

Between Absence and Affirmation. 23rd Workshop on the History and Memory of National Socialist Camps and Extermination Sites

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The Workshop brought together graduate students and young scholars from across the globe to discuss their ongoing research topics. The opening keynote lecture, given by GIORGOS ANTONIOU together with his colleague STRATOS DORDONAS (both Thessaloniki), emphasized the complex and turbulent history of Thessaloniki. While Dordonas introduced participants to the various approaches in studying and analyzing the Holocaust in Thessaloniki, highlighting the importance of using a variety of sources and coupling them with survivors' accounts in order to form a more integrated historical narrative, Antoniou pointed out the long continuity of denial, absence of memory, commemoration, and contemporary local scholarship relating to the Holocaust in Greece. However, during the last decade things have begun to change, and the workshop participants joined in the city's local memory march, which celebrates the memory of life and commemorates the death of the Jewish community in Thessaloniki.

Analyzing the intersection between sexuality, masculinity, and memory, FLORIAN ZABRANSKY (Sussex) opened the first panel of the workshop. His presentation on so-called *Piepel* focused on a group of mostly young male prisoners, who had participated in sexual barter with influential prisoners in order to receive protection. Zabransky's approach conceptually probes the limits of the category of

Piepel, arguing that their sexual barter was not completely voluntary, yet neither can they be categorized as sexual slavery, as witnessed in the camp brothels. Zabransky's presentation also provided insight into how memory politics filtered information about masculinity and male sexual violence in the memoirs of Jewish prisoners.

With an equally strong focus on gender analysis, STEFANIA ZEZZA (Rome) analyzed a group of Jewish female inmates at Ravensbrück concentration. Zezza's presentation reconstructed the stories of Sephardic women deported mostly from Thessaloniki and identified large gaps in the historical research of the persecution and deportation of Greek Jewry. According to Zezza, a more complete and detailed knowledge of these peculiar national groups, not yet presented in the Ravensbrück Memorial exhibition, is crucial for the scientific and pedagogical work being done there.

Dealing with camp society as well, LOVRO KRALJ (Budapest) addressed the issue of antisemitism among prisoners of the Jasenovac camp in Croatia. Kralj argues that although there is a vast literature on the history of Jasenovac, the topic of intra-prisoner dynamic, social roles, and the relationships between different categories of prisoners remains largely unexplored. The analysis of antisemitism in the testimonies of Serbian prisoners who were released in 1942 indicates that antisemitism was used for political purposes by the commissioners in occupied Serbia, while the examination of memoirs of some Croatian prisoners demonstrated further that they adopted antisemitism within the camp itself. The cornerstone of antisemitism among prisoners in Jasenovac was the projection of the status of a few, so-called „privileged“, Jewish prisoners onto other Jewish inmates within Jasenovac.

The first panel was complemented by Irina MAKHALOVA's (Moscow) presentation. She emphasized that historians concentrate mainly on the collaboration of the Crimean Tatars, while the question of voluntary cooperation of Russians and Ukrainians, particularly female collaboration, has not yet been researched in its entirety. During the German occupation, local women in Crimea worked as translators or as secret agents for the German

security service; they participated in interrogations of arrested Jews and assisted in collecting the belongings from houses of murdered people or identified communists and partisans. In her case study, Makhalova focuses on the social profiles of women and motivation for collaboration, and their postwar fates.

Shifting from the historical analysis of identity and social relations within camps or occupied societies to the analysis of practices of memorialization, the second panel, was opened by ŽELJANA TUNIĆ (Jena). Her presentation problematized the „policy of reconciliation“, as initiated by the Croatian president Franjo Tuđman during the 1990s when the idea of physically mixing the bones of perpetrators and victims of the Holocaust was proposed. Using an anthropological approach, Tunić argues that the narrative of victimhood at Jasenovac was replaced by that of the Croatian victimhood at Bleiburg – commemorating the World War II fascist perpetrators instead of the victims of genocide and the Holocaust during the 1941–45 period. The emphasis on bones and reburials during the 1990s was initiated in order to create a sense of propinquity between the living and the dead and, indeed, the past and the present.

EUGENIA MIHALCEA (Haifa) tackled the issue of how the memory of Jewish victims has been influenced by dominant Israeli narratives, as well as the memory politics of the Romanian communist regimes. In her presentation Mihalcea argued that, initially, Holocaust survivors in Israel were encouraged to forget their past in Europe. However, after the Eichmann trial (1961), there was a radical turn within Israeli society and witnesses of Holocaust atrocities were introduced as important actors in the public sphere. The prevailing Israeli narratives on the Holocaust had a lasting impact on Jewish-Romanian survivors who emphasized the role of the Germans as the main perpetrators, even though the majority of direct perpetrators were ethnic Romanians or the so-called „Volksdeutsche“ from Romania.

ROBERTG OBERMAIR (Salzburg) examined the dynamics of interaction between memory politics on the macro, state-level and commemorative practices at the local level. Using the case study of Vöcklabruck, a satelli-

te camp of Mauthausen, he demonstrated the importance of local initiatives in maintaining the educational and commemorative practices relating to the Holocaust in Austria.

Shifting from memory politics in Austria and Israel to those of Poland, JOAN SALTER (Nottingham) challenged the narrative of Polish unwillingness and subsequent failure to commemorate the Holocaust in a case study of the Polish town of Tarnow. Salter argues that much has been achieved in terms of commemorative and educational practices in Tarnow over the last two decades, thanks to the grassroot activities of local historians and the community of the town who have since established an important memorial dedicated to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

Further examination of memorialization practices was pursued in the third panel. ULRIKE LÖFFLER (Jena) argued that in contrast to the German Democratic Republic, most former camps in the German Federal Republic in the 1970s were completely absent from public memory. This slowly changed in the 1980s when existing exhibitions were enlarged considerably and many of these formerly „forgotten camps“ were reconditioned as memorial sites. Yet many of the victims such as Sinti and Roma, homosexuals, forced laborers, and others remained „forgotten“, which increased pressure in the late 1980s to recognize their suffering. Profound research on these groups, and especially their representation in exhibitions and educational material, has taken even longer. Löffler emphasizes that this demonstrates how absences and blind spots are a part of the history of memorial site pedagogy.

In the panel's second paper, ANGELIKI GAVRIILOGLOU, CHRISTOS CHATZIIOANNIDIS and PANOURGIAS CHRISTOS (all Thessaloniki) expanded the workshop's geographical coverage to Thessaloniki with their presentation of the on-going research project. The project concerns Jewish students of Thessaloniki during World War II. By gathering and analyzing information from communal schools – they created a database. These researched findings are uploaded to a website that contains an interactive map identifying where these children lived in the city just before the deportations, as well as further information on the historical and educational con-

text of the era. Developing this website as an educational tool, the student initiative focuses on encouraging local public involvement with the city's attempts to reclaim both its Jewish past and to recognize its responsibility in commemorating the Jewish population that inhabited Thessaloniki for centuries.

The next presentation by MARIOS-KYPARISSIS MOROS and AGATHI BAZANI (Thessaloniki) proposed to explore the ways in which the history of the German occupation of Greece (1941–1944), and the occupation of Thessaloniki in particular, was represented in contemporary Greek fiction. Starting from the assumption that fiction is engaged in a dialogue with history and memory, they emphasized that two generations of post-war writers can be found in Greece. By focusing on Houzouri's novel, *Moros* and *Bazani* analyzed how the story is connected to public historical speech and contemporary theories on memory. They examined how – under the pretext of historical investigation – Houzouri's main character dives into the world of individual-, familial-, and collective memory, as well as the memory of the city of Thessaloniki, which in expressing its own agency, triggers the protagonist's thoughts and actions.

IRINA REBROVA (Berlin) shifted the discussion from memorialization discourse in modern literature to the subject of monuments. Rebrova stressed that monuments and memorial sites are not only vessels of history, but a part of the history as well. By asking how the monument is inserted into the urban / rural landscape – how it engages with the local community's everyday life, whether it is a product of official memory or private commemoration – one can also study the memory of Holocaust victims in the (former) Soviet Union. Sites of mass killing of Soviet Jews were abandoned in the post war period. Later, such places became part of urban space or were used as cultivated areas. In the 1960s and 1970s, the most famous memorial complexes were erected throughout the USSR under the universal aegis of „victims of fascism“. Narratives of Jewish suffering and victimhood were silenced throughout Soviet history, yet in post-Soviet Russia the situation remains largely unchanged. Rebrova explores how me-

morialization has mostly taken place at the local level and by members of the Jewish communities.

The last panel was opened by KARIN HOFMAISTEROVA (Prague). She examined the politics of history within the Serbian Orthodox Church, from the 1980s to the present developments on commemorative plans dealing with the camp and the Holocaust in Serbia. The narrative of a glorious past has since been replaced with a narrative of national victimhood which conflates the connection between Serbian plight and the suffering of Jews during the Holocaust. The planned memorial and the museum at the site of Staro Sajmište is supposed to reflect this narrative of shared suffering between Serbs and Jews.

DARIA STARIKASHKINA (Giessen) deals with the experience of soviet prisoners of war (POW) in the Leningrad area: a region that was besieged and occupied by the German Wehrmacht from 1941 to 1944. Through the medium of photography, Starikashkina analyzes the memorialization practices of this period. The purpose of her project is to create an exhibition that catalogues the traces of memory of the occupation in the region, which was heavily related to the German POW camp system's activities. In the Gatchinskaja Oblast area alone, about 130 camps were established, but in most cases their remains do not exist anymore. By the fixation of such physical absence in photographs, Starikashkina looks to fill the gaps related to memory, and in turn develop a potential foundation for further research on the topic.

The individual presentations were completed by LAURA STÖBENER (Berlin). In her presentation Stöbner emphasized, how in *Kamp Vught* – a former Nazi concentration camp – multiple layers of history and opposing narratives collide. In considering the variegated uses of the postwar terrain at *Kamp Vught*, Stöbener's research centers around how these contrasting histories are mutually intertwined and entangled, and how they collectively influence the memorialization of the former concentration camp. In 1990, a memorial and museum of the camp was founded. It presents not only the history of the persecution, deportation, and murder of Dutch Jews under German occupation, but

contextualizes it within the larger history (and its consequences) of the Netherlands' own violent and racist colonial past. By highlighting the peculiarities of her case study, Stöbner sheds light onto memorialization of contested spaces and outlines the broader (national) culture of memorialization in the Netherlands.

As a part of the workshop itinerary, participants visited the former detention site „Pavlos Melas“, which was instituted by the German SD (secret service) from 1941 to 1944 and guarded by members of the Greek police. Furthermore, they had the privilege to listen to a presentation by IOSIF STROUMSA, a 90 year-old local Holocaust survivor. The week-long workshop in Thessaloniki provided insight into innovative approaches to the study of the Holocaust and the history of Nazi concentration camps. The broad spectrum of academic disciplines and international representation contributed considerably to the success of the workshop. Furthermore, the field of „memory studies“ had a strong presence throughout the panels, thereby affirming the rising impact of the „memory turn“ in the international discipline of Holocaust and genocide studies. Owing to the excellent selection of papers and panels, the 23rd workshop thus proved to be an invaluable continuation to the ambitious aspirations of the workshop series, which will be further pursued in 2020 with a conference held in Salzburg.

Conference overview:

Opening remarks

Keynote Lecture by Giorgos Antoniou & Stratos Dordonas (Thessaloniki)

Panel 1: Identity and Social Interaction inside Concentration Camps

Florian Zabransky (Sussex): Male Jewish Sexuality in the Nazi camps and Sexual anti-Semitism

Stefania Zezza (Rome): Greek Female Prisoners in Ravensbrück and its Sub-Camps between Starvation and Forced Labor

Lovro Kralj (Budapest): Antisemitism in the Ustasha Jasenovac Death Camp

Irina Makhalova (Moscow): Forgotten Collaborators: Soviet Women in Occupied Crimea

Panel 2: Commemoration and Politics

Željana Tunič (Jena): The Politics of Commemoration over the Jasenovac Camp in Croatia

Eugenia Mihalcea (Haifa): Memories and Memorialization in Romania and Transnistria

Joan Salter (Nottingham): Tarnow: A Town Remembers its Lost Jews

Robert Obermair (Salzburg): Commemoration of Satellite Camps in Austria

Panel 3: Memory Construction and Education Methodologies

Ulrike Löffler (Jena): „Forgotten Camps“ and „Forgotten Victims“; Educational Work at NS Memorials in the Old Federal Republic

Angeliki Gavriioglou, Christos Chatziioannidis & Panourgias Christos (Thessaloniki): Mapping Memory: Jewish Students in World War II Salonika and the Holocaust

Marios-Kyparissis Moros / Agathi Bazani (Thessaloniki): Literature and Memory in the Holocaust in Thessaloniki

Irina Rebrova (Berlin): The Life of Holocaust Memorials in the Soviet Union and Russia

Panel 4: Competing Narratives of Memory from the 'Periphery'

Karin Hofmeisterova (Prague): Staro Sajmište Camp in the Serbian Orthodox Church's Narrative of the Holocaust

Daria Starikashkina (Giessen): The Jewish Population of Leningrad; Between Siege and Genocide

Laura Stöbener (Berlin): Kamp Vught and Levels of Memory: From the Philips-Barraks to the High Security Penal Institution

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