

Gruner, Wolf: *Widerstand in der Rosenstrasse. Die Fabrik-Aktion und die Verfolgung der „Mischehen“ 1943*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag 2005. ISBN: 3-596-16883-X; 224 S.

Rezensiert von: Joachim Neander, Oswiecim und Kraków, Poland

On February 27, 1943, the Gestapo launched a nationwide „De-Judaization of the Reich“ raid, in Berlin better known as „Fabrik-Aktion“. Roughly 2,000 Jewish „Mischlinge“ and partners of „racially mixed“ marriages were separately rounded up in an office building of the Jewish Community on Rosenstrasse 2-4. The same day, „Aryan“ relatives of the arrested – for the most part wives and mothers – gathered before this building and publicly gave vent to their anger about the arrests. The street protests lasted for a whole week, until March 6, 1943, when nearly all Rosenstrasse internees had been released.

Just after the end of World War II, first reports about those events appeared, portraying the street protests as the cause of release. Since then, the Rosenstrasse women’s public protest has passed for a prime example of successful non-violent resistance in Nazi Germany. From the many publications sharing this view, Nathan Stoltzfus’ „Resistance of the Heart“ (1996; German version 1999) stands out as the most thoroughly researched scholarly work.¹ Wolf Gruner, in his dissertation published in 1997, already questioned this point of view², and firmly rejected it since 2002 in several publications. Historians such as Wolfgang Benz and Claudia Schoppmann, Berlin, Beate Meyer, Hamburg, or Rainer Deker, Paderborn, have sided with Gruner on this issue.

In the beginning, the discussion took place predominantly in scholarly journals. But when, in autumn 2003, Margarethe von Trotta’s award winning feature film „Rosenstrasse“ appeared on German cinema screens, a little „Historikerstreit“ erupted.³ In print and electronic media the opponents – not always professional historians – fought a fierce battle of words. To a large degree, both sides concur in their views of the course of events. The opinions about the background, however, wide-

ly diverge: Why were „Mischlinge“ and partners from „mixed marriages“ arrested at all, why were they kept at Rosenstrasse 2-4 for a period of up to two weeks, and finally, why were they eventually released, and who ordered this?

In the book under review, Gruner begins with an outline of the reception history of the street protests. He then positions the „Fabrik-Aktion“ within the broader context of the persecution of German Jews in wartime. He continues with a detailed portrayal of the arrests in Berlin and of the events within the Rosenstrasse transit camp, based to a great extent on documents from the Jewish Victims of Fascism files in the Centrum Judaicum, Berlin, archives.⁴ In the concluding chapter „Der Protest und seine Konsequenzen“ Gruner gets to the point: „At the end of February 1943, the NS authorities did not intend to deport the Rosenstrasse inmates, and the protests, therefore, had not led to their release.“ (p. 204)

Gruner follows the thread of reasoning that he had devised in his earlier publications. He enriches it with numerous examples which support his theses, but, with regard to content, does not go beyond statements and conclusions previously made. His reasoning is first and foremost based on the wording of the Reich Security Main Office guidelines for deportation to Auschwitz, dated February 20, 1943, and dependent Gestapo decrees from Frankfurt/Oder and Dortmund. In all these documents it says that „Geltungsjuden“ and Jewish partners of „German-Jewish mixed marriages“ were „for the present“ exempt from deportation. Gruner seems to be firmly convinced that the subordinate police and Gestapo units strictly abided by those rules (p. 194). He overlooks, however, that in the cour-

¹ Stoltzfus, Nathan, *Resistance of the Heart. Inter-marriage and the Rosenstrasse Protest in Nazi Germany*, New York 1996; German edition: *Widerstand des Herzens. Der Aufstand der Berliner Frauen in der Rosenstraße – 1943*, Munich 1999.

² Gruner, Wolf, *Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz deutscher Juden. Zur Zwangsarbeit als Element der Verfolgung 1938-1943*, Berlin 1997.

³ As coined by „Die Zeit“, No. 45, October 30, 2003, in an editorial.

⁴ These files are not generally accessible. The reviewer, e.g., was denied access by letter from Stiftung Neue Synagoge Berlin – Centrum Judaicum, September 5, 2005.

se of the „Fabrik-Aktion“ roughly 120 Berlin Jews from „mixed marriages“ were sent to Auschwitz, a fact already mentioned in a paper presented at a conference on the Rosenstrasse events in April 2004 which Gruner attended.⁵

Gruner argues as follows: In the course of the „Fabrik-Aktion“, the Gestapo first had to apprehend all Berlin Jews, which meant the arrest of about 10,000 individuals. From these the Gestapo had to select those Jews who lived in or came from „mixed marriages“. They were rounded up separately at Rosenstrasse 2-4 for two reasons. First, Gestapo officers had to check scrupulously the „racial status“ of the internees to avoid inadvertently deporting Jews who, under the regulations in force, were not bound for Auschwitz (p. 110). Second – and here Gruner can rightfully take the credit for having been the first who pointed to this fact – the Gestapo had to select personnel from the internees that were to replace „full Jews“ who were employed in the still existing Jewish institutions and now could be deported (p. 119). This would explain the concentration of partners from „mixed marriages“ at Rosenstrasse, the relatively long time of their arrest, and their trickling release.

But many questions still remain open. Why had the Gestapo to check the „suspects“ „racial status“ at all? No part of the German population was better „on record“ than the Jews. Shall we assume that the Gestapo's „Judenkartei“ was suddenly lost? The same holds with the Hollerith files of the Labor Office („Arbeitsamt“), from which the Gestapo easily could have drawn information about the professional skills of the Jews concerned. If „checking the racial status“ of the Jews living in „mixed marriages“ was so important, why were „only“ 2,000 of a total of about 8,800 such Jews arrested (p. 195)? And what is more, was rounding up 2,000 individuals really „the most efficient way“ (p. 121) to select from them 225 replacements (p. 128)? Last but not least: Why were quite a few children, many of them under 14, interned? Shall we believe that the Gestapo really was concerned about „not leaving them alone behind when their parents were arrested?“ (p. 109).

Gruner looks at the „Fabrik-Aktion“ from the Berlin perspective. In it, Auschwitz ap-

pears mainly as a passive receiver of orders from above. The active role of Auschwitz in the allocation and distribution of forced labor for the German war economy, its involvement in nearly every major enterprise of the SS Economic-Administrative Main Office (which closely collaborated with the Reich Security Main Office in the „Final Solution“), is left out of consideration.⁶ Already in September 2004, at the H-German discussion forum on Rosenstrasse – in which Gruner also participated – it was shown that the „Fabrik-Aktion“ took place in a typical „push-and-pull“ situation: push from the side of Berlin that wanted to get rid of its Jews, and pull from the side of Auschwitz, which urgently needed 9,000 skilled workers – physically fit, motivated to work, and non-Polish – who it should receive from the Berlin „Rüstungsjuden“ pool in the course of the „Fabrik-Aktion“.⁷ Gruner completely disregards this fact.

Since at the turn of March 1943 nearly every second Berlin Jew lived in or came from a „mixed marriage“, the Gestapo would have to deport thousands of those Jews as well. Adolf Eichmann himself had frankly admitted this to Erich Gritzbach, Hermann Göring's personal assistant, during the „Fabrik-Aktion“ – a fact already mentioned by Stoltzfus.⁸ It clearly demonstrates that the Reich Security Main Office took a flexible stance toward its own exemption rules. Gruner, taking these at face value, flits over this topic (pp. 76-77, 163). The issue, however, is dealt with in great detail – and with conclusions that question Gruner's

⁵ Conference report by Jana Leichsenring on the Web: <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=501>>.

⁶ See e.g. Allen, Michael Thad, *The Business of Genocide. The SS, Slave Labor, and the Concentration Camps*, Chapel Hill and London, 2002.

⁷ <http://www.h-net.org/~german/discuss/Rosenstrasse/Rosenstrasse_index.htm#discuss>, link to September 22, 2004. More details are given at Neander, Joachim, *Die Rosenstraße von außen gesehen*, in: Leugers, Antonia (Ed.), *Berlin, Rosenstraße 2-4. Protest in der NS-Diktatur. Neue Forschungen zum Frauenprotest in der Rosenstraße 1943*, Annweiler 2005, pp. 163-202, here pp. 188-202, or Neander, Joachim, *Auschwitz und die Berliner Fabrikaktion Februar/März 1943*, in: <<http://aps.sulb.uni-saarland.de/theologie.geschichte/inhalt/2006/02.html>>.

⁸ Stoltzfus, *Resistance of the Heart*, p. 205.

assertions – in a recently published book on the Rosenstrasse events.⁹

A further matter of dispute are the „Auschwitz returnees“, a group of 35 Jews, 23 from the Rosenstrasse and 12 from the Grosse Hamburger Strasse transit camps, who were deported to Auschwitz in the course of the „Fabrik-Aktion“, but were released two weeks later.¹⁰ Gruner holds that the 23 had a „special persecution status“ (p. 168), an assertion that already was contested at the April 2004 Berlin conference. Once more, many questions are left open. Why were the two men from Rosenstrasse, who did not return together with their comrades since they were probably ill at that time, not released after recovering? Why were only a handful of the nearly 100 Jews released who came from „mixed marriages“ and were deported to Auschwitz from transit camps other than Rosenstrasse? If the 25 men from Rosenstrasse and the other Jews from „mixed marriages“ were mistakenly sent to Auschwitz (as Gruner suggests), who or what draw the Gestapo superiors' attention to this „mistake“, and who in the Reich Security Main Office (which alone decided on release from a concentration camp) ordered its „correction“? Life tells us that no bureaucrat will admit having made a mistake and correct it without considerable pressure from above. This holds particularly for the secret police in dictatorships. Who exerted this pressure on the Reich Security Main Office in this very case, and for what reasons?

To sum up: Gruner's book, though obviously the fruit of immense labor, falls short of the self-set mark to be the definitive work on „Widerstand in der Rosenstraße“. Too many questions remain open. We certainly can agree with Gruner that at the turn of March 1943, the Reich Security Main Office, in principle, did not intend to deport German Jewish „Mischlinge“ and partners of „mixed marriages“ to Auschwitz. In the light of all available sources, including those Gruner has left out of consideration, the „Fabrik-Aktion“, however, appears to have been an exception, indeed a „Berliner Sonderaktion“ (p. 195). Therefore the files on Rosenstrasse cannot yet be closed. The question, why Jewish „Mischlinge“ and partners of „mixed marriages“ were interned for several days at Rosenstrasse 2-

4, why they eventually were released, why 35 Berlin Jews who had been deported to Auschwitz were brought back, and who ordered all this, and why, is open again for research and discussion.

HistLit 2006-1-145 / Joachim Neander über Gruner, Wolf: *Widerstand in der Rosenstrasse. Die Fabrik-Aktion und die Verfolgung der „Mischlinge“ 1943*. Frankfurt am Main 2005, in: H-Soz-Kult 02.03.2006.

⁹ Leugers, Berlin, Rosenstraße 2-4. Gruner, by the way, mentions this book in a footnote on page 30.

¹⁰ For details, see Neander, Joachim, *Die Auschwitz-Rückkehrer vom 21. März 1943*, in: Leugers, Berlin, Rosenstraße 2-4, pp. 115-143.