

The Development of Negative Commemoration in the Federal Republic of Germany The Example of Buchenwald Memorial Site

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Possibilities of Commemoration

On 17 April 2017 the new permanent exhibition *Ostracism and Violence 1937 to 1945* was opened at the Buchenwald Memorial. Its concept has been jointly designed by survivors of the concentration camp, such as Éva Fahidi-Pusztai from Hungary, Bertrand Herz from France, Naftali Fürst from Israel, Ottomar Rothmann from Germany, and Ivan Ivanji from Serbia, furthermore by historians, history education experts, and museologists. All participants agreed on the fact that this exhibition will be the last of its kind, because, on the one hand, the youngest victims are over 80 years old by now; on the other hand, there are ever less contemporary witnesses amongst the audience and, in the majority, young people visit Buchenwald Memorial. Accordingly, the new permanent exhibition combines “taking leave of the past with looking ahead to the future”, as Volkhard Knigge, Director of the Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation, emphasizes:

“[...] taking leave of the past in the form of living memory, but not in the sense of its absolute historicization – the political and moral impulses associated with the reappraisal of National Socialism can no more be historicized than the abovementioned sense of dismay – and looking to the future because its emergence goes hand in hand with the firm intention of all involved not to let an anti-humanity legitimized by the state and backed or tolerated by the society have the final say” (Knigge 2016, p. 8).

Ostracism and Violence 1937 to 1945 is the second permanent exhibition at Buchenwald Memorial after the reunification of Germany. Since the year 1990 victim associations, church representatives, scientists, and politicians have been leading a discussion about how to detect a common identity in the field of commemoration which is supported by both parts of Germany. On the one hand, the first permanent exhibition of 1995 was controversially discussed by the public from the point of its very emergence, and its planners earned fierce accusations. On the other hand, at that time it was the biggest exhibition about the history of a concentration camp in the Federal Republic of Germany. Designed as an open archive, it turned against trivialization, denial, and disregard for groups of victims. The former Buchenwald detainee Jorge Semprún called it an “example for Europe” (Stiftung Gedenkstätte Buchenwald und Mittelbau Dora 2016, p. 8).

To capture the specific character of Buchenwald concentration camp, the following paragraphs will display its particularity compared to other camps within German borders, for it were political prisoners, namely resistance fighters, who were detained here. After 11 years of solitary confinement, the leader of the illegal Communist Party of Germany (KPD), Ernst Thälmann, was brought here and murdered on 18 August 1944. Accordingly, during the GDR era, the former concentration camp fulfilled an exceptional function as “sanctuary of Antifascism” (Koonz 1994, p. 88).

In comparison, in the Federal Republic of Germany there was no commemoration possible for decades after the end of the Second World War until the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem (1961), and the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials (1963 until 1966) began to arouse the public.

Nevertheless, it took further years until the public was willing even to discuss National Socialist crimes. Willy Brandt's kneeling down before the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes in Warsaw in 1970, and Richard von Weizsäcker's speech on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of German surrender on 8 May 1985 were met with refusal by the majority of the people, by politics, and by the print media. It appeared that the development of the nationalization of negative commemoration was enabled only after the reunification of both German states.

To explain the difficulties of this process, first and foremost, Buchenwald concentration camp will be focussed on in this article. Together with its 139 subcamps, it was the biggest concentration camp on German soil just before the end of the Second World War. The high degree of politicization among its prisoners led to the founding of an International Resistance Committee in 1943. This committee took control over the camp during the time of its liquidation and opened it for the Allied from the inside. This heroic fight called to mind the possibilities of commemoration, and, therefore, concentration camps were turned into memorial sites everywhere in Europe. In the course of this development, the curators of the memorial sites were confronted with certain questions: To which purpose should be commemorated? Who is commemorated? Who were the victims? Who were the perpetrators? Which crimes did they commit? Upon the advice of the Soviet military administration, the former Buchenwald concentration camp was turned into the "National Buchenwald Memorial" (**Nationale** Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Buchenwald) by the SED regime, and, thereafter, became the most important memorial site of the GDR, and, not least, the country's justification of existence.

Furthermore, the abovementioned problem of how the reunified Germany dealt with a memorial site of this size will be addressed. While, on one hand, the National Buchenwald Memorial was considered outdated (which met the resistance of the victim associations), on the other hand, a rewriting of the GDR history was feared (which was inevitable in view of the latest state of research). The group of historians dealing with the new concept addressed all desiderata, however, scrutinized them in their verifiability and finally debunked many myths. The permanent exhibition, which was opened in 1995 and had a life span of 20 years, was accordingly controversial. This article is dedicated to an analysis of the second permanent exhibition which was opened in 2016 and aims at the people of the 21st century – an audience beyond the contemporary one. Owing to a change in German commemorative culture, this exhibition has been and, further on, will be more prudently perceived than the former one.

Buchenwald as Concentration and Transit Camp

Concentration camps made up a central part of the suppression system of the "Third Reich". In the course of the "enforced conformity" (Gleichschaltung) those people who did not identify themselves with the system or did not fit to it out of racist reasons were eliminated from the "national community" (Volksgemeinschaft) and ostracized. Those who did not emigrate early enough were imprisoned in the concentration camps built immediately after Hitler's Assumption of power¹. Not only social democrats, communists, and trade unionists were regarded as enemies of the system, but all people who refused to accept the aggressive system on grounds of their belief, such as Christians or Jehovah's Witnesses ("Bible students").

¹ On 3 March 1933, Nohra concentration camp in Thuringia was the first concentration camp to be established, soon to be followed by Dachau concentration camp on 13 March 1933.

During the first phase of the concentration camps (1933 until 1939) (Konzentrationslager 1998, pp. 785), which began with the Reichstag fire of 28 February 1933, first ideological opponents were taken into “protective custody” (Schutzhaft) and tortured. After the disempowerment of the SA (Sturmabteilung) in 1934, all camps were affiliated to the SS (Schutzstaffel). Theodor Eicke was appointed an inspector by Heinrich Himmler and, as the commander of Dachau concentration camp, organized the local camp administration, selected people from the local SS organizations for the guard forces (SS-Totenkopfverbände), and introduced “camp rules”. This helped him to systematize and to perfect the terror against the inmates. Therefore, Dachau became a model for all other camps (Theodor Eicke 1998, pp. 392). From the autumn of 1933 onwards, “unwanted” people came into focus of suppression. So-called “anti-social elements” (Arbeitsscheue) and “professional criminals” (Berufsverbrecher) were imprisoned. Officially, this was declared to be a necessity to purify the “national community”; unofficially, these people, who were displaced in the course of huge waves of arrest, were intended to become forced labourers. Ab initio, forced labour was a central part of the detention.

During the second phase (1936 until 1942), the preparation and conduct of war led to an expansion of the camp system and forced labour. Until the outbreak of the Second World War it was intended to exile the Jews. In the course of the Reichspogrom Night of 9 to 10 November 1938, 36 000 Jews were imprisoned and forced to emigrate. Their property was “Aryanized”, which means expropriated. This procedure changed after the outbreak of the war. From now on, the prisoners were used as labourers for military and civil construction projects within the production facilities of the SS. Amongst the prisoners were many Jews, Sinti and Roma. In the occupied territories camps were set up, which soon held more prisoners than the camps in the territory of the “German Reich”. From 1941 onwards, extermination camps were deployed, and it was there where the genocide of the European Jews, resolved at the Wannsee Conference of 20 January 1942, was carried out. First and foremost those people were murdered who no longer had the strength to work. The weak (old and unhealthy persons, women and children) were selected and murdered with Zyklon B, a gas developed by the German company Degesch. Afterwards they were burnt in corpse incineration ovens specially developed for mass murder.

The **third** phase (1942 until 1944/45) started with the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union and a change in warfare which was symbolized by the lost Battle of Stalingrad (1942/43). Henceforth, prisoners were systematically employed in the armament industry. The huge military losses at the eastern front forced the National Socialist leaders to transfer German **labourers** to the armed forces and to replace them by forced labourers. Companies of the German big industry, which collaborated with the SS in the building of subcamps, proved to be more efficient than the factories led by the concentration camps. On 30 April 1942 all prisoners were mobilized for forced labour, only to keep the machinery of war running. The labourers especially feared the work in the underground shafts, where the “V-weapons” (Vergeltungswaffen, retaliatory weapons) were produced in piecework. In the mobilization involved were also those Jewish prisoners who were able to work. In the course of the Allies’ progress, the extermination camps were cleaned and the prisoners “evacuated” to other camps via freight transports or in death marches. The SS commanders of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp even considered to dismantle the crematories and to carry forward the “Final Solution to the Jewish Question” in Mauthausen concentration camp on Austrian territory (Schüle 2011, pp. 233).

Buchenwald concentration camp was built by prisoners of other camps at the northern slope of the Ettersberg and put into operation on 16 July 1937. Considering its capacity, it was

prepared for warfare right from the beginning. By the end of 1937, 2 561 prisoners were detained here, whereas by the end of February 1945 their number was about 112 000. This makes Buchenwald the largest concentration camp on German soil in the last months of the war. It was named by imperial commander SS (Reichsführer-SS) Heinrich Himmler on 28 July 1937. The initially planned name “K.L. Ettersberg” was opposed by the National Socialist cultural community of Weimar. For them, Ettersberg was too much associated with Goethe, who had not only enjoyed the wide view over Thuringia from here, but also been a permanent guest at the Musenhof of the Duchess Anna Amalia: **Ettersberg Castle** (1.3 km from Buchenwald).

The location of the concentration camp, situated 8 km north of Weimar, was fateful. Though, after the liberation of the camp on 11 April 1945 Weimar’s citizens denied to have known about the atrocities and refused all responsibility for the committed crimes (Knigge et al 2016, pp. 182), the immediate proximity between the concentration camp and the German cultural city encouraged contacts between the population and both, SS and prisoners. No one in Weimar could deny to have known about the condition of the people who were being held as prisoners in Buchenwald. Already on the 4 August 1937, the Lord Mayor of Weimar, Otto Koch, gave the SS on a request the permission to use the municipal crematory to “incinerate the corpses in question” (Knigge et al 2016, p. 203). The municipal crematory was used until the summer of 1940 when special corpse incineration ovens, produced by the company Topf & Sons from Erfurt, were put into operation on the area of the concentration camp. The increasing number of transports and the physical condition of the deceased had to attract attention amongst the population. Until the establishment of an own hospital ward, the municipal hospital took in prisoners who also died here. On 17 September 1937 the Weimar town councillors expressed their general agreement to incorporate the camp into Weimar’s municipality. At that time the camp detained prisoners who were officially referred to as professional criminals and antisocial elements.

Early on nationalist and anti-democratic forces played a dominant role in Weimar. During the 1920s, the Nazi Party (NSDAP) was allowed to parade up and to hold its Second Party Congress in the Deutsches Nationaltheater on the 3 and 4 Juli 1926. After Hitler’s seizure of power the streets were renamed after prominent National Socialist politicians. Due to the large contingent of SS members stationed in the capital of the district Thuringia, the population felt politically upgraded. Furthermore, the SS became a business partner and customer on large scale: many of the companies benefitted from the prisoners, whose manpower was offered to them. Even more, the concentration camp turned out to be of such an economic value for the city and region that it could be called a proper “locational factor” (Frei 2016, p. 278).

The original planning of Buchenwald as of other concentration camps involved the ostracism of ideological enemies. This resulted in a merging of social democrats, communists, confessing Christians, Catholics, and Jehovah’s Witnesses in this place. After the outbreak of the War also resistance fighters from all over Europe were imprisoned here. Therefore, Buchenwald was a political camp at its core, and this was also perceived by the prisoners themselves. Although the SS tried to play them off against each other by introducing a certain hierarchy, penalties, and rewards, solidarity prevailed in the camp. From 1943 onwards communists took hold of the positions of functional prisoners, which led to the situation that the prisoners were helped noticeably. Epidemic danger was decreased, violence amongst the prisoners contained, and the protection of the weak and the children stabilized. When finally the order for the death marches was given, the functional prisoners obstructed their organization. In July 1943 the International Resistance Committee was formed. It sought

contacts to the outside world, obtained information about the course of war (Knigge et al 2016, p. 122), and successfully carried out acts of sabotage within the armament factories (Ruhland 1969, p. 235). It was this political core within the community of the prisoners at which the SED regime directed its subsequent commemoration.

However, the National Socialist regime did not remain focussed purely on ideological opponents. After the outbreak of the Second World War and the establishment of a program for the genocide of the European Jews (20 January 1942), the number of prisoners' deportations to Buchenwald increased immensely: Jews, Sinti and Roma, Polish and Soviet prisoners of war, women, and children. The various groups were strictly separated, so that a hierarchy developed within the camp: on the bottom, there were the Jews and the Soviet war prisoners, at the top, there were real criminals, who collaborated well with the SS until that moment when corruption became prevalent, and the camp commander Karl Koch had to be dismissed from his post in 1941 (Heymann 2010, pp. 383). Under his successor Hermann Pister (1942 until 1945) a systematic exploitation of the prisoners began, which involved medical experiments or forced labour in the industry.

With the declaration of "Total War" (18 February 1943) the demand for prisoners in the arms production grew. Thousands of people of the occupied territories were imprisoned randomly and put to forced labour. After the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 200 000 Polish people were taken to Germany. The SS leased out prisoners to the armament industry and built subcamps for the production of weapons in collaboration with companies all over Germany. Among these companies there were, for example, IG Farben, Krupp AG, HASAG, Bochumer Verein, Dortmunder Union, Vereinigte Stahlwerke AG, Ford Köln, Junker Flugzeug- and Motorenwerke, and Deutsche Reichsbahn. Even Jews were not murdered immediately but used in production until they were unable to work. The Buchenwald concentration camp became an important locational factor for the armament industry. The Wilhelm Gustloff company from Weimar rented production halls and prisoners here. By the end of 1943 almost half of all prisoners were detained in the subcamps. Forced labour in the underground or in the Dora subcamp was cruel. Those people who could not work anymore became victims of selection: they were either murdered immediately or deported to Majdanek, Auschwitz-Birkenau or later on to Bergen-Belsen – only to die.

The last months of Buchenwald concentration camp were characterized by the progress of the Allies and a growth of resistance. On 24 August 1944 allied bombers destroyed huge parts of the armament industry, situated close to the Buchenwald camp's central part. Due to this, 388 prisoners were killed and more than 2 000 injured. The survivors used the chaos to acquire and hide weapons of the SS. The influx of prisoners from other cleared camps which were situated near to the front led to an increasing number of detainees, approximately about **112 000** by February 1945. Thousands of people died in the so-called Little Camp, which served as quarantine facility. Jewish children and youngsters were protected by prisoners and more than 900 of them rescued.

When in March 1945 US troops reached Central Germany, the "evacuation" of the camp began. Though, the functional prisoners and the International Committee of Resistance succeeded in obstructing the organization of the march columns, 28 000 people were driven towards the concentration camps of Dachau and Flossenbürg or deported to the Theresienstadt Ghetto. Thousands of people died during the death marches at the beginning of April 1945, and only a minority of the civilian population helped. Since the prisoners were awaiting a massacre by the SS on the day of liberation, they armed themselves and called for resistance. When the 3rd US Army under the command of General Patton reached the camp on 11 April

1945, it was opened to them from the inside. The prisoners had captured the watchtowers and arrested the 125 SS men. According to the *Buchenwald-Report*, with its 21 000 starving and sick people, mountains of stacked corpses, the crematorium, execution sites, and a military hospital set up for medical experiments, this was the first huge camp the Western Allies set eyes on (Hackett 2010, p. 19).

Within the eight years of its existence (1937-1945) altogether 277 849 prisoners from 50 countries had passed through Buchenwald concentration camp and its subcamps. For many of them it was only a transit point on their way to the extermination camps. As far as the number of dead people is concerned, they are only approximately verifiable due to the unsecured numbers at the death marches. Today it is estimated at 56 000 prisoners, including 15 000 Soviet citizens, 7 000 Poles, 6 000 Hungarians, and 3 000 French.

Commemoration Politics in Divided Germany

As far as the Federal Republic of Germany was concerned, there was little willingness to deal with the violation of international law and the own guilt for crimes. Apart from the Nuremberg Trials against the main perpetrators of the Nazi regime (1945 to 1949), who all declared themselves as “not guilty”, the denazification of the general population among the Western occupying powers was rather half-hearted, and very soon the punishment of crimes was transferred to the German authorities. However, due to the shortage of skilled workers, only a fraction of those responsible were punished fairly. Large scale entrepreneurs of the armament industry, who evidently had exploited forced labourers, now provided the new allies: USA, England and France; former members of the SS made up two thirds of the senior staff of the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) during the 1950s; biased judges, prosecutors, police officers, doctors, teachers, officers, civil servants continued to do their duty. With only two abstentions, the German Bundestag passed the so-called “Entnazifizierungsschlussgesetz” on 10 April 1951. In the era of the Cold War everybody had to completely commit oneself to the enemy image of the Soviet Union. Members of left parties became suspicious individuals, while the former armed forces (Wehrmacht) were valued highly. The Battle of Stalingrad was stylized as the heroic attempt to protect the West from Bolshevism.

The Holocaust was no subject of public discourse and was even denied until the beginning of the 1960s. When the Adenauer Government, in the course of its reparations agreement with the State of Israel, assumed responsibility for Hitler's racial war, and in 1952 decided to compensate those Jews who lived in the Federal Republic and had suffered in the concentration camps, only 11 percent of the German population supported this decision. By leaving old party members of the NSDAP in their positions, and at the same time paying compensation to their victims, the government thought it had done justice to all sides.

Only a series of anti-Semitic crimes and judicial scandals, which aroused international indignation and concern about the West German democracy, provoked the willingness to deal with the Holocaust. In the summer of 1960 the German Bundestag passed the “incitement of the people” (**Volksverhetzung**) (Reichel 2001, pp. 144). Owing to the Adolf Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem (1961) and the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials (1963 to 1966) an interest aroused that had not been existent in large parts of the war generation so far. That the Nazi regime's crime scenes were not cultivated, that objects were not collected and archived, that the places of remembrance were exposed to decay caused indignation in the first post-war generation. Supported by intellectuals, such as Adorno, Grass, Hochhuth, or Mitscherlich, who enjoyed

high reputation, protesters, belonging to the 1968 movement, saw a continuation of National Socialism in the capitalist system of the Federal Republic.

From now on the spiral of cultural struggle began to spin, evidencing a high identical crisis. While the Willy Brandt Government saw the only way to the future in a confession of guilt and a reconciliation (Treaty of Warsaw, 1970), the opposition perceived both, the “Ostpolitik” and Richard Weizsäcker’s speech on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of German surrender on 8 May 1985, as a betrayal. With his statement that the 8 May 1945 was a liberation day also for Germany, the Federal President stirred up a questionable patriotism which became visible in the so-called “Historikerstreit” of 1985/86. Since, in spite of subtle criticism, the US series “Holocaust” (1978) achieved high ratings amongst the German population, the historian Edgar Wolfrum was rightly wondering if the German historiography had worked past the needs of the public for years (Wolfrum 2002, p. 140).

In October 1981 initiators of concentration camp memorials assembled in Hamburg for the first time. This meeting happened on the occasion of the opening of the controversially discussed and against many resistances opened “Dokumentenhaus” in Neuengamme (renamed in 1995 as “House of Remembrance”). The former concentration camp had initially been a detention camp after its liberation and was used as a prison by the city of Hamburg from 1948 onwards. Parts of the SS camp and the commander’s house had served as flats for the staff then. By the end of the 1960s, a further prison was built on the territory. It was only after the pressure of survivors’ associations and a public discussion that had lasted for years, that in 1989 the senate decided to relocate the prisons. However, the very relocation did not happen until 2003 and 2006. It was only in 2007 that the entire area was available for a memorial site. In the course of the abovementioned meeting, the Protestant Bishop Kurt Scharf had warned of the repressing as being “a characteristic of dangerous national disease” (Scharf 1983, p. 21).

Differently from the practice in the Western zones of occupation, denazification was carried out quickly and consequently on the territory of the Soviet occupation zone (SBZ). Functionaries of the NSDAP and its organizations were removed from their offices and partly interned in special camps. However, denazification equally served the purpose of removing opponents of the new regime, such as social democrats. In the course of denazification, **28 500** people were interned by the Soviet occupying powers in the Special Camp No. 2 in Buchenwald between 1945 and 1950. Most of the prisoners were members of the SS and the NSDAP, amongst them the former Lord **Mayor** of Weimar, Otto Koch; furthermore, medical staff, who had participated in euthanasia programs, was affected. However, also accidental victims got caught up in the wave of arrests. For there were too little judges, the processes did not start in due time and, thus, innocent people could not get free. Tightly packed together, approximately 7 100 prisoners died of hunger and cold.

In July 1949 the information department of the Soviet Military Administration recommended the Union of Victims of Persecution of the Nazi Regime (Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes) to set up a national museum in the former Buchenwald concentration camp. This union designed a museum of resistance on a large scale, whereby the barracks were to be used by different nations for their own exhibitions. This project failed due to the SED Politburo which wanted to turn the place into a commemoration site for Ernst Thälmann. According to their interpretation, the spirit of Buchenwald was not to be displayed in barracks and massive blocks, but in the deep faith in the “victory of our just cause” (Hoffmann 1997, p. 119). The whole camp was to be torn down, and only the crematory as Ernst Thälmann’s death-place, the gate building, and east and west watchtowers were to be preserved.

After the liquidation of the Special Camp, Buchenwald became the most important political memorial site of the GDR. It was firmly anchored in the anti-fascist tradition and legitimized the purpose of the new state. It furthermore symbolized that capitalism as the basis for fascism was abolished. Accordingly, commemoration was dedicated to the so-called anti-fascist resistance fighters – who indeed were amongst the prisoners. Subsequently, Buchenwald was regarded as symbol for a resistance that did not exist among the German population. As far as the museum was concerned, the securing of crime scenes and the archiving of objects allowed for an authentic exhibition. Sleeping places, clothing, cutlery, and utensils of the prisoners, as well as the tools which served the guards to torture and murder detainees were shown. Weapons of resistance evidenced the fighting spirit of the inmates. In the former hospital there were exhibited instruments, which had been used to experiment on people, furthermore, shrink heads, and lampshades made of human skin, which were withdrawn later and archived for inspection.

The monumental memorial complex, which was opened on 14 September 1958, corresponded with the intention of the museum to be a place of resistance. Without hiding the victims, which are honoured on the Stele-lined path and in the three enormous Ring graves, their suffering is given meaning. The figural group by Fritz Cremer (Fritz-Cremer-Gruppe) displays maltreated but morally unbroken prisoners, the Avenue of the Nations (Straße der Nationen) puts their struggle into an international context, and the Bell Tower (Glockenturm) raises far above the land and harbours earth and ashes from other places of extermination. The National Buchenwald Memorial served the government as a meeting place for mass rallies and site for self-legitimation. In his opening speech in 1958, Otto Grotewohl, Prime Minister of the GDR, called for a continuation of the fight against the old fascist system in the Federal Republik of Germany (Grotewohl 1961, p. 13).

Although, the cultural place of remembrance enjoyed high value, it was held low as a place of a wider remembrance since groups of prisoners beyond resistance were disregarded. Jews, Sinti and Roma, confessing Christians, Catholics, and Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, women, and children were excluded from the remembrance. The Holocaust was not addressed at all. Rather, the Cold War and the rise of the State of Israel led to anti-Jewish politics (Wolfrum 2002, pp. 144). As in the Federal Republic this topic only aroused public interest in the 1960s. The Eichmann Trial marked a significant turning point which was especially perceived by the churches in the GDR. In 1978 they warned that the antizionist attitude of the SED could evolve to anti-Semitism amongst the population. Shortly before the dissolution of the GDR, Erich Honecker attempted a rapprochement with the USA. A prerequisite for that was the compensation of the National Socialist victims living in the GDR. In this point, the GDR, like the Federal Republic, was taken into account as a successor state of the "German Reich" – which tremendously shook its self-image. In a great act, the 50th anniversary of the Reichspogrom Night was celebrated on 9 November 1988. A rapprochement with the West failed to materialize since the peaceful revolution brought the GDR to an end.

The Buchenwald Memorial in the Reunited Germany

After the reunification of both German states on 3 October 1990, the search for a common identity was also embarked upon in the field of commemorative politics. This turned out to be difficult especially in questions of how to deal with the Nationalist Socialist history. While there was no experience with memorial sites of the huge seize of Buchenwald in West Germany, the National Buchenwald Memorial was a monumental testimony of history. Historians, museologists, and history education experts, who soon were to re-conceptualize

the memorial site, were confronted with countless demands, which all implied to discard the hitherto concept. An initiative of the Weimar population wanted a concept which involved an equal commemoration, both of the KZ victims and of those interned between 1945 and 1950. This proposal failed because of the protest of the committee of former prisoners. They pointed on the fact that the camp's grounds do not belong to Germany but to the European Union. Subsequently, special German concerns had to be pursued outside the camp – which happened in this case. A large group of representatives of victim associations, churches, historians, and politicians wished for a broader commemoration of the events, which was to be dedicated to the victims hidden by now. In 1991 a memorial ceremony with former Jewish prisoners was conducted. The city of Weimar was represented only marginally then.

The necessity of a new concept for the Buchenwald Memorial was lost amongst innumerable ideological pretensions, which cannot be categorized in retrospect. The forces from the old Federal Republic perceived the former GDR as a “criminal blunder” and, accordingly, behaved towards it like a “victorious nation” (Augstein 2002, pp. 229). They, on the one hand, intended to raze the former national memorial; citizens from the former GDR, on the other hand, suspected museologists from the West to falsify history. In between there was a group of historians from Bielefeld, Oldenburg, and Oxford which, in 1988, had submitted a research project at the VW Foundation named “Materialized Memory – Memorials on the grounds of former concentration and extermination camps, and forced ghettos in East Germany, West Germany, Poland and France” (*Vergegenständlichte Erinnerung – Denkmäler auf dem Gelände ehemaliger Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslager sowie Zwangsghettos in Ostdeutschland, Westdeutschland, Polen und Frankreich*). This group quickly discovered that there was no researched data on the post-history of the concentration camp. Volkhard Knigge became a member of the group and took the opportunity to research the GDR archives. In 1994 he took up the position of Director of the Memorials Foundation of Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora, which was of huge interest to him because of both, the countless amount of material available at Buchenwald and the dedicated work of the previous employees. In contrast to memorial sites such as Ravensbrück or Sachsenhausen, where in 1990 there was “a rather wait-and-see silence”, in Buchenwald there was “much proactivity and creative restlessness” (Müller 2015, p. 4).

In February 1992 a commission of historians, convened by the Free State of Thuringia in 1991, disclosed the guidelines of a new concept. According to these guidelines both, the victims of the concentration camp and the Special Camp No. 2 were to be commemorated, whereby the memorial sites had to be spatially separated from each other and the concentration camp was to become the main focus. The permanent exhibition, hitherto dominated by GDR-historiography, was to be redesigned according to the current state of research. The previous memorial site was to become the subject of a separate documentation. It was furthermore recommended to rename the site from National Buchenwald Memorial to Buchenwald Memorial (*Gedenkstätte Buchenwald*). The commission of historians under the direction of Eberhard Jäckel cooperated with representatives of victim associations and social organisations. Especially the former had made negative experiences in how they were perceived in the old Federal Republic. Since the Nazi burden on the occupants of the Special Camp no. 2 proved to be true, vituperations on the part of politicians and the media were severe. However, scientific research was carried out, whereby employees from the former GDR mingled with new ones. The commission met on site for three times and legitimized further work at the memorial.

The research was now applied to all groups of victims and perpetrators. International work camps joined the work and devoted themselves to the neglected areas of the former

concentration camp, whereby many finds from prisoner's possessions were recovered. In November 1993 the memorial site for murdered Jews was inaugurated. It was from now on to be found at the place of the former "Jewish block" no. 22 (Judenblock 22), and an **inscription** displays the Psalm 78:6 in English, Hebrew, and German: "So that the generation to come might know, the children, yet to be born, that they too may rise and declare to their children". In April 1995 the memorial devoted to murdered Sinti and Roma was inaugurated. It is located at the place of the former "Block no. 14" (Zigeunerblock 14). Inscribed on basaltic steles are the names of other concentration and extermination camps. With the inscription in English, German, and Romani, all Sinti and Roma, who became victims of the National Socialist genocide, were to be remembered. On 11 April 1995 the memorial for all victims of the Buchenwald concentration camp was inaugurated. At the place where the prisoners erected a wooden obelisk for the camp's victims shortly after their liberation and where they made the "Oath of Buchenwald" on 19 April 1945 at a commemoration ceremony, a metal plate embedded in the ground commemorates more than 50 nations. The middle part of the plate is heated to 37 degrees – the human body temperature.

The permanent exhibition in the former "Depot" (Effektenkammer) was opened on 8 April 1995 and was the largest and most complex exhibition on the history of a concentration camp in Germany. Designed as an open archive, it relied on the evidentiary and informative value of documents and realities that were directly related to the fate of the persecuted. The exhibition's concept was based on displaying the system of Buchenwald by authentic proof and taking action against trivialisation and denial by means of irrefutable evidence. This involved the recognition of all groups of victims, as well as the examination of politically motivated ostracism, the interlocking of camp and war, and mass murder. Moreover, the resistance against the National Socialist regime all over Europe, even within the camps, was to be remembered. The well-functioning neighbourhood with the city of Weimar was already pointed out in this course. For the first time video material with experience reports and films was included in a concentration camp exhibition. Thereby, it was not about to re-enacted history, but rather, the visitors to develop an imagination and critical awareness of history.

When the exhibition was closed in 2015 to make room for the construction of a new permanent exhibition, this was received with positive expectations by the public. The process of nationalization of negative commemoration has begun at the end of the 1990s (Knigge 2010, p. 63). In 1996, the Federal President Roman Herzog assigned the 27th of January as the public commemoration day for the victims of National Socialism, as well as for the liberation of the concentration and extermination camps. In 1999 the federal government decided to support memorials on the consequences of the Second World War, the victims of National Socialism, and the victims of the SED dictatorship. Scientific conferences have dealt with the future of commemoration, which has to break new grounds considering the loss of eyewitnesses.

In September 2000 a conference was held at Buchenwald concentration camp on the topic "The future of commemoration. How will the NS crimes against humanity be remembered during the next 50 years? Narratives – Representations – Allegories" (Knigge, Frei 2002, p. XI). Owing to the opening of archives on the grounds of the former People's Republics of Eastern Europe since the 1990s, new sources for research have become available. The same applies to the International Tracing Service (ITS) in Bad Arolsen, whose archive was made freely accessible in 2007. It contains 90 percent of the administrative files of Buchenwald. Victims' and perpetrators' biographies were opened up, with which one can work in a vivid and exemplary way. As the victims and their relatives have increasingly placed their trust in the work of the scientists since the first permanent exhibition of 1995, inheritances with

several objects, photographs, film material or prisoners' artist works have been transferred to the memorial site (Müller 2015, p. 2).

Together with victim associations and the Scientific Advisory Board, it was decided to carry out a change in paradigm for the next generation. The new exhibition should display what remains relevant of history and historical experience for present and future. Nevertheless, aims and principles of 1995 have been preserved and further developed. It was intended to deepen the learning effects from an inhuman history with new didactic approaches and media opportunities. The new exhibition is designed around the main topics "society" and "camp". Within huge subject areas it is examined how the existence of camps was possible within a society. How could a society like this renounce its rights and approvingly accept humiliation and murder of people? How could it happen that the society supported a war until the end – a war which devastated a whole continent? How could the society ostracize so-called asocial persons and murder them according to a so-called law? The new permanent exhibition displays more precisely than ever before how close the city of Weimar was connected with the camp. It is scrutinized what has been possible – and what is lingering on and might be reactivated (Knigge 2016, 6-9).

On an area of 2 000 square meters, which includes the three floors of the former "Depot", 750 objects, over 400 documents, and more than 1 300 photographs are displayed. At listening stations biographical portraits, recorded memory accounts of former prisoners, and extracts from documents are provided. Owing to this, the victims get a face and a voice. Further 600 biographical notes are distributed all over the exhibition. On 400 screens photographs, films, and sequences of interviews by former prisoners are shown.

On the one hand, Buchenwald concentration camp should be presented as a self-contained space; on the other hand, it should be contextualized within history and within the geographical site regarding Weimar and the whole region. To reach an audience beyond the contemporaries, the topic is developed along various strands. Initially, in a main strand, the history of Buchenwald in Germany between 1937 and 1945 is addressed. This strand is divided into the sections "National Socialism and violence", "War and crime", "»Total War«" and "The final months". In a second strand, listening stations supply biographies and histories of the prisoners' persecution. Thereby, history becomes tangible and concrete. A third strand consists of three rooms of artefacts, which present depersonalization and clothing, undernourishment and hunger, and self-preservation and resistance by original objects. Large artefacts are, for example, the Buchenwald gallows and copies of Friedrich Schiller's furniture that inmates were forced to make. All three strands are related in terms of content and space. Further modules offer information about the 139 subcamps of Buchenwald, and about the more than 100 further places, prisons, and camps from which people from all over Europe were deported to the Buchenwald concentration camp.

The exhibition is preceded by a prologue. It displays the historical stages of the political, legal, and social transformation in Germany between 1933 until 1937 – from the transformation of a democracy into a racist dictatorship and a national community. Furthermore, the development of the legislation, the legalization of the privation of rights, expropriation, and ostracism of alleged asocial individuals (Gemeinschaftsfremder), which culminated in the Nuremberg Laws (Nürnberger Rassegesetze) in 1935, are outlined. An epilogue represents the situation in the liberated camp and sheds light on its subsequent history, such as how the National Socialist crimes were dealt with legally and societally in West and East Germany, as well as the hesitation and restrictions thereof (Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation 2017). In this part survivors speak themselves from

three perspectives: firstly, as immediate eyewitnesses of the liberated camp, secondly, about their further lives, and, finally, in reflections on consequences which have to be drawn from the experience of National Socialism (Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation 2017). With good reason the exhibition leaves the final word to the survivors, for they wanted to scrutinize and understand their experiences in the camp in regard of its meaning for the present and the future (Knigge 2016, p. 7).

Translated from German by Nadine Menzel, Leipzig

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