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Eva Schöck-Quinteros, Sigrid Dauks. *„Im Lager hat man auch mich zum Verbrecher gemacht ": Margarete Ries: Vom „asozialen "Häftling in Ravensbrück zum Kapo in Auschwitz.* Bremen: Universität Bremen, 2012. 104 S. ISBN 978-3-88722-732-6.

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E. Schöck-Quinteros u.a. (Hrsg.): Margarete Ries

In October 1965, fifteen German theaters premiered "The Investigation", Peter Weiss' attempt to facilitate the public debate about the Nazi regime. Since then, there have been many attempts to use theater to explore the mechanisms of National-Socialism, questions of responsibility, guilt, and shame. Moreover, recent events prove that putting the Nazi regime on stage is attractive, even when, on first glance, it is not the theme of the piece performed - see the recent cancellation of Richard Wagner's "Tannhäuser" at the Deutsche Oper Düsseldorf, where scenes depicting shootings of Jewish prisoners and the display of Nazi symbols were met with protests. Staging the Nazi regime has meaning. The power of words, of language and performance, are salient means to describe and explore how the atrocities were possible, and how individuals came to participate in the criminal regime.

The project "Aus den Akten auf die Bühne" (Putting Documents on Stage) of Bremen University's History Department, in collaboration with actors of the bremer shakespeare company, thus joins a series of efforts to combine historical research and sense-making with artistic, theatrical practice. The thin volume "Im Lager hat man auch mich zum Verbrecher gemacht" (In the camp I was turned into a perpetrator too) is the most recent outcome of a sequence of play readings based on historical documents. Previous performances, drawing on students' research in local archives, addressed the expulsion of foreigners from Bremen in the 1920s and a woman's persecution for "inappropriate" sexual relationships in 1927, among others.

The present book raises important questions about the merit of performing primary sources, and about how to evaluate a concentration camp prisoner's participation in the Nazi regime's violence who was assigned the post of Kapo (prisoner functionary). "Im Lager…" puts forth the accusation, interrogation and subsequent trial proceedings against the German Margarete Ries. Convicted of "asocial behavior" and as part of a campaign against petty criminals in 1939, Ries had first been sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp for women, then transferred to Auschwitz and, later on, to the sub-camp Budy. There she was made to oversee a woman's work battalion and, according to former prisoners, brutalized and killed a number of women under her surveillance. In 1949, Ries was put on trial as part of the denazification campaigns after World War II. Her trial was assigned to a Spruchkammer, a court of lay judges established to try Germans involved in the Nazi regime. In contrast to regular courts, which have to show the defendant's guilt, in these courts defendants had to prove their innocence. It is unclear why Ries was put in front of such a court: there is no proof for political motives for her actions, as noted by the judges (p. 88). By providing the protocols of witness statements, minutes of two of Ries' interrogations, and court documents, the volume traces the standard sequence of postwar procedures to uncover and punish individuals involved in Nazi atrocities. The book thus provides an effective introduction to postwar debates for students for whom not only the history of the Nazi regime, but even the history of the postwar debates about it, recede more and more into a distant past. Ries was eventually acquitted, yet the documentation of these select documents illuminates the complexity of putting Kapos on trial.

Whereas Peter Weiss used the minutes of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial as the basis for his Oratorio, "Im Lager…" does not attempt to fictionalize or abstract from historical sources, rather, legal documents *are* the text. This is an interesting approach, because the material reflects the complex inner worlds of a victim-turned-perpetrator and her efforts to prove her innocence. It is problematic, because as a book readers do not get a strong sense of the editors and project members' analysis or what they would readers/ listeners like to learn.

Weiss' work carried a strong anti-capitalist message, and by identifying several characters by numbers he suggested that individuals don't matter. "Im Lager…" shows the opposite, demonstrating explicitly how individuals were pulled into a criminal and violent system. Cases like Ries' evidence how victims could turn into perpetrators, here sketched out, albeit insufficiently, from the perspective of one that did change sides - even if only for six months out of nearly five years of camp imprisonment.

The documentation includes numerous significant moments for the study of the Nazi regime and the treatment of potential or true Nazi criminals in post-war Germany. There is the brief and factual account of the violence experienced by the main witness, Faiga Berkmann, first in a ghetto in German-occupied Poland and then in Auschwitz (p. 17-29); and there is the reluctance of a German police officer to arrest Margarete Ries - he doesn't believe a survivor's forceful accusation (p. 15). The interrogator of the US Army's Legal Division, Harold Oppenheim, displays perceptions and stereotypes that characterized common representations of Nazi perpetrators as deviant subjects rather than ordinary Germans (which were thus exculpated): Ries is called a "beast", not a "normal woman" (p. 41, 32), and suspected of sexual relationships with SS-personnel (p. 40). Oppenheim seems to adopt the accusation of "asocial" behavior that brought Ries to the camp in the first place, but he also replicates the public demonization of female camp guards that has been analyzed in great detail elsewhere. See for instance the section "Sexualisierungen" in Insa Eschebach et al. (eds.), Gedächtnis und Geschlecht. Deutungsmuster in Darstellungen des nationalsozialistischen Geschlechts, Frankfurt am Main 2002. Ries' efforts to escape persecution and prove her innocence display patterns rampant in postwar Germany, most notably her attempt to diminish the impact of her brutality by arguing it may have accelerated prisoners' death but not effected it directly (p. 62).

The interrogation protocols further suggest a drastically different approach by different investigators. In contrast to the threatening US officer, a second one, Alfred Göbel, himself a former camp prisoner, enables Ries to give a full account of her life and her behavior in the camp. Perhaps his own experience of limited choices for prisoners enabled him to see the difference between people like Margarete Ries, who were forced to join the ranks of brutal guards, and SS-members who willingly joined a Nazi organization and supported the violence for ideological reasons. This does not exonerate Ries from the guilt of brutalizing and killing people, but it reminds us of the necessary failure of established legal frameworks to come to terms with a criminal regime that suspended all moral norms.

In sum, "Im Lager…" provides valuable material to introduce students to thorny questions of how does one become a perpetrator, and the unsatisfying legal and moral instruments we have at our disposal to judge people's behavior in extremis. A more extensive comment would have been desirable. As is, especially teachers who would like to use the documentation are left to work out these questions by themselves and will have to look for additional material. Another volume published by the project may be useful here: Eva Schöck Quinteros et al. (eds.), "Was verstehen wir Frauen auch von Politik?" Entnazifizierung ganz normaler Frauen in Bremen (1945-1952), Bremen 2011. Articulating that solutions are not easy to find is important, yet without any guide the different, contradictory positions (victims-as-witnesses vs a victim as the accused) stand unquestioned and may not produce the desired conclusions project authors aim for.

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