

Perspectives on Memory: Research, Testimonies and the Media. 3. Bergen-Belsen International Summer School

Veranstalter: Gedenkstätte Bergen-Belsen / Bergen-Belsen Memorial

Datum, Ort: 01.08.2016–07.08.2016, Lohheide

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The third Bergen-Belsen International Summer School took place from the 1st until the 7th of August 2016 and focussed on the topics of memory, remembrance, bearing witness and the use of testimonies in different media. The 20 international participants were bachelor and master students of various disciplines such as history, art history, education and political science. One goal was to give the participants a deeper insight into the work of Bergen-Belsen Memorial as an international place of remembrance and learning, another was to expose the students to questions concerning concepts of memory and remembrance. Amongst the discussed questions was the role of scholars when researching the past and when making use of different sources such as diaries, interviews or feature films. Also the question how these depictions influence the viewers' awareness of history and image of the past was constructed. Further it was discussed how something can be made visible if there is no evidence left of it or it has been forgotten. During the summer school the participants listened to lectures, took part in discussions and workshops and received guided tours on the historical sites of Bergen-Belsen Memorial and Ahlem Memorial in Hanover. Throughout the week the participants also created blog posts commenting on their experiences for the summer school's homepage.¹

The official programme began with an opening lecture by ALEIDA ASSMANN (Konstanz) who gave an overview on the development of memory of the Holocaust in Germany. She pointed out a number of key events that shaped memory particularly and stated that memory was being influenced by generational changes as well as media changes and cultural concepts. Therefore

she introduced different concepts of memory and remembrance such as the three frames of transmission of Holocaust memory: the so-called 'identification mode', the 'ethical mode' and the 'empathy mode' all of which cannot be separated completely. After her lecture the participants had the chance to discuss the challenges and possibilities of Holocaust memory in the digital age. For instance they considered the use of fictional movies as a help for viewers to reconnect with individual experiences and discussed how interviews with witnesses that are being collected in different archives can be made accessible for future use.

Following this first theoretical input the participants were introduced to the history of Bergen-Belsen through a guided tour. They also had the opportunity to walk around the former camp grounds independently using the Bergen-Belsen tablet application.² In a meet the staff-session the students were able to gain an insight into different working areas within the memorial, such as the archive, the work on the name database and the field of the pedagogical work. In addition they were introduced to an Interview project in which testimonies of Bergen-Belsen survivors and other witnesses since the early years of 2000 were collected. These video interviews form a central part of the memorial's main exhibition.

On the second day of the summer school the participants had the opportunity to speak with Bergen-Belsen survivor and filmmaker FRANK DIAMAND (Amsterdam) about his experiences as a child-survivor of the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen and life after the camp. Being a professional story-teller today, Frank Diamand reflected on his desire to differentiate between personal and „learned“ memory.

In the second part of the workshop Frank Diamand screened the movie „When Memory comes“³ that he produced in 2013 about the

¹Participants of the GBB International Summer School 2016 / Summer School Blog, <<http://gbb.org/summerschool/seminar/news/>> (08.09.2016).

²SPECS / Bergen-Belsen Memorial / The Tablet application, <<http://www.belsen-project.specs-lab.com/the-tablet-application>> (08.09.2016).

³Frank Diamand, When Memory Comes: A Film About Saul Friedländer, 2013.

historian Saul Friedländer who is a Holocaust survivor himself.

A lecture by EVELIEN GANS (Amsterdam) introduced the biographies of the Jewish-Dutch family Meijer who survived the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.⁴ In her workshop the participants also read and discussed several diaries from other survivors of the Bergen-Belsen Sternlager like Hanna Lévy-Hass, who had been in the camp in order to be exchanged for Germans being held in neutral or Allied nations. Evelien Gans talked about her research experiences when using different forms of testimony like interviews or diaries and discussed the use of anecdotes as a strategy to cope with the past.

The next workshop with historian ULRIKE WECKEL (Giessen) dealt with the representation of the Holocaust in fictional movies. The participants talked about images of concentration camps each had in mind and about the historical photographs as well as original film footage that was being produced after the liberation.⁵ Furthermore they discussed the functions of fictional films as a form of reconstruction of the past. The workshop dealt with the difficult question of how to make use of narration when telling a story of dehumanization and showing unimaginable scenes, like the depiction of death in a gas chamber. For that purpose the participants watched different feature films from the early 1960s „Operation Eichmann“ up to recent productions like „Son of Saul“ and discussed in which way death in a gas chamber is represented.

In a workshop with STEPHANIE BILLIB (Gedenkstätte Bergen-Belsen) and SYTSE WIERENGA (Barcelona) the participants were given an insight into opportunities and developments in digital learning environments at Bergen-Belsen Memorial. They discussed the possibility of new ways of keeping memory alive and connecting individual stories of survivors to the camp site with help of the Bergen-Belsen tablet Application. Here the students tested the work of the App-creators themselves by designing potential thematic routes through the memorial site.

During a day trip to Hanover, the group visited the Ahlem Memorial. This former Jewish horticultural school first served as an as-

sembly point for deportations and was later a „police replacement prison“. The summer school participants visited the exhibition and the memorial sites in the gardens and discussed the use of video interviews in the main exhibition.

In the last workshop of the week KAREN BÄHR (Erfurt) gave an overview about different concepts of memory and remembrance such as ‘collective memory’, ‘historical consciousness’ and ‘historical culture’ and explored main principles of teaching history. It was then discussed whether those theoretical concepts were applied fully at the Bergen-Belsen memorial. Therefore the participants looked at how the architectural features, the memorial site and the exhibition of Bergen-Belsen Memorial make use of codes like multiperspectivity, intersectionality and controverse narration.

The final discussion with STEPHANIE BILLIB, KATRIN UNGER (Gedenkstätte Bergen-Belsen) and KAREN BÄHR (Erfurt) as a moderator summarized the results of the past week. In conclusion, the summer school made it possible for students from a diverse set of countries and disciplines to come together and discuss their views and experiences on Holocaust Memory. Throughout the week the participants debated over the use of historical sources like witness accounts and movies, learnt about theoretical concepts of memory and exchanged their interdisciplinary approaches to the topic.

Section Overview:

Opening Lecture

Aleida Assmann (University of Konstanz): „Changes of Holocaust Memory – Generations, Media, Concepts“

Guided Tour & Meet the staff of Bergen-Belsen Memorial

(Interview Project, Archive, Name Database, Pedagogical Work)

Talk

with Bergen-Belsen-Survivor Frank Diamand

⁴Evelien Gans, Jaap en Ischa Meijer. Een joodse geschiedenis 1912–1956, Amsterdam 2008.

⁵Ulrike Weckel, Beschämende Bilder. Deutsche Reaktionen auf alliierte Dokumentarfilme über befreite Konzentrationslager, Stuttgart 2012.

& Movie Screening „When Memory comes“
(2013)

Lecture and Workshop I

Evelien Gans (University of Amsterdam):
„Dying and surviving in the Sternlager of
Bergen-Belsen – Diaries and Interviews“

Workshop II

Ulrike Weckel (Universität Gießen): „Images
of the Unimaginable: Feature Films about the
Holocaust“

Workshop III

Stephanie Billib (Gedenkstätte Bergen-Belsen)
and Sytse Wierenga (SPECS/ Barcelona):
„Digital learning opportunities and develop-
ments in Bergen-Belsen“

Guided tour at Ahlem Memorial in Hanover

Workshop IV

Karen Bähr (Universität Erfurt): „Theories,
Practice and Voids – Holocaust Remembrance
and Bergen-Belsen-Memorial“

Final Discussion

Karen Bähr (Universität Erfurt), Stephanie
Billib and Katrin Unger (Gedenkstätte
Bergen-Belsen)

Tagungsbericht *Perspectives on Memory:
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Bergen-Belsen International Summer School.*
01.08.2016–07.08.2016, Lohheide, in: H-Soz-
Kult 04.11.2016.