

**24th Workshop on the History and Memory of National Socialist Camps and Killing Sites: From Centre to Periphery and Beyond**

**Veranstalter:** Agathi Bazani (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) / Ulrike Loeffler (Friedrich Schiller University, Jena) / Robert Obermair (University of Salzburg) / Christian Schmittwilken (Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich) / Maximilian Schulz (Leipzig University) / Laura Stoebener (Humboldt University, Berlin) / Florian Zabransky (University of Sussex, Brighton) / Jonathan Zisook (The Graduate Center, City University of New York)

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**Bericht von:** Silke Umdasch, Paris Lodron Universität Salzburg / Emil Kjerte, Clark University, Worcester

This workshop is an international union of future scholars organised for and by MA and Ph.D. students, with an annually changing theme. The unique setting and non-hierarchical environment foster a conducive atmosphere for discussion and debate between researchers and participants. Over the course of six days, the 36 participants listened to 14 individual presentations in four panels, each of which concluded with a discussion session. Due to travel restrictions in connection with COVID-19, bringing together a group of international students turned out to be challenging as not all participants could physically join the seminar. Hence, this year's workshop was a mix of online and offline participation. In addition to the presentations, excursions were organised to link the topic to the workshop's location.

The keynote was delivered by BERTRAND PERZ, who discussed the concepts of centre and periphery in the context of Mauthausen concentration camp and its subcamps. His keynote was followed up by HELGA EMBACHER. Focusing on Austrian commemorative culture since the immediate post-war period, she highlighted how Austrian politicians often portrayed their country as the first victim of national socialist aggression and downplayed persisting anti-Semitism. As part of

the workshop, a conversation with survivor Gertraud Fletzberger was intended to give the participants the opportunity to engage directly with a contemporary witness. However, due to the current situation, this event was substituted with a previously recorded video sequence.

The first panel revolved around visual sources, a type of source that can shed light on unfamiliar aspects of the Holocaust and contribute with novel perspectives. Kickstarting the panel, ELLA FALLDORF (Jena) discussed artworks created in Buchenwald by political prisoners. Challenging the tendency to take such artworks solely as evidence of „spiritual resistance“, Falldorf argued that they sometimes served to assert the identity of the political prisoners and to differentiate them from other prisoner groups. She substantiated her point by analysing artistic depictions that political prisoners made of the emaciated Muselmann in the so-called Little Camp in Buchenwald. A shared feature of these depictions is the use of visual elements and motifs from different cultural traditions that had the effect of estranging and distancing the Muselmann from the artist, which problematises the notion of solidarity between all inmates proclaimed by the camp resistance after the liberation.

Moving from the victim to the perpetrator perspective, LUKAS MEISSEL (Haifa) analysed SS photographs taken in concentration camps. These photographs were commissioned by central SS actors and offer insights into how the perpetrators sought to convey an idealised image of the camps. Addressing the resemblance to contemporary crime-scene photos, Messel elucidated how the SS utilised this type of photography to present their activities in the camps as purportedly scientific police work and thereby legitimise the killings. The staged photographs did not function as propaganda tools but were disseminated internally within the SS to bolster the institution's self-conception as a modern police force.

The panel was concluded by SANDRA FRANZ (Düsseldorf), who focused on the photographic and cinematic evidence produced in the immediate aftermath of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen by British forces. While

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the shocking images of heaps of corpses have played a profound role in shaping post-war narratives of concentration camps and the Holocaust, the history of Bergen-Belsen and the circumstances surrounding its liberation are largely shrouded in obscurity. Unveiling the history behind the images, Franz highlighted the disbelief that the British soldiers experienced when they entered the camp and their difficulties with perceiving the emaciated survivors as humans. Fearing a similar reaction, the British government was hesitant to broadcast the disturbing images to the public.

The second panel, „Neighbours, Places, Spaces“, was dedicated to the web of interactions between perpetrators, bystanders and victims in communities that became interwoven in the unfolding of the Holocaust. The first presentation was given by VOLODYMYR ZILINSKI (Lviv), who examined mass shootings of Jews in the Lviv region. Although Germans pulled the triggers, they enlisted or pressured locals to facilitate the implementation of the atrocities. Jewish auxiliary police from nearby ghettos were often compelled to escort victims to killing sites, while local gentile Poles and Ukrainians sometimes helped with logistics, provided alcohol to killing squads and covered up graves.

Focusing on the T4 killing facility at Brandenburg-Havel and its neighbourhood, CLARA MANSFELD (Brandenburg) moved the topic from the periphery of the East to the centre of the Nazi state. Contrary to apologetic claims of ignorance, the murder of people with disabilities in the facility was an open secret throughout the neighbourhood. Mansfeld argued that the locals' reactions ran the gamut from approval to acceptance to resistance. The few who resisted were primarily motivated by religious beliefs or personal relations to the victims. However, most neighbours passively accepted what was transpiring and remained inactive bystanders.

JUDITH VÖCKER's (Leicester) presentation on German courts in the General Government shed light on the barrage of discriminating legislation that Jews became subjected to. The courts functioned as an instrument for controlling the local population and played a critical role in implementing the Holocaust in the General Government by provi-

ding a legal basis for the persecution. Even for minor offenses, punishments were draconic. Already by October 1941, 50 persons had been sentenced to death for leaving the Cracow ghetto. In stark contrast to the harshness exhibited when they meted out sentences, most judges and lawyers in the General Government were never prosecuted after the war.

With recourse to untapped non-Jewish video testimonies, JAN BURZLAFF (Harvard) analysed the reconfiguration of social relations in the village of Belzec prompted by its proximity to the death camp. Central to his presentation were the social ties between the locals and SS men, Jewish forced labourers and *Trawniki*. To a large extent, it was the strength of these relations that determined chances of survival in the village. Besides their potential for illuminating local dynamics in the periphery of the Holocaust, Buzlaff underlined that interviews with non-Jewish bystanders contain accounts of escape and resistance by Jewish prisoners not preserved in other sources.

The heterogeneity of the actors that implemented the Nazi genocide was reflected in the panel on the perpetrators of the Holocaust. STEFAN BOBERG (Sussex) zeroed in on the agencies responsible for registering the German population on the basis of „race“. The registration process was characterised by growing centralization around the SS, which peaked in 1939 with the creation of a card index – the *Volkskartei*. Collated with a census on „racial descent“, this index proved essential in identifying the targeted Jews when the deportations commenced. However, registration also constituted a field on which competition between local and central actors was played out. Thus, when local state structures began to establish their own indexes in a bid to strengthen their position vis-à-vis Himmler's expanding police apparatus, the power balance tilted towards actors in the periphery.

Complementing Boberg's presentation, NIELS POHL (Berlin) analysed the obstacles Nazi bureaucrats and diplomats faced during their efforts to persecute Jews with foreign citizenship in the German sphere of interest. While states allied with Germany often pursued their own anti-Semitic domestic

policy, they frequently used the citizenship of their Jewish subjects as a bargaining chip in negotiations with German diplomacy to assert themselves politically. To illustrate the intricate negotiations the question sparked, Pohl invoked the case of Jenny Cozzi, an Italian Jewish woman who was interned in the Riga ghetto. Having been notified of her plight, the Italians requested her release, which prompted a dispute with the German Foreign Office and Reichs Main Security Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt) that first ended with the Italian capitulation.

The panel was concluded by EMIL KJERTE (Clark), who examined the guard force of the Jasenovac concentration camp in Croatia. Zeroing in on the perpetrators' intra-group relations, Kjerte illuminated how the camp leadership induced participation in killings and other heinous acts to cement the guards' belonging to a community predicated on moral transgression. Nevertheless, tensions persisted between members of the guard force due to cultural cleavages and factionalism cultivated by officers. In addition, some guards acted less cruelly when they were alone with prisoners, which suggests differences between their „private“ and „public“ behaviour.

The final panel, „memorialization“, revolved around the contested legacies of the Holocaust and its commemoration. MARLENE WÖCKINGER (Salzburg), focused on how the sensitive topic of the perpetrators is dealt with in workshops and tours at memorial sites on former concentration camps in Germany and Austria. While talking about the perpetrators has for a long time been anathema to most curators and guides, the subject is gaining traction within Holocaust education. Yet, Wöckinger underlined the absence of a uniform approach. At Ravensbrück, the perpetrators are a fixed part of the guided tours. In contrast, it is left to the discretion of the guides at Dachau and Mauthausen whether to address them. However, Wöckinger also observed how space itself determined the extent to which perpetrators were a subject of discussion. Whereas visitors in Ravensbrück walk into buildings that used to be everyday workspaces of SS-men, they are not allowed to enter watchtowers and former SS offices at

Dachau and Mauthausen.

MARYNA TKACHENKO (Dnipro) examined historical consciousness of the Second World War in contemporary Ukraine. Focusing on history students living in the city of Dnipro, she inquired into their knowledge of and emotional attitude to monuments that commemorate the victims of Nazi atrocities in what was then Dnipropetrovsk. The questionnaire revealed that although the students were aware of their existence, the monuments generally did not elicit strong emotions. Directing attention to the interrelationship between memory and emotion, Tkachenko concluded that the students in Dnipro belong to a generation whose knowledge of the events of the Second World War is not necessarily translated into actual remembrance.

Using the examples of the memorial sites at Buchenwald and Neuengamme, JESSICA BURMESTER (Hanover) addressed educational programmes about former concentration camps. She argued that transnational political debates about the commemoration of the Holocaust can be evidenced within education. Employing a European perspective, she stressed that the narrative of the Holocaust as the singular crime against humanity is being challenged by a narrative that pays an equal amount of attention to commemorating Nazi and Stalinist crimes. While the debate has shaped the educational programmes in Buchenwald and Neuengamme, they have responded differently, showing the absence of a homogeneous European Holocaust memory culture.

The panel was concluded by NINA RABUZA (Berlin), who focused on the memorial at the crematory of the Dachau concentration camp, which was redesigned in the early 1950s as a garden. The choice to cultivate a garden reflected an aesthetic form rooted in the 19th century and expressed in the cemeteries of the First World War, whose designs symbolically integrated the deaths on the battlefield into the ideology of the heroic death for the nation. However, throughout the 1950s, Dachau survivors criticised the garden memorial's design as inappropriate for commemorating the camp's violent history. Rabuza concluded by noting that the survivors' criticism echoed a broader rejection of the para-

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digm of the heroic death in the landscaped nature and signalled its replacement by a new paradigm predicated on the authentic.

While dealing with different temporal and geographical settings, the presentations offered diverse perspectives and various approaches that facilitated a transnational view on the topics. The inspiring speeches from keynote speakers and scholars gave in-depth insight into the subject of „centre“ and „periphery“. At the end of the workshop, the organisation team and topic of the next workshop were chosen: The 25th workshop on the History and Memory of National Socialist Camps and Killing Sites will be held in Zagreb, Croatia in 2022 with the title „The Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion“.

#### **Conference overview:**

##### *Keynote lecture*

Bertrand Perz (University of Vienna)

Q&A with Helga Embacher (Salzburg University)

##### *Panel 1: Visual Sources*

Ella Falldorf (Jena University): On the Edges of Buchenwald. Interpretations of the Little Camp in Artworks of Political Prisoners

Lukas Meissel (University of Haifa): Institutionalised Perpetrator Photography. SS Pictures taken at Concentration Camps

Sandra Franz (Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf): „When Night Falls“ – the Photographic Evidence of the Liberation of Bergen-Belsen as an Iconic Template for the Holocaust

##### *Panel 2: Neighbours, Places and Spaces*

Volodymyr Zilinskyi (Ivan Franko National University of Lviv): Mass Shootings of Jews during the Nazi Occupation in the Territory of the Lviv Region

Clara Mansfeld (Memorial to the Victims of Euthanasia Murders, Brandenburg): Euthanasia Crimes and the City Society. The T4 Killing Facility in Brandenburg/Havel and its Neighbourhood

Judith Vöcker (University of Leicester): National Socialist „Jewish ghettos“ as Legal Spheres in Occupied Poland

Jan Burzlaff (Harvard University): In the Pe-

riphery of the Gas Chambers: Social Ties and Daily Life Around the Death Camp of Belzec (1941-1945)

##### *Panel 3: Perpetrators*

Stefan Boberg (University of Sussex): Deportation Lists as a Token in the Power Struggles of Berlin Ministries and Local Administration

Niels Pohl (Touro College Berlin): Persecution Policy and State Practice: Nazi Bureaucracy and Diplomacy in Dealing with Jews of Foreign Nationality in the Extended German Sphere of Power from 1942 onwards: A Case Study

Emil Kjerte (Clark University): The Perpetrators of the Jasenovac Camp Complex: Intragroup Relations and Private/Public Behaviour

##### *Panel 4: Memorialisation*

Marlene Wöckinger (Salzburg University): Talking about National Socialist Perpetrators. A Comparative Study on Workshops at the Memorials of Dachau, Mauthausen and Ravensbrück

Maryna Tkachenko (Dnipro National University): Memorial Markers of Victims of Nazi Terror in Dnipro (Ukraine) and the Emotional Culture of History Students Regarding their Perception of Tragedy

Jessica Burmester (Leibniz University of Hannover): Europeanisation of the Educational Work at Memorial Sites in Germany

Nina Rabuza (Free University of Berlin): The Crematory Area as a „Garden of Memory“ – Landscape Gardening and Meaning at the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site

Tagungsbericht *24th Workshop on the History and Memory of National Socialist Camps and Killing Sites: From Centre to Periphery and Beyond*. 19.10.2020–25.10.2020, Salzburg und digital, in: H-Soz-Kult 10.03.2021.