stored in the National Archives in Kew near London. Two of the seven trials addressed, inter alia, the Siemens armaments factory in Ravensbrück and the later Siemens camp. In the first trial, which ran from 5 December 1946 to 3 February 1947, a verdict of ten years in prison was handed down against Eugenia von Skene, who was temporarily the block elder in the Siemens camp. In the sixth trial from 2 July to 21 July 1948, the court acquitted the head of the Siemens camp, Christine Holthöwer, due to a lack of evidence. If no German version was available, the English-language protocols for the original version of this volume were translated into German.
3. The archives of the Foundation for Social History of the 20th Century in Bremen contain files from the Office of Military Government for Germany, US (OMGUS), which concern the entanglement of the German economy within Nazi rule, including a report on Siemens Group. Some of the evidence (exhibits) have been included in this volume.

4. The Central Office of the State Judicial Administration for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes based in Ludwigsburg also contains files from a preliminary investigation into the Ravensbrück women's concentration camp and the Siemens camp from 1959, which include interrogation protocols from both former prisoners and former guards. However, the proceedings were never handed over to a public prosecutor and were not opened.[21]
5. One of the most extensive sources on the subject is the numerous unpublished testimonies contained in the so-called Buchmann inventory in the archives of the Ravensbrück Memorial. After 1990, the memorial reports and other materials collected by Erika Buchmann and other primarily communist prisoners were obtained via several intermediate stopovers from the holdings of the documentation archive on Nazi crimes at the GDR (German Democratic Republic) Ministry of the Interior. In many cases, the origins of the individual reports are not clear, nor is it clear when they were written and whether they were translations. It also contains copies of witness statements, lists of names drawn up after the war, letters, and German translations of foreign publications. Thus, for example, a German working translation of the passages on the Siemens production site from the book edited by Dagmar Hájková, Božena Holečková, Vlasta Kladivová, and others, a collective report by former Czech prisoners, which appeared in Prague in 1960 under the title *Ravensbrück*. Another detention report by Anna Vavak that is important for this volume stems from the Documentation Center of the Austrian Resistance (DÖW) in Vienna.
6. Furthermore, several monographs and anthologies on the Ravensbrück concentration camp were evaluated. Worth mentioning here is the volume *Les Françaises à Ravensbrück* (1965), published by the Amicale de Ravensbrück / Association des Déportées et Internées de la Résistance. This is a collective memoir written by named members of the editorial committee and put together based on various witness statements. The list of witnesses is included in the appendix. However, it is not complete since some witnesses wished to remain anonymous; the text passages quoted in the publication also cannot be assigned to individual women. In addition to the French original, the archives of the Ravensbrück Memorial also contain a German working translation, which was used for this volume. On the Slovenes in the Siemens command, a work entitled *FKL Žensko koncentracijsko taborišče Ravensbrück* by the two former prisoners Erna Muser and Vida Zavrl, published in Ljubljana in 1971, was particularly evaluated. It contains arrest reports from several Siemens forced laborers who are known by name. Here too, a German working translation available in the archives of the Ra-

vensbrück Memorial was used. Particularly noteworthy is the 1978 publication *Le donne di Ravensbrück*, edited by Lidia Beccaria Rolfi and Anna Maria Bruzzone, which comprises comprehensive eyewitness reports from Italian women imprisoned in Ravensbrück, including Lidia Becaria Rolfi and Bianca Paganini Mori from the Siemens labor detachment. It was possible to use here the German translation published in 2016 in the series "Survival Testimonials" by the Brandenburg Memorials Foundation (Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten).[22]

7. In the period between 1945 and 2013, autobiographies of former prisoners from different countries and in different languages were also published. In the case of Siemens, forced labor usually only takes up a small part of the greater memories of persecution, concentration camp imprisonment, and life after liberation. Where available, the publications translated into German were used as a basis for the present book; otherwise, translations of the relevant passages were commissioned. This is then noted accordingly in the sources, with a bracketed comment [from a German translation].
8. Since the 1990s, with the foreseeable passing of the contemporary witness generation, audio and video interviews with recollections from survivors have been conducted. The interviews used in this volume were conducted between 1993 and 2015. Most of them come from Loretta Walz's video archive, the Visual History Archive of the Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education and the Ravensbrück Memorial.
9. In addition, for this volume, over 2,500 compensation claims were examined in the archives of the Siemens Historical Institute (SHI) in Munich for the first time. These were claims for compensation submitted to the Humanitarian Aid Fund set up by Siemens between 1998 and 2000. Of these, around 365 came from women who stated that they had performed forced labor at the Siemens production site in Ravensbrück. In addition to the mandatory questionnaire answered, some claims also contained more detailed descriptions of the work processes or prison conditions. The reports have been partially anonymized for use in this volume.
10. A large number of the company documents used come from the Siemens archives. In 2011, the SHI handed over a number of documents to the archives of the Ravensbrück Memorial. The material totals almost four hundred pages and includes, inter alia, documents on the lease agreement and payment modalities, gas and electricity supply, and fire insurance; correspondence between Siemens & Halske AG and Luftfahrtanlagen GmbH (LAG); WWFg performance reports; lists of civilian employees; correspondence between Siemens & Halske

AG and the SS Economic Administration Main Office regarding the recruitment of guards; internal correspondence from the various departments regarding hall occupancy; documents on the bonus system as well as working and training times; eleven monthly reports from the WWFg for the period from March 1943 to December 1944; and internal postwar reports and statements from individual sections of the firm. Also included are witness statements and letters from former prisoners, newspaper articles from the postwar period, and excerpts from an internal company justification entitled "Use of foreign civilian workers, prisoners of war, Jews, and concentration camp prisoners at Siemens," written in the autumn of 1945; when quoted it is referred to below as the "Siemens report."

11. An aerial photo of the Ravensbrück camp complex, taken from a Royal Air Force reconnaissance aircraft in the early afternoon of 23 March 1945, provides information about the presumably final state of development of the factory halls and barracks in the Siemens camp. Many structural details can be clearly seen. Barbara Schulz, Office for Contemporary History and Monument Preservation (Berlin), obtained the image from the aerial photo database Dr. Carls GmbH on behalf of the Ravensbrück Memorial site.
12. Further historical photos come from a series with a total of nineteen photos that are archived in the Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation in Besançon.[23] The photos were taken shortly after the liberation of French male prisoners in Ravensbrück. They are most likely to show the Siemens camp. This is indicated by various structural details.[24] The images document the horrific conditions and deaths in the camp. There are corpses of male prisoners and also male survivors who are in a completely emaciated physical state. In some pictures one can also discern various barracks in the camp and the watchtowers.
13. In addition, the collections of the Ravensbrück Memorial include a number of drawings that prisoners secretly made in the Ravensbrück main camp and later in the Siemens camp. In particular, Astrid Blumensaadt-Pedersen, Yvonne Useldinger, Georgia Peet-Taneva, Lidia Beccaria Rolfi, and Aat Breur should be mentioned here. The prisoners were able to purloin paper and pens, for example, from the offices of the Siemens company and from the packaging departments.
14. Last but not least, the location of the former Siemens production site can also provide information about its history. The now largely overgrown foundations of the factory halls and some utility buildings from this time can still be seen on the site, as well as the railway siding through which the raw materials arrived and from which the finished products were transported away. After the Ravensbrück concentra-

tion camp was liberated by the Red Army on 30 April 1945, initially Soviet and later Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) troops were stationed on the production site and in the area of the former camp. The area was significantly changed due to subsequent military use until the troops withdrew in 1994, but many structural remains have been preserved. Individual finds that were recovered from the area can also provide evidence of Siemens production on site.

The very different types of sources used for this volume require particular sensitivity. Despite the dismay that they cause in readers because of the atrocities described in them, the autobiographical texts must also be critically assessed with regard to the circumstances in which they were written.[25] They each provide a subjective perspective on the camp, the forced labor, and the personal prison experience, and should not be understood as universal statements about the living and working conditions of the prisoners at the Siemens labor detachment (*Siemens Kommando*) or about the history of the Siemens production facility.[26] Each report is shaped by individual impressions and experiences. The prison history of the individual women was determined by various factors: the prisoner

Figure 0.3. Participants of the 11th Ravensbrück Generations Forum 2015 at a presentation on the site of the former production facility. On the left: the three Ravensbrück survivors Selma van de Perre-Velleman, who did forced labor for Siemens, Batsheva Dagan, and Eva Bäckerova. *Source: Dr. Hildegard Hansche Stiftung.*

category to which they were assigned, the time and period of imprisonment, the position within the camp hierarchy, and the social relationships within the camp. In addition, coincidences often played a role.

When reading the biographical testimonies, it should first be taken into account that the prisoners in the Ravensbrück concentration camp and in the later Siemens camp were in an isolated situation. As a rule, they had only little information about their exact whereabouts, the timing, the names and positions of the SS personnel and civilian employees, or the nature of the forced labor. The possibilities of obtaining such information were determined, for example, by language skills, the place of work, one's physical and mental condition as a result of the previous arrest history, but also by personal socialization and social position before the arrest. In particular, to be able to describe the specific work processes and products, appropriate previous training or work experience in a factory was necessary.

The distance in time from the events at the time of reporting also influences the accuracy of the memories and which details come to the fore.

Although reports from numerous different authors were compiled for this volume, whose diversity of perspectives paint a very differentiated picture, the selection of sources is also limited because not all former prisoners of the Siemens labor detachment were able to speak or write about deployment as forced laborers. In particular, survivors who continued to be confronted with social persecution and discrimination even after their liberation from the concentration camps—such as Sinti and Roma, people stigmatized as "asocials" (*Asoziale*) or "criminals," or even homosexuals—only very rarely wrote reports about their concentration camp imprisonment because for a long time this was not recognized as injustice. Only much later were members of these groups also sought out and interviewed by historical researchers as interview partners. Aside from a few exceptions, their voices and memories have therefore not been recorded; instead, there are statements that fellow prisoners made about them.

Other survivors also make no or only brief mention of their time in the Siemens labor detachment. The episode may have been of less importance for one's personal history of imprisonment, since experiences in other camps dominated their memory. Some did not mention that they had to work for a well-known German arms company in the concentration camp for fear of being later suspected of collaborating with the National Socialists. Such a suspicion could have had a direct impact on the approval of prison compensation or state aid. This could be one of the reasons for the relatively small number of sources from Eastern European and former Soviet countries as well as France.[27] Added to this are the different psychological processing strategies of the former prisoners: the injustice they

suffered was often repressed and kept secret for a long time because there was little interest regarding this within the postwar societies, or even a personal desire to start a new life. Last but not least, only those who had survived the camp could in any case bear witness. The experiences of the murdered and deceased remain unknown and inaccessible; there are in the main only indirect reports about them.

The majority of publications, reports, and interviews come from politically active and educated women. Many of them were employed as prison functionaries at Siemens and report from this perspective.

What is also important for understanding the sources is the purpose and background against which the texts were written. The reports written already shortly after the end of the war primarily aimed to inform the public about the crimes of the National Socialists, to hold the guilty responsible, and in the case of Siemens, to denounce the cooperation of the internationally important business group with the National Socialist regime and to condemn the exploitation experienced. Such reports often also contain a warning to future generations. An example of this is Yvonne Useldinger's report "Inhumane Exploitation at Siemens-Ravensbrück," which she wrote already in May 1945 in Sweden. In it she notes:

> The "Siemens exploiters" made the prisoners' lives hell. The long columns, the hollow-cheeked, the feverish eyes stared daily at their exploiters in silent accusation. They were powerless before this united prisoner force. Their exploiters were able to kill many, but they could not destroy all of them. The survivors have a duty to tell the truth about the excessive exploitation of abducted women from all countries at Siemens-Ravensbrück.[28]

Another motivation for the reports was the decades-long lack of any compensation and the lack of recognition of the injustice experienced, while Siemens was able to emerge from the war almost unscathed and continues to operate as a leading company. For example, Marie Françoise Bontemps writes:

> Today the Siemens factories are working at full speed again. People have forgotten that during these terrible war years so many thousands of women HAD to work for Siemens in Ravensbrück under inhumane conditions. But we who escaped this hell will NEVER forget it![29]

In some cases, reports were written together or coordinated and discussed with one another. A collective debate, such as that which sometimes took place within the framework of various prisoner associations and federations, was able to help many survivors process their individual experiences, but often also had a political character. An exchange of letters

between Rita Sprengel and Noen Beuzemaker shows how, for example, after the war, the resistance that was engaged in and the extent and effects of sabotage were discussed.[30]

Some of the court witness statements included in this volume were recorded shortly after the end of the war and thus close to the time of imprisonment. However, they usually only deal with the specific facts of the crime that were heard in the respective criminal proceedings. The content of the statement is predetermined by the questions asked and the judicial interest in knowing the facts. The exceptionally stressful situation in the courtroom must also be taken into account: the former prisoners sometimes faced their perpetrators directly once again. The interrogating lawyers and officials did not always approach the questioning sensitively but sometimes gave the witnesses the feeling that they were being accused themselves.

Interesting in this context is a witness statement by Irma Trksak, who initially worked as a prisoner in the office in Hall 3 and later was a block elder in the Siemens camp. On 22 December 1946, she was cross-examined in a British military court by the German lawyer Dr. Günther Bruch, who represented the defendants Johann Schwarzhuber, protective custody camp leader of the Ravensbrück concentration camp, and Gustav Binder, operations manager in the SS tailoring shop. Bruch asked Irma Trksak among other things whether she was able to manipulate the figures for recording the performance of individual forced laborers at Siemens. She clearly denied this because, as she noted, she was being monitored herself. However, the minutes of the interrogation give the impression that she felt under pressure from the defense lawyer and had to justify herself.[31] It is possible that she wanted to deny any freedom of action as a prisoner functionary so that she would not herself be accused of co-responsibility. In a later interview in the 1980s, she gave contradictory statements on the same question, recalling instead that her *Meister* had placed great trust in her and that she had changed the numbers to protect poorly performing prisoners from possible punishment.

Perhaps these later memories were influenced by the reports of other former prison functionaries such as Rita Sprengel, who had described something similar. As Ulrike Jureit has noted in this regard, the memory process of former prisoners is also influenced by knowledge that does not arise from personal experience but rather through subsequent engagement with historical studies, press and remembrance reports, or even conversations with other survivors, as well as the overall social engagement with National Socialism in the respective country. Jureit therefore distinguishes between a personal, authentic truth and a "factual" truth.[32]

A number of autobiographical novels were also used for this volume. The form of the novel enables the authors to create a distance from their

experiences and has a coherence that contrasts with the reality of the camp, which is characterized by unpredictability and powerlessness. In the case of literary processing, it can also be assumed that fictional elements and stylistic devices as well as subsequently acquired knowledge are incorporated. If, for example, Silvia Grohs-Martin writes in her autobiographical novel, "From one breath to the next, twenty-one buildings, or rather halls, have gone up. They must have put them up in triple time when nobody was looking,"[33] then she takes a literary license here to emphasize under what time pressure the production site was built. The first ten halls and the accommodations for Siemens employees were demonstrably constructed at great speed, but the construction of the remaining halls was not fully completed by the end of the war.

When it comes to interviews, it must be taken into account that the interviewers exert a certain influence: the extent to which statements are guided by leading questions and which events are actually queried is not insignificant for the production of memories. External circumstances also often play a role in determining which topics are remembered and asked about. Thus, the filmmaker Loretta Walz reports that numerous detailed memories of forced labor at Siemens in Ravensbrück became public around the time of the company's 150th anniversary in 1997, when Siemens was already being widely discussed in the German press. The opening of the former production site after the withdrawal of Russian troops in 1994 also activated memories among the survivors, as there was the possibility of returning to the concrete locality.[34]

In order to better classify the context in which the individual sources came into being, each excerpt contains—if known—information about the respective contemporary witness (year of birth, place or country of birth, start and place of work at Siemens) as well as the source. The appendix contains, in alphabetical order, short biographies of all contemporary witnesses from the Siemens labor detachment quoted in this volume, with the exception of the reports that have been anonymized for reasons of data protection.

Index of Names

During the course of the project, all the researched names of prisoners who were forced to work in the Ravensbrück production facility, as well as all other information obtained about the respective person and the work assignment, were compiled into a file. The preliminary result is an index of 1,000 names. Only very few of these women have authored written reports themselves: of the 1,000 names, around 280 come from the database

of the archives of the Ravensbrück Memorial, where their work at Siemens is noted. Around 365 were identified when looking through the compensation claims submitted to the Humanitarian Aid Fund for Ravensbrück. These claims were also accompanied in part by lists of names of women eligible for compensation from national prisoner groups, as in the case of the Slovenian and Czech women. The index also includes a list of names of 32 Austrian Siemens forced laborers, which was compiled by Anna Marsalek (Vavak) after the liberation.[35] A large number of names of Jewish forced laborers at Siemens in Ravensbrück come from a study by Judith Buber Agassi entitled *The Jewish Women Prisoners of Ravensbrück: Who Were They?*[36] In the course of research it was also possible to determine the names of Jewish forced laborers who received compensation on the basis of an agreement concluded in 1962 between the Jewish Claims Conference and the Siemens company, and they were also included in the index of names. The names of fellow prisoners mentioned in the reports by others, in the literature, in witness testimonies in court trials, or in various surveys are also included in the file.

Although a large number of names were collected, this only represents part of the Siemens work detachment. In January 1945, the number of prisoners employed at Siemens reached its peak at 2,300. The total number was probably much higher due to numerous discharges, job changes, and deaths.[37] For all of these reasons, the list is not representative and can only provide an approximation of the composition of the work detail. There is hardly any personal data available about women who had to wear the black triangle of those stigmatized as "asocials" or the green triangle of those categorized as "professional criminals." However, they are mentioned in some reports. The majority are (a) younger women who were still alive at the end of the 1990s and had the opportunity to submit a compensation claim to the Humanitarian Aid Fund; (b) women of Jewish origin, who are better documented than other prisoner groups for the reasons mentioned above; (c) women who wrote down and/or published their prison story or were interviewed; and (d) the fellow prisoners they named. The file itself cannot be published here for reasons of data protection and confidentiality.

National Prisoner Groups

As already mentioned, the members of different prison groups in the Ravensbrück concentration camp and in the Siemens labor detachment met with different starting conditions. There are clear differences between the groups in terms of the time of their arrival in Ravensbrück, the routes

to the concentration camp, and the prior detention centers, as well as in terms of the size of the prisoner group and their position within the camp hierarchy in the main camp and in the Siemens labor detachment. Large differences in the situation of source material for the national prison groups also occasionally become evident.

At this point, these differences will now be taken into specific account again. They form the context in order to be able to better classify the voices of the individual contemporary witnesses in the following chapters. For this purpose, the research results on some of the national prisoner groups as well as the Jews, Roma, and Sinti in the Siemens labor detachment were combined and summarized.[38] For this purpose, the information available so far on one thousand women (as of December 2016) will be evaluated and interpreted below, also taking into account the current state of research on the respective prisoner groups in the main camp.[39] The national groups are presented in the order of their arrival in Ravensbrück, with a brief discussion of the Jewish prisoners and the imprisoned Roma and Sinti from the respective countries. Finally, the situation of these two racially persecuted prisoner groups will be summarily described.

In addition to the groups described in greater detail below, there were also prisoners from Belgium, Romania, Luxembourg, Norway, Albania, Bulgaria, Great Britain, Denmark, Turkey, Argentina, the USA, and China in the Siemens labor detachment.

Germany and Austria

There were ca. 17,900 "Reich German" prisoners in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. Austrian women were also registered as Germans by the SS as a result of the so-called annexation (*Anschluß*) of Austria to the German Reich in March 1938. Women from Germany and Austria were the first prisoners in the Ravensbrück concentration camp, which was established in May 1939. They were taken into custody and transferred to the camp for various reasons: they were accused of political opposition to the Nazi regime or of having a sexual relationship with a foreign forced laborer. Others were victims of racist persecution as Jews or Sinti and Roma. And still others came to the camp because of their membership in the banned International Bible Students Association (later Jehovah's Witnesses) or because they were blamed for engaging in "behavior alien to the community," prostitution, or theft.

Of the one thousand prisoners currently known by name within the Siemens labor detachment, about 180 women stemmed from the German Reich. The relatively large proportion could be due to the fact that there are a particularly large number of publications, reports, and interviews

from this group and that Germans and Austrians are also strongly represented among the applicants for compensation from the Humanitarian Aid Fund. However, the proportion of "Reich German" prisoners in the Siemens labor detachment, at approximately 40 percent, was also significantly higher than the proportion of other national groups.[40] Only three of the 180 names belong to the so-called pupils (*Zöglinge*) of the Uckermark Youth Protection Camp (*Jugendschutzlager*), in which predominantly German girls and young women were imprisoned. There too, young prisoners housed in two or three separate barracks had to do forced labor for Siemens. In December 1944, 128 prisoners were deployed there. Even based on currently available sources, only very little is known about the working conditions of the young prisoners in Uckermark.

With regard to the age of the approximately 180 people identified, it is noticeable that there are a comparatively large number of women over forty years old in this group. According to the Siemens report, the average age of the prisoners was twenty-two years. Several memory reports also emphasize that preferably young women were deployed as forced laborers. Furthermore, among the German and Austrian names researched to date, a relatively large number were victims of racist persecution. Over fifty of them were registered as Jews and more than twenty-five as female "Gypsies." Many of them were sent from Auschwitz to the Ravensbrück concentration camp in 1943 and 1944. German prisoners managed, inter alia by dint of good connections or their language skills, to more readily obtain positions as prison functionaries in the Siemens labor detachment or in the later Siemens camp. Of the women whose names were recorded, more than twenty stated that they were deployed as prison functionaries at Siemens.

Poland

With 36,000–40,000 women, the Polish prisoner group was the largest in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. The first Polish prisoners arrived in the camp in April 1940: members of the Polish resistance, female teachers, and academics, as well as Polish female forced laborers who were punished with concentration camp imprisonment.

After the Warsaw Uprising was suppressed in the fall of 1944, around twelve thousand women, young people, and children, most of whom were arbitrarily arrested, were deported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. In the winter of 1944–45, more than a thousand Polish Jewish women from the evacuated Auschwitz concentration camp also arrived in the camp. The Polish political prisoners formed various networks in Ravensbrück that provided support, cohesion, and diverse resistance. In this

way, it was possible for many Polish prisoners to be assigned to labor detachments that were led or markedly influenced by other Polish women.

As far as is known, however, there were only a few Polish women working at Siemens compared to the size of the prisoner group. Of the one thousand prisoners identified so far, more than 140 women came from Poland. The largest part of this group came in transports from Warsaw and Auschwitz in 1944 to Ravensbrück. Among the Polish women at Siemens known by name are over forty women who were imprisoned because of their Jewish origins. The Polish workers in the Siemens labor detachment were relatively young. Around half of the women in 1945 were twenty-five years old or younger, and there were also children among them. Most of the Polish women in the Siemens labor detachment had only come to Ravensbrück shortly before their assignment to the production site. This meant that they were not in close contact with the organizational centers of the Polish prisoner group in the main camp. In 1944, Siemens represented to a certain extent a kind of refuge for many of the Polish prisoners. Young people, but also mothers, saw here an opportunity to be able to stay together with their children. The Polish children in particular later reported that they had been advised by block elders or female guards to report to Siemens as minors.[41]

In the Ravensbrück memories among the Poles, the Siemens labor detachment and the Siemens camp receive little attention, despite an early historical analysis of the history of the Polish prisoner group in Ravensbrück.[42] The central narratives revolve around the executions of Polish women, the medical experiments on seventy-four Polish women, the so-called rabbits, as well as the size and therefore importance of the Polish prisoner group. Of the few Polish memories of Siemens, most come from the immediate postwar period: the seven transcripts of interviews by the Polish Research Institute (PIZ) in Lund. In addition, an interview with Genowefa Bejmo recorded in the Ravensbrück Memorial in 2002 can also be utilized.

It is possible that working for a well-known company like Siemens in the Stalinist postwar period in Poland might have led to accusations of collaboration with the enemy, and this may be one reason for the small number of reports. However, the women came from a country that was still largely agricultural. It is clear from their descriptions that they often did not understand what they were producing at Siemens and in what context they were working, although they suspected that they were being used for armaments production. It is possible that the women, who according to previous estimates were quite young and who also barely understood the language, were not fully able to grasp the importance of the industrial production they were deployed in.

Former Czechoslovakia

In March 1939, after the Wehrmacht attacked Czechoslovakia, the Reich Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was established under German administration, and Slovakia became a satellite state of the German Reich. Some two thousand Czech women were deported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp in the following years, most of them because they had been active in the resistance. The 196 residents of the village of Lidice, who were deported to Ravensbrück in 1942 as a result of a reprisal action, should also be mentioned as a special group. From November 1944, over one thousand Slovak Jewish women and their children were transferred from Auschwitz and other camps to the Ravensbrück concentration camp.

Around eighty of the thousand prisoners from the Siemens labor detachment who have been identified by name so far came from Czechoslovakia, of which two-thirds were Czech women and one-third were Slovak. About thirty of the known women were imprisoned as Jews, most of them Slovakians.

Since many Czech women had been deported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp early on, they had a better chance of obtaining one of the coveted positions in the camp administration. The Czech prisoners in the Siemens labor detachment were also often used as prison functionaries, both in the administration and in the kitchen and infirmary of the later Siemens camp. They are usually highlighted positively by the other prisoners. This is especially true for Anna Vavak, who had to work as assistant to the operations manager Grade at the Ravensbrück production site almost from the beginning to the end. For example, many report that Anna Vavak helped them get accepted into the Siemens labor detachment. There are some very detailed reports and publications from the Czech prisoners, as well as several claims for compensation. However, by contrast no reports from Slovakian prisoners could be found.

The Netherlands

Some one thousand Dutch women were imprisoned in the Ravensbrück concentration camp; the first were deported to Ravensbrück in 1940. From 1942 onward the number of Dutch women there slowly increased, but most of them only arrived in 1944. As the Allied forces advanced to the Dutch border, the Germans evacuated the Herzogenbusch concentration camp (in Dutch: Kamp Vught) in September 1944. All 653 prisoners in the women's camp there were transferred to Ravensbrück. Among them were a number of women who had previously worked as forced laborers for the Philips Group, including many Jewish women. In total, of the one

thousand prisoners currently known by name, around sixty-five women came from the Netherlands. In addition to the transports from Westerbork and Herzogenbusch, women were also transferred to the Siemens labor detachment via prisons in Antwerp and Düsseldorf and from Auschwitz.

Several Dutch women were able to obtain positions as prison functionaries in the administration or as forewomen because of their German language skills. The majority of known women from the Siemens labor detachment were evacuated by the Swedish Red Cross in April 1945. Overall, however, a fifth of the Dutch women died in the Ravensbrück concentration camp or one of the subcamps. There are no reliable figures for Dutch women in the Siemens labor detachment; ten women are known not to have survived.

There are only a few extant reports and interviews from the Dutch women. There are also two autobiographical novels by women from the Netherlands: *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom was published in 1971, in which forced labor for Siemens does not play a major role. The book *Cel 383, zing nog eens: Een leven met de oorlog* [Cell 383, sing again: A life with the war] by Jenneke Romkes was published in 1987. It contains inter alia detailed descriptions of the last days in the Siemens labor detachment and the liberation by the White Buses, which Jenneke Romkes and her fellow prisoner Trudy Storm wrote immediately after their arrival in Sweden. In addition, passages from Selma van de Perre-Velleman's published autobiography were included in the source collection. This text also contains some names of further Dutch prisoners.

Former Yugoslavia

After the German Wehrmacht attacked the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941, the Yugoslav state was destroyed. Serbia came under German military administration; Slovenia was divided between Germany, Italy, and Hungary; and Croatia was ruled by the fascist Ustasha, which, however, was under the influence of the German and Italian occupying troops.

Most of the approximately 2,700 Yugoslavian prisoners at the Ravensbrück concentration camp came from Slovenia. In Croatia and Serbia there were separate camps for political opponents and those persecuted for racist reasons. Therefore, fewer women were deported from there to the Ravensbrück concentration camp: ca. 160 women from Croatia and around 200 women from Serbia. Almost all Yugoslavian women were political prisoners. In many cases they had been active in one of the partisan organizations or were suspected of supporting the partisans. Forty women were registered as Jews. A number of individual women, including some Roma, were labelled as "asocials."

Of the currently known 1,000 persons, around 190 women stemmed from the former Yugoslavia and worked in the Siemens labor detachment or in the construction of the Siemens factory halls—the vast majority here too were Slovenians. The historian Silvija Kavčič writes that, according to information from contemporary witnesses, up to 340 Slovenian women worked for Siemens between 1942 and 1945. Accordingly, the percentage of Slovenians in the Siemens labor detachment was significantly higher than in the entire Ravensbrück concentration camp.[43] A large proportion only arrived in Ravensbrück from the beginning of 1944. The reports included in the present volume come principally from the book edited by Erna Muser and Vida Zavrl, *FKL Žensko koncentracijsko taborišče Ravensbrück*, published in Ljubljana in 1971. In these reports, the cohesion of the group of Slovenians in the Siemens labor detachment is often emphasized. The Slovenians were housed together in one barrack in the Siemens camp and used this room to exchange information about the course of the war, sing partisan songs, or celebrate holidays together. Attempts at sabotage during work also play a central role in the reports.

France

On 10 May 1940, the German Wehrmacht invaded France. Two years later, the first French women were deported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. They had mostly been involved in the communist or national resistance against the German occupiers. From April 1943, the number of French prisoners in the women's concentration camp continued to rise. However, the majority did not arrive until 1944. In total, around eight thousand French women were imprisoned in the Ravensbrück concentration camp, most of whom were transferred to one of the subcamps after a short time—but not the approximately five hundred French *Nacht und Nebel* ("Night and Fog," NN) prisoners. Since they were forbidden any contact with the outside world, they were only used for work within the camp. Of the thousand prisoners known by name, just over fifty women stemmed from France. Their birth years lie between 1882 and 1928: the French women known to date tended to be among the older women in the Siemens labor detachment, whose average age is deemed to have been twenty-two years. Over half of them only arrived in Ravensbrück in 1944. The French women arrived, inter alia, with transports from the Toulouse prisons, a number of them in a transport via the Dachau concentration camp that reached Ravensbrück on 3 July 1944, coming from Romainville near Paris, from Frèsnes also near Paris, from Bordeaux, from Belfort, and from Saarbrücken and Breslau, as well as from the collection and transit camp Compiègne, and from Auschwitz.

Almost all of these women were registered as political prisoners, three as Jews and one as "asocial."

There are various indications that the group of French women in the Siemens labor detachment may have been larger. The survivor Marie-José Chombart de Lauwe writes that several women from her transport were employed by Siemens.[44] She arrived in the Ravensbrück concentration camp on 26 July 1943 with a transport of NN prisoners from Paris. In addition, the two Italians Lidia Beccaria Rolfi and Bianca Paganini Mori write about an entire block or an entire room with French women within the later Siemens camp.[45] However, in the very extensive commemorative literature of French Ravensbrück survivors, forced labor for Siemens is hardly mentioned. This applies especially to the early memory reports that were published in the first years immediately after the liberation. But also Charlotte Delbo, who was deployed in forced labor at Siemens, did not mention work at Siemens in her trilogy, *Auschwitz and After*, published in French in 1970–71. The reports from former French forced laborers at Siemens that were found during research date from later years.[46] Descriptions of sabotage and resistance occupy substantial space there, as do accounts of attempts to be able to leave Siemens again in order to not have to continue to do forced labor for German war production. When reviewing the commemorative literature, several reports were also found about efforts to circumvent or avoid deployment in such forced labor at Siemens in order not to have to work at tasks for German war production. Various association magazines from 1999 also contain articles from French prisoner associations dealing with the rejection of compensation payments by the Siemens Humanitarian Aid Fund. The prisoners were never employees (salaried workers) of Siemens. Consequently, members of the Amicale chose to refuse compensation for work they had been forced to do.

Former Soviet Union

With over twenty thousand persons, prisoners from the Soviet Union were one of the largest groups in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. Most of them were deported to the German Reich as forced laborers after the German attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, where they were deployed to do forced labor primarily in the armaments industry and in agriculture. Because of "refusal to work," critical statements, or other reasons, they were arrested and taken to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. Others were arrested on suspicion of supporting partisan resistance in their homeland. There were also some eight hundred Red Army soldiers and medics who were imprisoned in Ravensbrück. As far as is known to date, none of the imprisoned Red Army women did forced

labor at Siemens. The prisoners from the Soviet Union were not allowed to receive letters or packages from their relatives. Only receipt of mail from relatives or friends who were also deployed in forced labor in the German Reich was permitted. In the racist ideology of the SS, persons from the Soviet Union, along with Jews and Roma and Sinti, were at the lowest level of the camp hierarchy.

Of the one thousand names identified so far, only just over seventy women stemmed from the territory of the former Soviet Union. Most were Ukrainians, but there were also Russians and Belarusians among them. Most of them arrived in the Ravensbrück concentration camp between 1942 and 1943 and were also deployed within the Siemens labor detachment comparatively early on. Almost half of these approximately seventy women were identified based on the compensation claims submitted to the Humanitarian Aid Fund.[47] In addition to these claims, there are a number of published and unpublished memoir reports as well as interviews and other documents. With the exception of the interviews with Olga Smirnowa and Nora Idzikowskaja, in which forced labor for Siemens is discussed in more detail, there is only brief mention of the fact that their work was in a concentration camp "at Siemens." This is particularly the case in the inquiries about former prisoners addressed to the Ravensbrück Memorial and in the compensation inquiries sent to the international human rights organization "Memorial" in Moscow. However, there are hardly any more detailed descriptions of the working and living conditions. In the reports of other former prisoners, the women from the Soviet Union are highlighted in various positive ways because they had initiated sabotage actions.

Italy

At the beginning of September 1943, the fascist-ruled Kingdom of Italy concluded a ceasefire with the Allies, whereupon Wehrmacht troops occupied large parts of the previously Allied country. In October 1943, the first Italian women were sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. In total, over a thousand Italian women and children were deported to Ravensbrück from October 1943 to March 1945. The majority were imprisoned for political reasons, more than 150 of them as "Jewish" and ten as "Gypsies." Yugoslav women from the areas occupied by Italy in 1941 were also partially counted among the Italians in the camp.

The Italians came in approximately seventy transports from what was then Italian state territory, from the countries occupied by the Germans and from German concentration and collection camps. Many were transferred to a satellite camp shortly after their arrival. In the main camp they formed

small, scattered groups that were only rarely able to make contact with each other. The SS treated them with particular hostility as members of a "traitor nation." But even among the other prisoners, the Italians were also perceived largely as citizens of a fascist state, an ally of the German Reich.

Due to a lack of language skills, the Italians only gradually managed to convey that they were anti-fascists and had taken part in the resistance against the German occupation. The Italian women did not hold positions as a prisoner functionary that would have given them access to certain privileges. They were not allowed to receive mail or packages in the camp; this meant that, without material help, emotional support, or news from home, they were particularly dependent on the help and solidarity of their comrades.[48]

To date information has been found on twenty-six Italian women who were deployed in forced labor for Siemens. In contrast to larger national prisoner groups, they did not have their own room or block in the later Siemens camp but were inter alia housed together with the German and French prisoners. The twenty-six women were transported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp between March and October 1944 from prisons in Leipzig, Romainville, Turin, Bozen, Verona, and Auschwitz—the origin of six women could not be determined. Before they were obliged to do forced labor at Siemens, they had worked in various work detachments: as "available persons" (so-called *Verfügbare*, who were given especially strenuous manual tasks), as forest workers, as dock workers unloading ships, as construction workers, and so on. In view of the approaching winter, joining the Siemens labor detachment seemed desirable.

The reports often compare the living conditions in the main camp with those in the Siemens camp. If possible, the prisoners tried to maintain contact with other women from their transport and with their compatriots in the production workshops. Of the twenty-six known Italian women in the Siemens labor detachment, six women wrote reports or gave interviews. The earliest report by Maria Montuoro was first published in 1959; the remaining reports and interviews came about in the 1970s, 1980s, and 2000s.

Female Jews

In total, the SS sent almost twenty thousand Jewish women from different countries to the Ravensbrück concentration camp between 1939 and 1945. That constituted about 15 percent of all prisoners.

In 1942, almost all of the approximately 1,400 Jewish prisoners who were in the camp at that time were either killed in the "14f13" mass murder operation or deported to Auschwitz. Until 1944, hardly any Jewish women were admitted to the camp.

An exception was the "*Mischling* transport" from Auschwitz with a total of eighty-four women who were considered "half-Jewish" according to the Nuremberg racial laws or who were married to "Aryan" men. The transport reached Ravensbrück on 16 September 1943. At least twenty of these women subsequently worked at Siemens. In addition, Jewish women and children from Allied countries such as Turkey, Italy, and Spain were deported to Ravensbrück during this period. There is also evidence that Turkish Jewish women and girls were assigned to the Siemens labor detachment. On a transport dated 7 February 1944, sixty-three Jewish women and children—mostly of Hungarian nationality but living in the Netherlands—arrived in the Ravensbrück camp coming from the Westerbork transit camp, including Rachel Krausz and her nine-year-old daughter Irene, who were both deployed in the Siemens labor detachment.

The mass deportation of Jewish women and children to the Ravensbrück concentration camp began at the end of 1944, when the SS evacuated the Auschwitz concentration camp in view of the approaching Red Army. In addition, in the winter of 1944–45, thousands of Hungarian and Slovak Jewish women were deported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp for forced labor in German armaments production. In the Ravensbrück main camp the Jewish prisoners received particularly harsh treatment by the SS. They often had to work deployed in physically demanding construction labor squads. At the end of 1944, when the vast majority of Jewish women from Hungary and Auschwitz reached the already disastrously overcrowded Ravensbrück concentration camp, many of them were crammed into a tent under appalling conditions.

From the available reports it cannot be concluded that such a terrible situation awaited forced workers deployed in the Siemens labor detachment. Particularly because of their good language skills, some of these prisoners were able to assume positions as secretaries in factory offices, as prisoners for work assignment (*Anweisungshäftlinge*), or as forewomen for a small work group.[49]

Of the one thousand prisoners of the Siemens labor detachment known by name to date, about 30 percent were stigmatized and persecuted as Jews. As mentioned at the beginning, the history of Jewish women deployed in the Siemens labor detachment is comparatively well documented. Around 31 percent of the compensation claims submitted to the Humanitarian Aid Fund come from Jewish former forced laborers. The actual proportion of Siemens workers who were imprisoned as Jews in Ravensbrück could well be lower. Most of them only arrived in the Siemens labor detachment in the fall of 1944, many of them transported from Auschwitz. Of particular note is a transport of 1,650 Hungarian Jewish women that arrived in Ravensbrück around the end of November 1944.

The women and girls had only been imprisoned in Auschwitz for three months and were then deployed in the Walldorf subcamp near Frankfurt am Main in the highly strenuous manual labor for the expansion of Frankfurt Airport. At least forty-six of them were admitted into the Siemens labor detachment.

Since most of the women and girls who were persecuted as Jews only arrived in Ravensbrück in the last months of the war and were imprisoned there for a relatively short time in relation to their Holocaust experience, Ravensbrück and the Siemens labor detachment are often given only brief mention in their reports. Some remember the transfer from the main camp, and from the tent to the Siemens camp set up in December 1944, as a form of relief and improvement compared to the miserable conditions prevailing before.[50]

Roma and Sinti

At least 2,800 women and children who were persecuted as "Gypsies" were imprisoned in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. Most of them came from Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. The first large transport with four hundred and forty Roma from Burgenland in Austria arrived at the Ravensbrück concentration camp in June 1939.[51] In the period that followed, smaller groups and individuals were repeatedly brought to Ravensbrück. After the evacuation of the *Auschwitz Zigeunerlager* (Gypsy camp) in the summer of 1944, over a thousand women, men, and children classified as "fit for work" were transported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp.[52]

Roma and Sinti in the Ravensbrück concentration camp were required to wear the black angle badge of those persecuted as "asocials." They were initially housed in a separate block. Later on, as soon as they arrived, many of them were placed in the aforementioned tent that the SS had erected in the overcrowded main camp in the fall of 1944.

Similar to the Jewish women in the main camp, the Roma and Sinti also suffered particularly from racist attacks by the SS. However, there are no reports on this specifically for the Siemens labor detachment. In the main camp, Roma and Sinti were often used for extremely difficult, dirty, or dangerous work. They also became victims of forced sterilization and sterilization experiments in the Ravensbrück main camp.

To date, information has only been found on just under some thirty Roma and Sinti between the ages of twelve and twenty-three who were deployed in forced labor in the Siemens labor detachment. Eleven of them had been previously imprisoned in Auschwitz. The women and girls came principally from the territory of the German Reich. Only one of them,

thirteen-year-old Waleria Tomaszewicz, stemmed from Poland. She is also the only one who provided a detailed report about her imprisonment in Ravensbrück and forced labor for Siemens. The remaining information is derived from claims submitted to the Humanitarian Aid Fund. Several of the women and girls said they had been deployed in construction work at Siemens, such as digging foundations and laying cables. We currently have no knowledge about any Roma and Sinti prisoner functionaries at Siemens in Ravensbrück.

Structure of the Volume

The collection of sources is divided into five thematic chapters: It begins with the construction and expansion of the Ravensbrück production site, the selection for the Siemens labor detachment, and the type and scope of Siemens production in Ravensbrück. The second chapter deals with the working conditions of the prisoners and the complex relationship between civilian employees of the Siemens company who managed the forced labor contingent, the female concentration camp guards who were responsible for monitoring, the prison functionaries with their sometimes expanded scope of action, and the other prisoners. The third chapter takes a look at the living and prison conditions, with special attention given to the Siemens camp, to which the prisoners of the Siemens labor detachment, who were previously housed in the main camp, were transferred in December 1944. The fourth chapter deals with the topic of sabotage, which plays a central role in many memory reports. The fifth chapter focuses in conclusion on the final few weeks of the Siemens labor detachment, the closure of the production site, and the liberation of the surviving prisoners. This volume does not discuss in any detail the postwar period, in particular the struggle of the former prisoners for compensation payments for forced labor deployment.

To better understand the source texts, each chapter is preceded by a multipage introduction that compiles background information and critically comments on the source texts. For this purpose, other historical works on the topic—in particular by Wilfried Feldenkirchen, Bernhard Strebel, and Rolf Schmolling[53]—and contemporary sources such as company documents and Nazi documents were consulted. The few available statements from civilian employees, female concentration camp guards, and members of the SS were also evaluated. The following thematic excerpts from survivor memory reports constitute the focus of the chapter. The central selection criteria were the most balanced ratio of reports possible against the background of the different nationalities, the description of

the individual production halls of the armaments factory, the relationships between the prisoners and the prison functionaries, and the comprehensibility and plausibility of the texts. A further fundamental concern was the multi-perspectivity in the compilation of the memories: individual aspects and experiences are described and juxtaposed from perspectives that are as different and sometimes contradictory as possible. This is also intended to take into account the fact that there were large differences between the various prisoner groups as well as individual prison experiences.

In order to improve readability, minor orthographic and grammatical errors were tacitly corrected in German-language texts that were not written by native speakers, and in interview transcripts if they significantly impair comprehensibility. Where there was any uncertainty, we have added additions in square brackets. In various places we have added comments in square brackets or in footnotes. This is how, for example, dialect terms are explained, names are added or completed if they could be identified, and explanations are given about historical events, places, and people, as well as about production processes and products. Some of the terms specific to the context of the production site and the Ravensbrück camp complex, which appear several times in the texts, are explained in a glossary. In addition, there is a list of abbreviations at the beginning of the volume.

To make orientation easier, the appendix contains, in addition to the short biographies of the contemporary witnesses already mentioned, a list of references and sources as well as an index of names. The names mentioned in the short biographies and the main entries in the index of names are based on the names that the women had while in the camp.

This volume contains only excerpts from selected reports. Parallel with publication, all of the source material that was compiled for this publication will be handed over to the archive of the Ravensbrück Memorial and can be viewed there.

Notes

1. See "Workshop zur Zwangsarbeit für Siemens in Ravensbrück im 11. Ravensbrücker Generationenforum," posted 6 December 2015 by Matthias Heyl, YouTube, retrieved 5 December 2023 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGsEL_DJe_o. In addition, the Ravensbrück Memorial has been carrying out educational projects on the topic of "Siemens in Ravensbrück" for several years, also including Siemens trainees who meet survivors on site and deal with the company's history under National Socialism. In recent years, various work camps and youth meetings have taken place on the site. See, for example, "siemens@ravensbrück" (https://projekt-ravensbrueck.com).

2. See Wilfried Feldenkirchen, *Siemens 1918–1945* (Munich/Zurich, 1995), 200 ff.

3. Feldenkirchen, 203.

4. Around 90 percent of the forced laborers came from Poland, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, the remaining 10 percent from the Baltics, Belgium, France, Italy, Croatia, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. This is according to the head of the Siemens archive, Dr. Frank Wittendorfer, in a lecture on the occasion of a memorial event by IG Metall on 9 November 2015 in Berlin.

5. The total number of "*Ostarbeiter*" who were placed in forced labor in the German Reich is estimated at 2.75 million. See "Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene und 'Ostarbeiter,'" Zwangsarbeit im NS-Staat, Bundesarchiv, retrieved 5 December 2023 from https://www.bundesarchiv.de/zwangsarbeit/geschichte/auslaendisch/russlandfeldzug/.

6. Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany Under the Third Reich*, trans. William Templer (Cambridge, 1993).

7. The Siemens-Schuckertwerke (SSW) had already started using forced Jewish workers at the beginning of 1940. In September 1941, according to a company report, the number of Jewish forced laborers for SSW and S & H was at its highest at 3,650. In October 1942 the number had fallen to 2,800, probably as a result of the deportations. See internal company report "Einsatz ausländischer Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangener, Juden und KZ-Häftlinge im Hause Siemens," October 1945, p. 41, SHI, SAA 18601; see also Marie Jalowicz Simon, *Untergetaucht. Eine junge Frau überlebt in Berlin* (Frankfurt a. M., 2014).

8. Bernhard Strebel, *Das KZ Ravensbrück. Geschichte eines Lagerkomplexes* (Paderborn, 2003), 391.

9. See Feldenkirchen, *Siemens 1918–1945*, 550n120. In Berlin, the "Factory Action" affected a total of around eight thousand Jews who worked in around one hundred different companies and factories. The Gestapo's large-scale raid lasted about one week. Those arrested were deported on five transports between 1 March and 6 March 1943 to Auschwitz.

10. It would be conceivable that the use of concentration camp prisoners was also intended as a means to compensate for the loss of the labor power of the Jews deported from Berlin-Siemensstadt. Strebel points out, for example, that the Heinkel Works in Oranienburg were offered concentration camp prisoners as a direct "replacement" for Jewish forced laborers. See Strebel, *Ravensbrück*, 391.

11. See the result log of an official meeting and discussion between the newly appointed head of the Economic Administration Main Office (WVHA) Oswald Pohl and General Air Chief Erhard Milch on 10 March 1942, BArch- MA RL 3/45, fonds 8117. It is stated there inter alia that the firm Siemens would provide 1,500 female prisoners as a workforce. In an audit report on the firm Flugzeuganlagen GmbH (LAG) dated 31 March 1942, there is already mention for the financial year 1941–42, under the category of planned and in part completed projects, a "concentration camp production facility" in Ravensbrück, with construction costs of 950,000 RM and a capacity of 1,500 persons, BArch R 8135/7669, p. 10. See also on this Strebel, *Ravensbrück*, 388 ff.

12. Nürnberger Dokumente, NO-569. See also Marc Buggeln, *Das System der KZ-Außenlager. Krieg, Sklavenarbeit und Massengewalt* (Bonn, 2012), 18.

13. See "Bericht über die Beschäftigung von weiblichen Häftlingen im KZ Ravensbrück durch die S & H Wernerwerke Siemensstadt," 27 August 1947 / 24 September 1947, SHI, SAA 18534-1. See also Strebel, *Ravensbrück*, 392.

14. See also the introduction to chapter 1.

15. Other examples of a relocation of production in armaments firms into the main camps are the relocating of carbine rifle production of the Wilhelm-Gustloff-Werke to the Buchenwald concentration camp and the setting up of the "Metallwerke Neuengamme GmbH," a subsidiary of the Thuringian weapons manufacturer Carl Walther, in the Neuengamme concentration camp. See Marc Buggeln, *System der KZ-Außenlager*, 18.

16. According to Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel, it is possible to establish that there were a total of twenty-three main camps with 1,154 subcamps. Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel, eds., *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, vol. 1 (Munich, 2005).

17. On this in detail, see Buggeln, *System der KZ-Außenlager*, 18–19.

18. The subcamp in Kraslice (Graslitz) was set up on 7 August 1944. At least 877 women were imprisoned there. The prisoners had to carry out precision mechanical assembly work for the Hakenfelde GmbH (LGW) aviation equipment factory, a subsidiary of the Siemens Group. The subcamp in Svatava (Zwodau), with a total of over 1,350 female prisoners, was set up in March 1944. The prisoners there also had to work for the LGW. Both camps were initially subcamps of the Ravensbrück concentration camp, which from September 1944 were placed under the administration of the closer Flossenbürg concentration camp.

19. Feldenkirchen, *Siemens 1918–1945*, 204. According to Feldenkirchen, there were until the war's end a total of thirty-four satellite camps or subcamps in which concentration camp prisoners had to work for Siemens and its subsidiary firms.

20. A substantial number of these protocols are accessible online at "Witnessing Genocide: Experiences of Nazi Concentration Camps," Universitetsbiblioteket, Lunds Universitet, retrieved 12 February 2024 from http://www.ub.lu.se/witnessing-genocide.

21. Between 1946 and 1950, the French occupation authorities carried out trials in Reutlingen and Rastatt against SS personnel and prisoner functionaries from Ravensbrück. Among others, Emmy Kowa, temporarily a supervisor in the Siemens production facility, and Ruth Schumann, a former Siemens civilian employee, were on trial. Kowa was sentenced to twenty years in prison and hard labor, while Schumann was acquitted on appeal.

22. Lidia Beccaria Rolfi and Anna Maria Bruzzone, *Als Italienerin in Ravensbrück. Politische Gefangene berichten über ihre Deportation und ihre Haft im Frauen-Konzentrationslager* (Berlin, 2016; Italian 1st ed., Turin, 1978).

23. The prints of the photos came into the possession of the Musée de la Résistance et de la Déportation in Besançon in different ways: one person who brought them was Jacques Henri Paul Lambach, who was an NN prisoner in the Natzweiler-Struthof, Dachau, and Neuengamme concentration camps before he was evacuated to Ravensbrück. He stated that after liberation he found a camera with which he returned to the camp and took the pictures. The French woman Marcelle Gougat, who was imprisoned in the Neuengamme and Ravensbrück concentration

camps before being evacuated to Sweden, also handed over prints of a total of seventeen photos to the archive. She wrote that the photos were taken in the early morning of 2 May 1945 by one of her comrades, whom she however did not name.

24. Thus, for example, the arrangement of the barracks, with the division of the individual barracks into three areas, each with its own entrance and chimney; and the location of the watchtowers, and also the sandy ground upon which the barracks stood, which has been described a number of times.

25. See Primo Levi, *Die Untergegangenen und die Geretteten* (Munich, 1990), 12.

26. The inclusive term *Siemens Kommando* has been rendered in the English translation throughout the book here as Siemens labor detachment or work detachment (–the translator, W.T.).

27. See also the introduction to chapter 4.

28. Yvonne Useldinger, "Unmenschliche Ausbeutung bei Siemens-Ravensbrück," Memories report, May 1945, MGR/SBG, Coll. Buchmann, Vol. 27, Report 480.

29. Marie Françoise Bontemps, "Siemens-Arbeitslager-Ravensbrück 1942–1945," Memories report, n.d., MGR/SBG, Coll. Buchmann, Vol. 29, Report 509.

30. See chapter 4.

31. See testimonial, Irma Trksak, 22 December 1946, The National Archives (Public Records Office), WO235/305. An extract from the testimonial is provided in the resources section of chapter 4.

32. Ulrike Jureit, *Konstruktion und Sinn. Methodische Überlegungen zu biographischen Sinnkonstruktionen* (Oldenburg, 1998), 15 ff.

33. Silvia Grohs-Martin, *Silvie* (New York, 2000).

34. On how prisoner reports are dealt with in historiography on Nazi history, see also Jens-Christian Wagner, "Der Häftlingsbericht. Kritik einer Quellengattung," in *Produktion des Todes. Das KZ Mittelbau-Dora*, ed. Jens-Christian Wagner and Stiftung Gedenkstätten Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora (Göttingen, 2001), 29–41; Thomas Rahe, "Die Bedeutung der Zeitzeugenberichte für die historische Forschung zur Geschichte der Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslager," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung in Norddeutschland* 2 (1995), 84–98; Claudia Schlenker, "Frauen in nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern," M.A. thesis, Konstanz University, 1998, retrieved 6 December 2023 from http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bsz:352-opus-1869.

35. Anna Marsalek (Vavak), "Namen der Ravensbrückhäftlinge, die im Siemens-Kommando beschäftigt waren," Sig. DÖW/1-32 V/1, No. 28; MGR/StBG RA I/6-7-139.

36. Judith Buber Agassi, *The Jewish Women Prisoners of Ravensbrück: Who Were They?*, 2nd ed. (Lubbock, TX, 2014).

37. On the number of discharges, see chapter 2.

38. However, due to the incomplete and sometimes contradictory data situation, it was not possible to clearly assign the country of origin for all one thousand names. In particular, there are gaps in the arrivals lists kept by the SS, and only parts of the arrivals lists have been preserved.

39. To achieve this, use was made of the research results published in the permanent exhibit of the Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück, which opened in 2013. See Insa Eschebach, ed., *Das Frauen-Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück. Neue Beiträge zur Geschichte und Nachgeschichte* (Berlin, 2014).

40. Siemensbericht, p. 33, SHI, SAA 18601.

41. See also the introduction, chapter 3.

42. See Wanda Kiedrzyńska, *Ravensbrück. Kobiecy obóz koncentracyjnego* [Ravensbrück. Das Frauen-Konzentrationslager] (Warsaw, 1961). According to Germaine Tillion, this was the second comprehensive monograph on the Ravensbrück women's concentration camp. Yet Siemens is not described in more detail here either. Nor is it in Kiedrzyńska's thematic compilations, which were handed over to the Polish National Library in Warsaw. There is likewise no mention of Siemens in the letters that were secretly passed on to Polish prisoners of war in the surrounding area by Polish women prisoners. See Andrea Genest, ed., *Damit die Welt es erfährt. . . . Illegale Dokumente polnischer Häftlinge aus dem Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück* (Berlin, 2015).

43. See Silvija Kavčič, "Junge slowenische Frauen im Jugendkonzentrationslager Uckermark," in *Das Mädchenkonzentrationslager Uckermark*, ed. Katja Limbächer, Maike Merten, and Bettina Pfefferle (Münster, 2000), 121–40.

44. See Marie-José Chombart de Lauwe, *Toute une vie de résistance* (Paris, 1998), 69.

45. See Beccaria Rolfi and Bruzzone, *Als Italienerin in Ravensbrück*, 155, 256.

46. The collectively published memoir report *Les Françaises à Ravensbrück* (1965) contains descriptions of forced labor at Siemens. That is also the case in the book published in 2005 and edited by Jean Pierre Vittori, *Le grand livre des témoins*, a compilation of memory narratives alphabetically ordered by their authors' names. In 1995 Monique Nosley published a personal report in the association journal *Voix et Visages* about her liberation in April 1945 from the Siemens camp and her return via Switzerland with the aid of the Red Cross. The most detailed report on Siemens is in the book by Marie-José Chombart de Lauwe, *Toute une vie de résistance* (1998). The survivor Simone Gournay described her forced labor for Siemens in various video interviews.

47. However, a large number of the compensation claims from the former Soviet Union were passed on to the foundation "Memory, Responsibility, and Future" (EVZ) or to the respective national partner organizations, which could not be reviewed for this volume.

48. Johanna Kootz, "Deportiert aus dem Land des Verbündeten: Italienerinnen," in Eschebach, *Frauen-Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück*, 31–50.

49. See glossary.

50. We are grateful to Dr. Irith Dublon-Knebel for her assessment of the Jewish prisoners who were deployed in forced labor in the Siemens production facility in Ravensbrück.

51. See also Guenter Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies* (Oxford, 2000), 175.

52. The men and boys aged twelve and over were sent to the Ravensbrück men's camp. On the night of 3 August 1944, the approximately three thousand persons who remained in the "*Auschwitz Zigeunerlager*" were murdered in the gas chambers.

53. Feldenkirchen, *Siemens 1918–1945*; Strebel, *Ravensbrück*, 384–418; Rolf Schmolling, "Zwangsarbeit von Konzentrationslager-Häftlingen in der letzten Phase des

Zweiten Weltkrieges: Das Beispiel Siemens unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Außenlager Siemens-Haselhorst und Siemens-Lager Ravensbrück," unpublished M.A. thesis, Technical University Berlin, winter semester 1997–98; Rolf Schmolling, "Häftlingszwangsarbeit für Siemens in der NS-Zeit," in *Zwangsarbeit für Siemens in Auschwitz und Berlin*, ed. Zwangsarbeit erinnern e. V. (Berlin, 2006), 63–79; Rolf Schmolling, "Ravensbrück ('Siemenslager')," in *Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, vol. 4, *Flossenbürg, Mauthausen, Ravensbrück*, ed. Barbara Distel and Wolfgang Benz (Munich, 2007), 587–91.