

**Between Collaboration and Resistance.
21st Workshop on the History and
Memory of National Socialist Camps and
Extermination Sites**

Veranstalter: Anne-Lise Bobeldijk, Amsterdam; Juliette Constantin, Tübingen; Karoline Georg, Berlin; Verena Meier, Heidelberg; Paula Oppermann, Berlin; Gedenkstätte Grafeneck e.V., The German Resistance Memorial Center; Aix-Marseille Université

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30 graduate students and young scholars came together in Aix-en-Provence for the „21st t Workshop on the History and Memory of National Socialist Camps and Extermination Sites“ from May 24th to 30th, 2016. The subject of this annual workshop, which aims at offering a supportive environment for graduate students and young scholars to present and discuss their work, was „Between Collaboration and Resistance“. The workshop, organized since 1994, takes place annually in locations that are tied to the topic, in the case of Aix-en-Provence – which was under the authority of the French Vichy-Regime that collaborated with National Socialist Germany – the nearby Les Milles internment camp, which later also served as a transit camp to Auschwitz. This camp illustrates the complex and tense relationship between those in power and those subject to authority, as well as the spectrum of actions ranging from collaboration to resistance, multiple forms of resistance within the camp, attitudes of the local population and what individuals perceived as their personal opportunities for agency within this frame.

The organization team chose an interdisciplinary approach, inviting students from a wide array of academic disciplines, including musicology, arts, literary studies, sociology, political sciences, cultural studies, and history. Speakers and participants came from Austria, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, the United Kingdom and the

United States of America. This broad spectrum of academic disciplines and countries considerably contributed to the success of the workshop. The overall subject of the workshop, „Between Collaboration and Resistance“, proved to be a very fruitful one: the discussions after the presentations soon focused on the specific question of how to actually define those terms. While some of the participants and speakers went as far as to consider any acts against the intention of the SS or even the pure act of surviving the camp system as resistance, others conceptualized the term in narrower forms, proposing that an intention to resist on the inmate’s part had to be present in order to define their acts as resistance.

The conference was opened by keynote speaker ROBERT MENCHERINI (University Aix-Marseille) who illustrated France’s position between resistance and collaboration during World War II with an introduction to the local history of the Marseille region and the camp Les Milles set up by French authorities. An excursion to the former camp site and museum followed the same afternoon, where guided tours through the memorial opened the floor for intensive debate on memorial work and pedagogics, reflecting the background of a number of conference participants.

Knowledge of the history of the Marseille region was deepened by JEAN SÉRANDOUR (Varian Fry Association). Using the example of the American journalist Varian Fry, who set up a rescue network for Jews in Marseille and thus managed to enable around 2.000 individuals’ escape to the United States, Sérandour introduced an example of resistance against Vichy France and its fascist policies.

Panel 1: Art and Resistance

ANDREAS E. LEHMANN (Weimar) started his presentation on Music in the Buchenwald concentration camp with an impressive live performance of the song „Kopf hoch, Kamerad“, composed by an inmate of Buchenwald, moving on to analyze music and text of that particular song. On a more abstract level, Lehmann discussed the critical issue of resistance versus collaboration in relation to music in concentration camps, which was written

and performed both at the initiative of the SS and of prisoners, thus immediately initiating the central discussion on definitions of collaboration and resistance which would characterize the whole conference.

Moving from music to material objects, HELEN TURNER (Oxford) addressed the issue of art and material resistance in her detailed study of material possessions in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Turner emphasized the importance of gender, age and social status for the possibility of resistance in the context of concentration camps. Sparked by Turner's wide definition of resistance as any act not sanctioned by the SS, including acts such as the engraving of spoons with an inmate's number, as well as surviving the concentration camp system, the discussion following her presentation emphasized the general problematics of a wide definition of resistance.

This presentation was complemented by SABINE KÜNTZEL (Berlin), who presented her research on handicraft in the camps. According to her, the creation of „beautiful objects“ constituted a cultural activity that showed resistance to the deindividualization and dehumanization which characterized the National Socialist camp system. The differentiation made in the presentation between handicraft (posited to be a continuation of pre-internment activity) and art (focused on aesthetics resisting the harsh reality of camp life) initiated a discussion on whether the creation of handcrafted objects could be termed resistance.

A different form of creative activity was introduced by SARA DI ALESSANDRO (Milan) who presented her paper on „Writing as Resistance during World War II“, discussing the powerful role of words as resistance against National Socialism. Di Alessandro chose to compare works by two authors and their writing style: the German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing in German during his imprisonment, and Arthur Koestler, a Communist journalist born in Hungary, who wrote his autobiography „Scum of the Earth“ in English after he had escaped to England, which could be considered as short time range biographical re-working.

FÉLIX L. DESLAURIERS (Montréal) expanded the discussion into the realm of his-

toriographical analysis when discussing Walter Benjamin's political project trying to introduce a „camp paper“ during his internment in the Vernuche camp. In his presentation, Deslauriers brought up the topic of historical materialism, which would consequently become an important element in the discussions of the whole week, additionally offering new insights into the debate by looking at history and scopes of action from the view of the defeated.

Panel 2: Institutionalized Collaboration

The second panel of the workshop shifted the focus to the issue of collaboration. The first speaker JANINE FUBEL (Berlin) gave a presentation on the death march from Sachsenhausen camp in 1945. Emphasizing how the death marches had a higher degree of organization than is generally assumed, Fubel tackled the issue of collaboration when discussing the inherent power relations stemming from the social order within National Socialism. In that context she not only addressed the role of both prisoner-functionaries as well as members of Wehrmacht and SS, but also showed how local German communities were involved, examining how power relations evolved once the camp architecture was left behind.

IZABELLA SULYOK (Szeged) expanded the workshop's geographical coverage to Hungary with her discussion of the ghettoization and local administration in the country's third gendarmerie district. Emphasizing local initiatives and their fundamental contribution to the progression of the Holocaust, she showed that local administrations never questioned the bigger picture of Jewish persecution, but rather clashed with German occupiers and higher Hungarian authorities on the implementation methods thereof that affected the local non-Jewish population. Sulyok gave interesting insights in the role of the county level authorities in the establishment of the ghettos, pointing out the more or less „voluntary“ basis on which the local authorities acted.

Panel 3: Scopes of Action

The presentation by DENISA NEŠTÁKOVÁ (Bratislava) discussed the role of Gisi Fleis-

chmann, a prominent member of the Jewish community in Slovakia and one of the few women who took up a leadership role. Fleischmann was involved in the promotion of Jewish labor camps, believing to protect the Jewish population in doing so. In that context Nešťáková referred to the concept of „choiceless choices“ and talked about how Fleischmann is commemorated today. The following discussion showed the difficulties of analyzing the „collaboration“ between Jewish communities and the German authorities, thus problematizing the use of the term.

MATEUSZ TOMASZ JAMRO (Krakow) followed with his thoughts on the Polish political organizations in the Buchenwald concentration camp. Jamro related the developments in the Polish organisations in the Buchenwald camp to the establishment of the Second Polish Republic in 1918 and the formation of the major political parties in Poland at that time, which were later represented in Buchenwald by imprisoned party members. According to him, the Polish prisoners took over important positions in the camp after the organisation of Communist inmates was discovered by the SS in 1943.

The debate on scopes of action of inmates was carried further in the next panel by two talks that discussed the behavior of medical professionals. SARI J. SIEGEL (Los Angeles) presented an aspect of her PhD dissertation on Jewish prisoner-physicians in the Nazi camps, based on extensive primary sources. Jewish prisoner-physicians offer an interesting case study for Primo Levi's concept of the gray zone, as Siegel showed: they provided medical treatment to inmates, therefore improving their lives, but at the same time also participated in selecting patients who were to be killed. Siegel also introduced the term „coercion“ (in her definition, pressure to act in a particular way) as a potentially more useful term than „collaboration“ when considering these medical functionaries.

Building on Siegel's presentation and calling for an integrated history of prisoner doctors, SS doctors, as well as the camp system as such, CHRISTIAN SCHMITTWILKEN (Berlin) presented his research on the work of the SS-doctor Percival Treite in the camp of Ravensbrück. Coming from the discussion on

collaboration and resistance, he emphasized Treite's initiative in expanding the infirmary, as well as his initiative in carrying out human experiments. Schmittwilken stressed the complete imbalance of power within the camp system, in which SS members such as Treite dictated the spaces of action in which individual prisoners found themselves. This should be taken into account in discussions on resistance and collaboration.

The final panel of the conference also dealt with local reactions to persecution. BORBÁLA KLACSMANN (Budapest) presented her research on the Monor transit camp, located near Budapest, which served as a deportation center for approximately 9.000 Jews in early July 1944. She described the local administrative collaboration in setting up the camp, also exploring the behaviour of those people who were affected by the camp itself, addressing, for example, the issue of „bystanders“ and the coping strategies of the Jews themselves. Rounding up her presentation, Klacsmann also talked about the final phase of the camp: the deportations to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Local populations' knowledge of camps and their conditions was a topic also taken up by KATJA GROSSE-SOMMER (Amsterdam). Focusing on the contemporary representation of the relationship between the camp Sachsenhausen and town Oranienburg in an exhibit of the memorial Sachsenhausen, she questioned the exhibit's uncritical use of post-war oral testimony and their treatment of the concept of the bystander, thus linking to larger discussions in Holocaust historiography.

The individual presentations were completed by FRANKA RÖSSNER (representative of Grafeneck) and her introduction to the T4 program. Giving a general introduction to the National Socialist „euthanasia“ policy and the six centres for „euthanasia“ in the German Reich, Rössner specifically focused on Grafeneck, where the first gas chamber was built in 1940. Refuting the prevailing myth that protest by the church had led to the termination of the T4 program, Rössner showed that the National Socialists had already achieved their planned goals in the extermination of so-called „worthless life“ when the program was officially halted.

The week in Aix-en-Provence provided a supportive, non-hierarchical environment for graduate students to exchange and evaluate their ideas on the meanings of collaboration, resistance, and the nuanced spaces in between these terms. The 21st workshop thus proved to be a successful continuation of the established tradition of the workshop series, which will be further pursued in 2017 with a conference held in Budapest.

Conference Overview:

Introduction to the Workshop by the Organizing Team

Keynote Lecture by Prof. Dr. Robert Mencherini

Lecture by Jean Sérandour, representative of the Varian Fry Association

Panel 1: Art and Resistance: Music

Andreas Lehmann: Music in the concentration Camp Buchenwald

Panel 1: Art and Resistance: Material Objects

Helen Turner: Resistance as examined through material possessions in Auschwitz-Birkenau

Sabine Küntzel: Handicraft as Resistance. Beautiful Items made in Concentration Camps

Panel 1: Art and Resistance: Writing

Sara di Alessandro: Words beyond the fence: Writing as Resistance during World War II

Félix Deslauriers: Bulletin de Vernuche: Walter Benjamin's Political Project between Internment and Failed Escape

Panel 2: Institutionalized Collaboration

Janine Fubel: Driven Captivity. The Death March(es) from the Concentration Camp Sachsenhausen, Oranienburg

Izabella Sulyok: Crossfire of Interests - Ghettoization and local administration in a gendarmerie district of Hungary

Jos Sinnema: Introduction to the „Names, not Numbers“ project

Panel 3: Scopes of Action: Reactions of the

Persecuted

Denisa Nešťáková: Gisi Fleischmann and establishment of Labor camps in Slovakia

Mateusz Tomasz Jamro: Polish Political Organizations in Buchenwald Concentration Camp – Between Rivalry and Cooperation

Panel 3: Scopes of Action: Medical Professionals

Sari Siegel: Depictions in Shades of Gray: (Self-)Perceptions of Jewish Prisoner-Physicians in Nazi Camps

Christian Schmittwilken: Shaping the Institutional and Personal Prerequisites for Collaboration – The Example of the SS-doctor Percival Treite

Panel 3 Scopes of Action: Reaction of Locals

Borbála Klacsmann: 10 Days in the Brick Factory: The Monor Transit Camp

Katja Grosse-Sommer: Representing the Bystander in the memorial Sachsenhausen: „Die Stadt und das Lager 1936-1945“

Franka Rössner (representative of Grafeneck): Lethal Trajectories: The T4 Killers from Grafeneck to San Saaba

Summarizing Lecture and Final Discussion

Tagungsbericht *Between Collaboration and Resistance. 21st Workshop on the History and Memory of National Socialist Camps and Extermination Sites*. 24.05.2016–30.05.2016, Aix-en-Provence, in: H-Soz-Kult 30.08.2016.