

New Approaches to Research on Everyday Life during World War II

Veranstalter: Heidi Hein-Kircher, Herder Institute for Historical Research on East-Central Europe; Gintarė Malinauskaitė, German Historical Institute Warsaw; Jerzy Kochanowski, University of Warsaw; Igor Kąkolewski, Centre for Historical Research in Berlin of the Polish Academy of Science

Datum, Ort: 27.09.2019–28.09.2019, Berlin

Bericht von: Ruth Leiserowitz, German Historical Institute Warsaw

The workshop aimed to convene young researchers to contribute to networking in the field as well as to foster and stimulate future impulses for their research. During the workshop, the organisers addressed new approaches and topics through reading important texts and presenting current research projects.

Two keynote lectures by TATJANA TÖNSMEYER (Wuppertal) and JERZY KOCHANOWSKI (Warsaw) opened the workshop. In her speech, Tönsmeier challenged our knowledge about the Second World War and its historical research by offering new approaches and perspectives to researchers. Mainly, an approach to everyday life under the conditions of occupation could deliver new insights into war societies. In his opening lecture, Kochanowski discussed his research on the survival strategies of Polish society during 1939 and 1945. His presentation focused on daily life during the occupation, revealing how ordinary people managed to survive within strict rules imposed by the occupiers. He approached such issues as illegal trade, unemployment, new job possibilities in the changing labour market, and daily eating habits and portrayed how people managed to adapt to occupation and survive war struggles and hardships.

The first panel, dedicated to everyday life in the Warsaw ghetto, started with a presentation by JUSTYNA MAJEWSKA (Warsaw). The paper, inspired by the theories of time by François Hartog (spirit of the time) and Barbara Adam (colonising of future), introduced Majewska's research on future visions of the Jewish life from the Warsaw ghetto. Investi-

gating the debates on the Jewish future carried out in the Warsaw ghetto by Zionists, Socialists, and Bundists. She showed how interned Jews imagined their time ahead and what ideas they shaped for a future awaiting them in postwar Poland and Palestine. Using such sources as the underground press and Jewish personal accounts from the Ringelblum Archive, she revealed how the prewar social stance of her analysed actors influenced these visions of the future.

Another case dealing with the everyday life experiences in the Warsaw ghetto was presented by MARIA FERENC PIOTROWSKA (Warsaw). In her paper on sources and meanings of information in the Warsaw ghetto, she sought to answer questions related to the outside knowledge gathered in the ghetto. She claimed that Jews were imprisoned not only physically but also that they were interned in time. Therefore, Piotrowska argued that information from the outside world in the ghetto was a valuable resource that allowed Jews to interpret war events and shape their future visions. She addressed not only such questions as how the information was imported to the ghetto, how it was processed and gathered, but she also portrayed how Jews interpreted wartime news, what emotions this outside knowledge and rumours evoked and, finally, how the information contributed to shaping Jewish mental visions of reality.

In the second panel, MANTAS ŠIKŠNIANAS' (Vilnius) contribution to everyday life in Nazi-occupied Lithuania (1941–1944) sought to investigate such topics as healthcare, medicine, hygiene, food as well as to show how reversed daily life during the war impacted people's mental health and how people adapted to different wartime situations and managed to reshape their everyday life. He presented his research as the first scholarly project in Lithuania dedicated not to the factual or political history of the Second World War, but the study of the everyday life of ordinary people during the Nazi occupation. According to Šikšnianas, the lack of research on everyday life during the war in Lithuania could be explained by the legacies of the Soviet occupation of Lithuania and ideologically based historiography, which solely used to highlight the crimes and cruelties of

the occupiers and avoided the topics of the everyday life war experiences.

In her paper on crime and criminal prosecution as a part of everyday life in „Jewish ghettos,“ JUDITH VÖCKER (Leicester) introduced new insights into the social history of the ghettos in occupied Poland. She argued that for Jewish ghetto inmates, crime and criminality, which were steadily growing in the ghettos during the wartime, were a necessary survival strategy. Vöcker asked how the Nazi regime constructed a new legal sphere and introduced new standards of law in occupied Poland. She studied the history of the German and Special Courts in the Generalgouvernement that prosecuted crimes committed by Jews and Poles and decided upon the life or death of its defendants. She demonstrated that such activities as leaving the territory without permission, smuggling, bribery of guards or illegal trade of smuggled goods during the war were redefined and turned into very severe criminal acts leading to harsh punishments or even death penalties.

Sounds and soundscapes in Nazi ghettos and concentration camps were a topic that opened the final session of the workshop. JANINA WURBS (Bern) focused on the everyday auditory experiences of Jews during the war. Her paper, based on such resources as texts written by Jews and other archival sources from the ghettos and concentration camps, portrayed how micro-historical soundscapes were created. She argued that sound is never just a sound and raised intriguing questions, for example: „what role did sounds play in ghettos and concentration camps?“ „How auditory experiences have affected the lives of interned Jews?“ and „Why were these sounds produced, and how did they contribute to the survival?“

MARTIN BORKOWSKI-SARUHAN (Göttingen) presented his research project on leisure activities during the Second World War, focusing on sports, violence, and everyday life in East Upper Silesia. He argued that German-occupied East Upper Silesia presents an exceptional case as its population was banned from any organised sports activities. Borkowski-Saruhan claimed that sports were an occupier's niche to exercise violence against the occupied, ranging from

Germanisation to extermination. At the same time, he noticed that sports could have also served as a protection from military service and created an impression of normalcy. To define this situation, he employed Alf Lüdtke's term *Eigen-Sinn* that defined the strategy to distance oneself from the regime and its power relations.

JAKUB GAŁEZOWSKI (Augsburg / Warsaw) introduced gendered approaches to everyday life history during the war. He drew attention on sexual relations between local women and foreign enemy or Allies'soldiers, ranging from violence to love relationships, and discussed the issue of children born of war from these relationships in postwar Poland. Gałezowski claimed that the stories of these children remain untold in Poland until today. He illustrated this set of problems by presenting his complicated process of finding interviewees to share their traumatic experiences, as these children grew up in silence and were unwilling to bring their past to the surface.

The workshop gave a possibility for its participants to share their current research and offered new insights into the study of everyday life during the Second World War in Nazi-occupied Poland and Lithuania. The stimulating discussions with other scholars after each presentation highlighted not only the positive aspects of each project but also gave suggestions for further improvements.

Conference overview:

Keynotes

Tatjana Tönsmeier (University of Wuppertal): Alles schon bekannt? Der Zweite Weltkrieg und die historische Forschung: Neue Ansätze und Perspektiven

Jerzy Kochanowski (University of Warsaw): Survival Strategies of the Polish Society During 1939–1945. Research Proposal

Panel I

Justyna Majewska (Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw): Toward the Future: Visions of the Jewish Life from the Warsaw Ghetto

Maria Ferenc Piotrowska (University of Warsaw): Sources and Meanings of Information in

Warsaw Ghetto

Panel II

Mantas Šikšnianas (University of Vilnius):
Everyday Life in Nazi-Occupied Lithuania
1941–1944

Judith Vöcker (University of Leicester): Crime
and Criminal Prosecution as a Part of Every-
day Life in „Jewish Ghettos“

Panel III

Janina Wurbs (University of Bern): Over-
heard? Sounds and Soundscapes in NS Ghet-
tos and Concentration Camps

Martin Borkowski-Saruhan (University of
Göttingen): Fun Under German Occupation?
Sports, Violence, and Everyday Life in East
Upper Silesia During World War II

Jakub Gałęziowski (University of Augsburg
/ University of Warsaw): Entangled Biogra-
phies of Children Born of War in Poland after
1945

Tagungsbericht *New Approaches to Re-
search on Everyday Life during World War
II*. 27.09.2019–28.09.2019, Berlin, in: H-Soz-
Kult 07.11.2019.