
ARTICLES IN ENGLISH

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THE CAMP AND THE VILLAGE: LOCAL MEMORY OF THE NEUENGAMME CONCENTRATION CAMP AMONG THE RESIDENT POPULATION

This essay examines how local village residents perceive the former National Socialist concentration camp Neuengamme. The essential question here is how the former camp is retained in the memories of the villages today, if they consciously remember it at all. If it is the case that they do, then it is worth asking how these memories are shared and passed on from one generation to the next. In this, it is interesting to examine how supra-regional policies of remembrance interact with local memory on-site. The main methodological instrument used to explore these problems is oral history. Seventeen biographical interviews with local residents of different ages were conducted and then analysed with regard to Maurice Halbwachs's fundamental theoretical concepts of memory. The author examines the relationship between individual and local memory frameworks and public discourse on remembrance in Germany. Rather than providing definite answers, the author reveals disruptions, dissonances and conflicts between the different memory frameworks and offers these for further discussion.

Keywords: National Socialism, Concentration Camp, Neuengamme, Collective Memory, Oral History

More than 70 years ago several letters arrived at the National Socialist *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Security Main Office) in Berlin from Hamburg

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Neuengamme, Hausdeich Nr. 60 (from a circular letter of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, cit. in Bauche 1991: 110). The return address signified the Neuengamme concentration camp, which dispatched all its mail from this address in the village of Neuengamme between 1940 and 1945.

The village in the suburbs of Hamburg currently stretches to approximately 18 square kilometers alongside its main road, the Neuengammer Hausdeich on the southern shores of the Dove Elbe, which is a branch of the river Elbe. Approximately 3500 people currently live in the area and derive their living, in the main, from traditional agricultural and horticultural family businesses (Statistisches... 2011: 184). Besides these, there are also some handicraft enterprises and retailers located in Neuengamme, the majority of which tend to be found around Neuengammer Hausdeich, near the protestant Church of St. Johannis.

This northern German village, its inhabitants and their historical experience of the concentration camp in its midst were the focus of a research project which I conducted in 2012 and 2013 (Trojan 2014). I began by conducting a visual survey of the research object, cycling down the village roads in order to observe how the past had inscribed itself in a variety of different layers. One of these layers was formed by the Neuengamme concentration camp, which is located between the greenhouses of local gardening businesses and the fields of resident farmers.

For German society, the camp represents a negative reference point in the history of Germany. National Socialism and its atrocities are among the basic building blocks of German self-conception and of the national commemorative culture. Newspaper editors, bloggers and documentary filmmakers have worked on this topic for many years and have used it to fill title pages, online platforms and primetime slots. Historians and cultural scholars have examined the phenomenon of collective memory on global or national scales, both diligently and fruitfully (e.g. Assmann 2006; Welzer et al. 2003; Jureit, Schneider 2010; Reichel et al. 2009). So far, however, almost no one had thought of doing research on historical memory at the level of the village.

I followed the intervention of the German historian Malte Thießen, who suggested it might be worth looking at "memorial subcultures" in a more detailed way (Thießen 2009: 163) to understand more about the composition of the big picture. The local perspective offers ways of understanding the effects of national or global developments on smaller units. From the village's local perspective it is possible to observe the phenomenon of commemorative culture that the concentration camp represents. This makes it possible to explore if and how the larger history of National Socialist atrocities infiltrates the small corners of a village. The questions concerning the research project arose while standing on the street by the former concentration camp Neuengamme: What do the people living in its immediate vicinity remember of it? How do they remember? Do they remember at all? What relationships between local memories in the village and official history-related policies can be detected? On the next pages, I set out my conceptual framework and the findings of the project.

Neuengamme – concentration camp and village

The camp was founded in 1938 as a satellite camp of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp and became independent in 1940, after which it expanded in size until the end of the war, finally becoming the main concentration camp in north-west Germany. More than 100,000 people from all over Europe were sent to perform forced labour at the main camp of Neuengamme and its more than 85 satellite camps (KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme 2005). The most common reason for being sent to the Neuengamme concentration camp were resisting the German occupation in various European countries during WW2, insurgency against forced labour or racially motivated persecution. About half of the concentration camp prisoners did not survive their internment at Neuengamme (Kaienburg 1997: 268). Unlike extermination camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek, the main interest of the SS at Neuengamme was the exploitation of the prisoners' labour rather than their extermination. However, the death of prisoners was generally and commonly accepted as an expected consequence of labouring at the camp (KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme 2005).

The construction of the concentration camp and its operation did not remain unnoticed by the residents of Neuengamme. This was partly due to the fact that some high-ranking SS officials lived in the village and spent some of their spare time among its inhabitants in local pubs (KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme 2005). It was also well known because the concentration camp prisoners themselves were present around the village. Encounters between prisoners and the local population became part of the daily routine and usually occurred when the prisoners were working in public places or being transported. In the first years, prisoners were transported to the Neuengamme concentration camp via one of the nearby train stations, Bergedorf or Curslack (Kaienburg 1997: 97). From there, prisoners had to get off the train and walk the rest of the way to the camp, thereby crossing the village. Prisoner work groups guarded by SS men also had to walk to different work locations outside the camp (KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme 2005). They often marched along the same roads that were frequently used by the villagers on their everyday walks.

Public commemoration of the National Socialist period in German society and history-related policies at the site of the former Neuengamme concentration camp

When the war ended in 1945, the British army found the Neuengamme concentration camp empty and deserted. Since the camp seemed suitable for mass accommodation, the British military decided to set up an internment camp for members of certain National Socialist groups, such as local officials of the *NSDAP* and members of the *SS* (KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme 2005). When the "Civil Internment Camp No. 6" in Neuengamme was disbanded in 1948, the City of Hamburg took over the facilities of the former concentration camp and set up the

"Neuengamme Prison for Men". Another prison building was erected on the site at the end of the 1960s (KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme 2005).

Official commemoration of National Socialist crimes – in Germany in general and in Neuengamme in particular – did not take place at that time. In the first two post-war decades, German society mostly ignored its National Socialist past. The dominant discourse in Hamburg at that time discussed how the liberal spirit of the city had somehow tempered the political climate during the National Socialist period compared to elsewhere in Germany (Schildt 2003: 18). Consequently, very little was discussed about the Neuengamme concentration camp, which would have undermined this mainstream narrative.

Documented historical accounts and memories of the camp were almost exclusively designed and authored by the survivors themselves. For decades they fought with the Hamburg City Government to erect a memorial at the former camp's site. The survivors also outlined the insensitivity of using the former concentration camp once again to imprison people (Klarmann 2013). However, their demands were rejected several times by the Hamburg Senate at that time, who, with their Cold War mentality, accused the survivors' organizations, such as the Association of Victims of the Nazi Regime/Federation of Antifascists (*VVN-BdA*), of secretly working for the East German communists. The Senate therefore concluded that these groups were not to be negotiated with (Klarmann 2013: 204).

It was not until the end of the 1960s that this situation eventually began to change. Gradually, West German society started to deal publicly with its National Socialist past. The internationally broadcasted trials against Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem (1961) and the personnel of Auschwitz (1963–1965) brought the reality of the National Socialist crimes into the homes of many Germans, who slowly developed an interest in the country's National Socialist past including the Holocaust. As a result of this development and rising international political pressure, the situation in Hamburg-Neuengamme began to change as well. Even though the prison facilities on-site had not been removed yet, the Hamburg government finally allowed the erection of a new memorial on the grounds of the former concentration camp's site (Garbe 2001: 16). It was inaugurated in 1965 and symbolized the city's will to never forget its National Socialist past (Thießen 2011: 181).

After a new generation that had not personally been involved in the National Socialist regime took over the leadership of the country in the 1970s, NS crimes were more and more included in the canon of national commemorative culture. Consequently, the character of the concentration camp memorial in Neuengamme started to change; from a place of pilgrimage for survivors to a place of education for younger generations (Thießen 2011: 182). Due to its new educational function, a museum was set up next to the memorial on the site of the former Neuengamme concentration camp. The first exhibition illuminating the camp's history opened its doors in 1981 (Garbe 2001: 19). This "education-alization" of memory (Meseth 2005: 158) asserted itself in the following years as a main motif in history-related politics.

Since the 1990s, public memorialization of the NS-crimes that identified with the victims became the norm in Germany (Jureit, Schneider 2010: 23). By then the memorial on the place of the former concentration camp in Neuengamme had become an established institution in the memory landscape in Hamburg. The Hamburg Senate decided some years ago to remove the two penal facilities that shared these grounds with the memorial. However, the two prisons were still working on the site of the former camp for another decade before they were finally removed in 2005.

Subjects like "National Socialism" and "Commemoration of the Holocaust" are quite present and normal in present-day German society. Memorials like the one in Neuengamme are considered to be unquestionably necessary. A very satisfactory moment in such developments was the removal of the two prisons from the grounds of the former concentration camp and the inauguration of the newly designed memorial on-site in Neuengamme in 2005. "Neuengamme has arrived within the city's memory," remarked Malte Thießen, who made critical remarks on the "commemorative salvific assurance" the memorial contained (Thießen 2011: 186). His expression refers to a present discourse in Germany: Today, not only has German society successfully come to terms with the National Socialist past but it also celebrates the manner in which it has achieved this (Jureit, Schneider 2010: 33).

From observing to researching: sources and methods

Gaining access to the villagers' perception of the concentration camp raises questions of how to explore the subjective experience of the site and its history. Oral history, meaning qualitative, biographically laid out interviews, provides a suitable methodical device for this issue. In the 1980s the method of oral history began to make its way into the field of historical research in Germany (e.g. Niehammer 1983). At this time traditional historians criticized oral history, saying that the data generated was useless for scientific research. They argued that as personal memory is not an objective but a subjective source, oral history could not be used to shed light on past realities. They were right. The way a historical event is remembered in the present time is not necessarily congruent with what actually happened in the past. Memories change over the course of a lifetime. We adapt them according to the story we want to tell about ourselves as well as to the contemporary demands of political correctness (Jureit 1999: 79, 104). Regarding the latter, this criticism of oral history is indeed well justified.

If a researcher decides to work with oral sources, it is important to ask the right questions. Personal memories can hardly be expected to reveal past realities. However, they have great potential for other scientifically relevant and interesting questions, as long as we remember that they are personal memories and thus highly subjective sources. Indeed, this can even be the strong point of using oral history. For scientific research on how history is experienced subjectively, how experiences are integrated as memories in a personal biography and how these are being passed on to subsequent generations, oral sources are of great value.

In 2012 and 2013, I conducted 17 interviews with residents of different ages. These interviews became the main sources for my work. As I was born and raised in Neuengamme myself, I became at the same time both the explorer and the explored. At first, I feared the strong tie between myself and my chosen topic would cause problems regarding my position as a scientific researcher. But it soon turned out this study would not have been possible if it were not for my personal relationship with my interviewees. They only agreed to meet me because they trusted me as a fellow villager. Using a snowball system to find interviewees, I started with my own two grandmothers and my mother, who gave me the names of some of their acquaintances, who then again recommended some of theirs.

The sample consists of members of three age-related peer groups. The first group is composed of eight men and women who were born during the time of National Socialism and grew up in Neuengamme. The second group consists of people born in the 1950s and the third group includes men and women born in the 1960s. Some of the interviewees were related to each other. Thus, it is possible to examine the perception of the concentration camp over a long period of time and how memories are being passed on to subsequent generations. It is obvious that this sample cannot be regarded as representative. However, the interviews conducted here can still be presented as a detailed case study. As this analysis on the village and the concentration camp of Neuengamme is the first of its kind, it is hoped that it will be the first step on a path that may be continued by others in the future.

From researching to understanding: Material evaluation by means of three approaches

Reflecting on a variety of established theories whose authors dealt with the phenomenon of (collective) memory, I encountered problems concerning their applicability to my case study. Aleida and Jan Assmann, who undertook groundbreaking theoretical analysis on cultural and communicative memory (Assmann 1992; Assmann 2006) as well as Harald Welzer, who wrote about the assumption of "creating the past by talking about it" (Welzer 2001: 160), concentrated on the communicative aspect of memory. However, in my empirical analysis this aspect turned out to be less important when it came to the question of how the interviewees perceive and deal with the place of the former concentration camp. Even though the theory of Maurice Halbwachs could be considered outdated due to the more recent work of the Assmanns and Welzer, Halbwachs' work on memory and its social frameworks from the 1920s were more relevant for analysing my sources.

I have analysed the data collected in this research through the use of three approaches: an individual memory framework, a local memory framework and one using the memory framework of society as a whole. The conception that memories exist within different social frameworks can be traced back to the fundamental theoretical considerations of Maurice Halbwachs (Halbwachs 1985). These memory frameworks do not autonomously stand side by side but influence each other.

What an individual remembers on a private level from a past event and how this happens (individual memory framework) is always connected to how the event is remembered by the communities the individual is part of (collective memory framework). Such a community can, for example, consist of a nation (memory framework of society as whole) but also of smaller components of society such as a village community or a family (local memory framework). In regard to Halbwachs, three memory frameworks were applied in the case study: An *individual* framework, involving *what* and *how* the interviewees remember; a *local* memory framework accounting for the smaller social component of the village community or the family, and finally a framework of society as a whole that shapes the public commemorative culture in Germany.

Individual memory framework: memories of the concentration camp in the narrations of the interviewees

The crucial question concerning the individual memory framework was whether the interviewees remember anything at all about the concentration camp? This question comprises two levels: a content-related level and a language-related level. It is not only important to ascertain what the interviewees remember; it is also necessary to consider how they remember it.

What is remembered? Most respondents evoked the concentration camp by speaking of certain places where the space of the concentration camp and the space of the village overlapped: Public places where prisoners worked or were transported across the village – either marching along the roads or in trains along the rail tracks that went through parts of the village. Furthermore, the spaces also overlapped at the site of the camp itself and by the road leading passed its boundaries. This road named "*Lagerstraße*" (camp road) was also used by the villagers. Within this individual memory framework the interviewees usually address two thematic areas. On the one hand, they refer to their own perception of the place and, if applicable, of how it changed because of the concentration camp. On the other hand, they point out the people involved with the concentration camp and their relationships.

Gerda¹ (born in 1934) reported how she observed the concentration camp prisoners working on the extension of the Dove Elbe, a branch of the river Elbe, when she was a child:

... yes, it was terrible, terrible. Well, the way it worked was that when the prisoners were being whipped, the Kapo² would stand in the middle. Then the SS guards would sit there, and then we sat down sometimes, too, because they didn't have anything, they just had to watch out, so that nobody could run away.

¹ All names of the interviewees were changed to pseudonyms.

² Kapos were functionary prisoners deployed as foremen by the SS in concentration camps in order to supervise work groups.

You know? If they did they would get shot straight away, you know? Well, no, that actually wasn't a nice time (Interview with Gerda 2012: #00:08:54–3#).

When Gerda came to talk about the river for a second time during the interview, the place was, as opposed to before, a site of very pleasant experiences:

It was actually a nice time. Generally everything was nice, being a child, going ice-skating, swimming and everything here on the Elbe, in the Elbe [laughs] <...>. Next door, there was an elderly lady who had this bathing costume, like you would have seen on the beach in the olden days, it looked like a blouse. She had that on, we had a laugh! [claps her hands and laughs]. You know we all went bathing there, yes, oh well [sighs] That's where you met in the evenings (Interview with Gerda 2012: #00:57:22–1#).

What Gerda describes in the first quote with the words "*Well, no, that actually wasn't a nice time*" is actually the exact same place and time that she in the second quote refers to with the phrase "*It was actually a nice time*": It is the river Dove Elbe of her childhood. At the same time it seems as if she is talking about two completely different places. One is the creepy place where she observed the concentration camp prisoners' suffering. The other is the idyllic place where she met with friends to go swimming.

Erich (born in 1935) reported how he watched prisoners marching in work gangs along the roads:

... several of them were deployed there, they marched through here. They also sometimes helped farmers. When there was harvest or something. They also did that. Then they would march right past here. We used to see them, us kids, we would sometimes follow them for a short while. <...> there were some without any shoes at all, they only had socks on. And the clothing, everything was quite shabby... but in our eyes... today you see everything differently. But back then we saw, we thought they were criminals, they had done something and it was their own fault that they were now being punished. But of course that wasn't the case. [pause 5 seconds]. Well, we laughed at them, this one doesn't even have shoes, he doesn't even have shoes on, and so on (Interview with Erich 2012: #00:06:40–5#).

What Erich remembers most is the visual impression of the prisoners and his own infantile reaction. The prisoners' appearance, in their ragged clothes marching along the roads, some of them without shoes, seemed funny to the children. As a child Erich was not intellectually able to understand the reasons for the prisoners' appearance. He saw them with the eyes of a child: "*But back then we thought that they were criminals*". To Erich as a child, it seemed logical and plausible that the concentration camp prisoners, whom he regarded as criminals, were punished. With the eyes of a grown up man and with the knowledge about the terror of that time he comprehends the context far better: "*Today you see everything differently*."

I will now move on to the *How* of the memories: How do the respondents remember the concentration camp? They remember it by placing the concentration camp within their living environment. If we allocate something to our living

environment, i.e. assigning it to a certain place within this environment, then a certain process is taking place. This process is dialectical in the sense that human beings need to orientate themselves in relation to their living environment and, by doing so, always construct an inside and outside area. This relationship between inside and outside might be revealed when something that feels unpleasant is imagined to be external and therefore to be on the outside. At the same time, everything that feels pleasant is consolidated as something internal or on the inside.

This process is also to be found in the memories of the respondents: Here, the people of Neuengamme cut off the concentration camp from their living environment and allocate it on the outside. Physically, the camp and the village overlapped. But although it was part of the physical space in which they lived, in their perception it did not belong to their cognitive space of the living environment. This becomes evident in the example of Gerda. The unpleasant emotions connected to memories of the prisoners' sufferings while working at the river Dove Elbe are separated from the pleasant memories of the idyllic evening hours at the same river. Therefore, the concentration camp and the village were perceived as two unconnected units.

The language in which the memories are expressed is another dimension of the *how*. The interviewees used language to keep their distance from the concentration camp. For example, some of them called the concentration camp prisoners "Zebras" (Trojan 2014: Interviews with Ada 2012: #00:55:59–0# and Käthe 2012: #00:33:44–5#). Superficially, this refers to the striped prisoners' clothing. But this term also sets up a distance, a linguistic safety margin between the denoted prisoners and the interviewee.

Furthermore, I noticed another linguistic phenomenon: Many interviewees repeatedly broke off their narrations in the middle of a sentence or an anecdote. It seemed as they were struggling to find the right words. What did this mean? My first assumption was that they did not want to talk about something and therefore purposely concealed it. Certainly, there were such cases. But with most of my respondents this did not seem to be the case. It seemed to be more a case of "not being able to" instead of "not wanting to". They exhibited a high level of insecurity. This expressed itself via their language, in the literal lack of words. They were afraid of saying something wrong or politically incorrect regarding the concentration camp.

This demonstrates they have some sense that there is a right and a wrong way of talking about Nazi atrocities. On a social level, there has indeed been an agreement about the appropriate way of talking about the Holocaust. The Holocaust has its own language or as the sociologist and psychoanalyst Christian Schneider claims, there is a thesaurus of the Holocaust discourse (Schneider 2010: 109). The latter decides what can and what cannot be said. This language, spoken within large parts of the national commemorative culture, is marked by a huge variety of set phrases, for example, the word "grief" as central metaphor of normative German memory politics (Schneider 2010: 105). On a local level – i.e. the level of the respondents from Neuengamme – this norma-

tive language has not (yet) been established. This is the cause of their insecurity: They do not speak this language; they know of its existence but are unsure of how to apply its rules.

Local memory framework: transgenerational transfer of memories of the concentration camp

When analysing the sources within a local framework, the following questions were relevant: Which memories of the concentration camp do the younger and the older respondents from the village have in common? Do they share memories regarding the concentration camp at all? Therefore, can the village actually be regarded as a commemorative community?

When I started to think about this paragraph, I felt unsettled when I realized that there did not seem to have been any kind of communicative exchange about the memories of the concentration camp among the interviewees. The memories I have presented previously were found exclusively with the older ones who had still experienced the Nazi era and the concentration camp. I worried that there could not be a transgenerational transfer of memories of the camp without concrete stories being told to the younger ones by the elderly.

When asked how she perceived the concentration camp with its fences and buildings, Mathilde (born in 1933) answered:

Well, we never, we never actually went there. And why? It was always like that. That whole area. <...> I don't know, because it had a bad reputation or no, it wasn't a bad reputation, it was a terrible reputation. Because the prisoners in the beginning always had to go back there and then come back out. We knew about that. Oh god, oh god, yes (Interview with Mathilde 2012: #00:51:27-4#).

The unpleasant feeling that Mathilde associates with the locality of the camp can be defined as discomfort. Discomfort is an unpleasant feeling that causes agitation and aversion. Mathilde connects this discomfort caused by the presence of the camp in the village to its geographical location. Because she cannot avoid her feelings of discomfort connected to the site of the former concentration camp, she needs to find another way of dealing with them: she tries to physically avoid the place that causes her discomfort.

Mathilde's daughter Ina (born in 1957) told me that they never talked about the concentration camp at home:

No, never <...> But I knew there used to be a concentration camp there. <...> Well I knew the prison once used to be a concentration camp. I knew of it even earlier I suppose, but I assume that is because I was told directions. Well, when it was referred to as the road passed the camp, when you had to get somewhere or so. Those were directions. But I guess I didn't scrutinize them. It just was the road passed the camp. You didn't take that road (Interview with Ina 2012: #00:05:08-5#).

Although the family never talked about the concentration camp, Ina knew about its former existence. She knew where it used to be and better than that, she knew how to behave towards it: you did not take the road that passed it.

Even though the older people did not pass their memories on to the younger ones, something was still passed on. However, the object passed on was something totally different from what I had expected it to be: it was not storytelling about the camp, but only a certain way of perceiving its former location. To be more precise, two things were being transmitted: On the one hand, the discomfort connected to the location of the former concentration camp, on the other hand, the construction of the camp as something external. This pattern of perception was boosted by the decision of the city of Hamburg to build a prison on the former concentration camp's premises after WW2 (KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme 2005). In this way, the place in its physical appearance retained its topographical stigma in the village and was continuously excluded by the respondents from their living environment.

As there is no communicative exchange between the older and the younger villagers regarding memories of the concentration camp, we cannot speak of a commemorative community in terms of being a *narrative* community. The interviewees can rather be referred to as a commemorative community in terms of being a *behavioural* community regarding the location of the former concentration camp.

Memory framework of society as a whole: public remembrance and local memory of the Neuengamme concentration camp

Previously, the main two focal points were on local memories of the concentration camp. The third framework looks to compare these local perspectives to the memories of society as a whole. What was of interest here was the relation between history-related policies and local memories at the site of the former concentration camp. It seemed obvious from the outset that the post-war policies of the city of Hamburg regarding the site influenced the villagers' perception of it.

After 1945, the city set up two prisons on the premises of the former concentration camp that remained in existence until the early 2000s (KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme 2005). The establishment of the prisons supported the perception of the location as external. Most bids for a memorial at the location of the former concentration camp were non-local: International organisations of former concentration camp prisoners from different European countries applied pressure onto the city of Hamburg to erect a worthy memorial in Neuengamme (KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme 2005).

Although these efforts for remembrance did not remain unnoticed by most of the villagers, the setting up of a memorial and its gradual advancement did not change anything regarding their perception of the place. Even as a memorial, it remained excluded from the interviewees' living environment.

In the 1980s, West Germany experienced a "remembrance boom" and the remembrance of the Holocaust in general was broadly renegotiated. The origins of this can be found in the Kohl administration's promotion of a revisionist history in West Germany and in the activities of grassroots movements (Siebeck 2015: 31–34) that started the first commemorative incentives, including the group of the residents of Neuengamme. Jürgen Köhler, at that time the pastor of the local parish, became involved in promoting remembrance of the concentration camp in the village. My respondent Dieter (born in 1956) reported that this new line of action caused mixed reactions among the parishioners:

Some made fun of him <...> I remember one incident, when we walked by the camp and Köhler was on this ramp, you know, that ramp that goes up there and then Köhler was weeding the grass from the gaps. And the other said: "well, if the pastor has nothing to do but weeding grass", you know, well <...> he was smiled at by some. "Why is he fishing around in the concentration camps history? You should rather let bygones be bygones, it is all over and done with." Köhler, I remember him as the one really making an effort to bring the camp into the public awareness (Interview with Dieter 2012: #00:22:31–0#).

The two opposing parties in the "*Historikerstreit*" (Historian's Quarrel) debate about Holocaust remembrance in Germany around that time were also represented on the local level in Neuengamme. This divided those who wanted to draw an end to the camp's history and let it be dead and buried and those, such as pastor Köhler, who fought this process of forgetting, even to the point of pulling weeds out of the site.

When the memorial's first international youth work camps took place on-site in the 1980s, local institutions started getting involved as well (Museumspädagogischer Dienst Hamburg 1988). The parish provided materials and members of the congregation accompanied the camps daily. A voluntary fire brigade helped with the technical side of installing the necessary infrastructure. Only a small number of the villagers were actually involved in this and after a short time, they were no longer required. The concentration camp memorial soon after became a totally government-financed institution. In this way, it was not dependent anymore on the support of the parish and fire brigade. This is what Wolfgang (born in 1953) reported:

Well, by now the parish has created a full-time position for that, a full-time pastor at the memorial. In this way, the work of the Neuengamme parish has decreased quite a bit. It's like this: We don't have to concern ourselves so much about that anymore, now there's somebody taking care of it. That's also a danger. Jürgen and me have foreseen that at the time. And that's just the way it went. <...> Well, yes, it was just like leaning back and saying, well, Neuengamme is doing something and the church has somebody doing the job now. In a way it's also just comfort (Interview with Wolfgang 2012: #00:33:48–1#, #00:34:40–2#).

Thus history-related political policies at the site of the former concentration camp have contributed to a kind of alienation on a local level in Neuengamme. This not only applies to the decision of building two prisons on the grounds of the former camp but can describe the measures that were undertaken in order to

establish a dignified commemoration, e.g. to rename the former *Lagerstraße* (camp road) or what was also referred to as "the road that passed the camp". In 1986, that part of the road that passed the former grounds of the camp was renamed into Jean-Dolidier-Weg, Jean-Dolidier-lane (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Neuengamme e.V. 2008: 160), after a former president of the *Amicale Internationale de Neuengamme*, an association of former concentration camp prisoners. Many of the residents, especially the elderly, cannot pronounce this French name.

As a living environment is also constructed and structured via everyday language (another example is the expression "Zebras" when referring to camp prisoners), this apparently noble measure of commemoration has contributed to moving towards a condition under which the place remained excluded from the living environment of the villagers.

Conclusion

In the beginning of this project, cycling down the roads around and past the former concentration camp raised hopes of obtaining a (new) picture of the field of my analysis. I hoped that this research project would provide a better understanding of the relationship between the location of the former concentration camp and my home village.

I found that the older villagers have cut off those memories of the concentration camp connected to unpleasant feelings, e.g. the visible suffering of the prisoners, from the rest of their memories. These memories could not be integrated meaningfully into their own life stories. Therefore, the unpleasant memories of the camp were also not narratively passed on to younger generations. Because of this finding, the theories of collective memory that focused on the communication and memory were not as relevant for the design of this study as the older theoretic works of Halbwachs that concentrate on the social framing of memory. Nevertheless, these unpleasant memories still existed within the village, although not in a concrete shape of stories, but rather in an unconscious habitus: the interviewees avoided the site of the concentration camp. The way in which the city of Hamburg dealt with the plots of the former camp did not encourage the people of Neuengamme to integrate the historical experience with the camp into their village either. On the contrary, history-related political policies promoted the perception of the site as something external, or, to conclude with the words of the interviewee Martin (born in 1960): "*It's like being stamped out <...> and what's left over around it, is the village*" (Interview with Martin 2012: #01:13:02–8#).

Although the case study could hardly ask, let alone answer all questions, it had still been possible to outline crucial points that may offer future research perspectives. It can be argued that particularly transnational comparative investigations, not on a national but rather a regional level, could provide further incentive within memory studies.

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