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Buchenwald Concentration Camp in Post-War Literature from Luxembourg

Abstract: During World War II, the German occupation forces incarcerated about 4000 Luxembourgers, of which around 250 were sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp. Their experiences left numerous literary traces in the decade following the liberation of Luxembourg in September 1944. Albert Beffort, a primary-school teacher, reports how he helped build up the prisoner library in Buchenwald. Karl Schnog, a politically active German journalist who emigrated to Luxembourg in 1933, processes his tribulations in various poems and prose texts. Henri Rock, a Catholic priest, retells his experiences in Dora in a series of letters to his father written in 1945. Finally Nicolas Spielmann, a young policeman who refused to betray his country, gives a detailed account of the events he witnessed in Buchenwald. Though they came from very different backgrounds, the central themes of camaraderie, courage and a belief in one's ideals are found in all their works.

On 10 May 1940, German forces invaded Luxembourg. Faced with a much larger enemy force, the small Luxembourgish army, the *Freiwilligenkompanie* [Company of Volunteers], surrendered to the aggressors. Mainly composed of young people training for a career in the police, the occupiers intended to incorporate the *Freiwilligenkompanie* into the German police. However, many recruits refused to serve in the German forces and were either executed or sent to concentration camps (Jacoby and Trauffler, 1980; 1986).

In the days following annexation, journalists and newspaper editors were interrogated by the new rulers and many of them were imprisoned. From the start, the German occupiers sought to bring the Luxembourgish media and state institutions under their control. Several small, independent groups mounted resistance against the occupying forces. While each group sought to defend its own socialist, communist or Catholic ideals against Nazi ideology, all of them were driven by a strong desire to restore an independent Luxembourgish state. Events such as the destruction of the Monument du Souvenir, a statue commemorating the victims of the Great War, in October 1940; the census of October 1941, where a majority refused to declare themselves of German nationality; and, in particular, the forced recruitment of young Luxembourgers into the Wehrmacht from August 1942 onwards led many people to actively support the resistance, be it by helping

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young men to escape conscription or by refusing to join in with the *Volksdeutsche Bewegung* (the ethnic German movement).

During the four-and-a-half years of German occupation, around 4,000 Luxembourgers were interned in prisons and concentration camps. Eight hundred of them did not survive the war.[1] Most prisoners were sent to the nearby work camp Hinzert, in the vicinity of Trier, but there were Luxembourgers in almost all other concentration camps as well. In the extensive commemorative brochure *Livre d'or de la résistance luxembourgeoise* [*Golden Book of Luxembourgish Resistance*], 234 Luxembourgers are listed by name as prisoners of Buchenwald, and twenty-two of them as having died there (Bosseler and Steichen 1952, 88 – 91).

After the war, many survivors wrote about their incarceration, their toils and plights, the atmosphere in the camp and the relationships both between prisoners and between the prisoners and the guards. There are six early accounts by Luxembourgish survivors of Buchenwald. All were written either in the camp itself or immediately after the authors' return home, and most of them were published in Luxembourg between 1945 and 1947. In the following, I will elucidate the motivations, feelings and thoughts of these survivors – as described in their works and discussed in the post-war Luxembourgish press (Schmit 2020).

Many concentration-camp accounts were written in the form of journals. Two members of the aforementioned *Freiwilligenkompanie* who had been sent to Buchenwald for their refusal to serve in the German police were René Trauffler and Nicolas Spielmann. The former kept a diary during the death march from Sachsenhausen through Brandenburg (Trauffler 1961),[2] while the latter wrote down his impressions of Buchenwald. Neither of the journals were printed until much later, but Spielmann's account is included in this analysis as it belongs to the corpus of early post-war texts on Buchenwald. The first text to be published in 1945 by the communist Verlag der Volksstimme was the forty-four-page-long narrative *Streiflichter aus Hinzert, Natzweiler, Buchenwald* [*Impressions of Hinzert, Natzweiler, Buchenwald*], written by the high school teacher and pedagogical reformer Pierre Biermann. An outspoken antifascist, his articles in the literary review *Die Neue Zeit* marked him as a potential troublemaker to the new powers. Committed to socialist ideas, his time in the camps of Hinzert, Natzweiler and Buchenwald (where he met influential authors like Bruno Apitz) convinced him of the merits of communist thinking. In *Streiflichter aus Hinzert, Natzweiler, Buchenwald*, he relates life in these three camps in a series of short

1 The names of all Luxembourg concentration camp victims and survivors are listed in Bosseler and Steichen 1952.

2 The journal is kept in the National Literary Archives in Mersch, CNL L-96.I.1. Fonds René Trauffler.

anecdotes. The part about Buchenwald consists of a seventeen-page-long account of the final days before the liberation of the camp.

One of the first residents of Luxembourg to be sent to a concentration camp was the German writer and satirist Karl Schnog, who had been living in exile in Luxembourg since 1933. He was incarcerated in Dachau, Sachsenhausen and finally Buchenwald, where he stayed until its liberation on 13 April 1945, when he was able to return to his wife and daughter in Luxembourg. That same year, his text *Unbekanntes KZ* [*Unfamiliar Concentration Camp*] was released as the first volume in the series *Stimmen aus dem KZ* [*Voices from the Concentration Camp*] by the established publisher Bourg-Bourger. The second booklet in the same series, also just over thirty pages long, was Léon Reuter's *La voix du bagne* [*The Voice of the Forced Labour Camp*], which was printed soon after. All we know of the author is his name and the fact that he was from Luxembourg City. His account does not tell us anything about why he was sent to Buchenwald, nor about his profession or social background.

The primary school teacher Albert Beffort from the village of Bech in the East of Luxembourg was a member of the *Lëtzebuerger Patrioteliga* [Luxembourgish Patriot's League]. In May 1942, he was arrested in front of his young pupils, and in September 1943 he was sent to Hinzert and then to Buchenwald, where he remained until April 1945. In Buchenwald, Beffort managed to obtain a post as a librarian and thus became a driving force behind the prisoners' library. Beffort gave a detailed account of his experiences in Buchenwald in the monthly magazine *Rappel*, published by the Luxembourg League of Prisoners and Political Deportees (LPPD). His narrative was released in instalments under the title *Ich war Bibliothekar im K.L. Buchenwald* [*I was a Librarian in Buchenwald*] in 1947.

The final publication that I will consider here is Henri Rock's *KZ Dora* [*Concentration Camp Dora*], published in 1946, in which the young Franciscan monk tells of his resistance against the Nazi occupiers, his arrest, incarceration and forced labour in Buchenwald's infamous subcamp Mittelbau-Dora. The account takes the form of letters to his father, written in Luxembourgish and dated 1945. The monk seeks to explain why he decided to join the fight against the occupiers. He is under no illusions that many people will condemn his actions as reckless. In his first letter dated 1 July 1945, he writes: 'Dir sôt elo vleicht, matt vill ânerer: Du hätts solle ro'eg sin we' de' âner, da wir et dir gânge we' dénen âneren.' [You might say, like many others: you should have kept your mouth shut like the others, then you would have been treated like the others.] (Rock 1946, 15) This is a common sentiment among the Luxembourgish survivors of concentration camps, expressed in many early accounts. Even though resistance against the Nazis has been presented as a nationwide effort since the end of World War

II, only a minority of people were actually ready to risk their lives. It was only after the liberation of Luxembourg by the Allied troops in September 1944 that many more people came forward to declare their allegiance to the freedom fighters by joining the militia trying to fill the power vacuum after those in charge under the Nazis had fled the country or been imprisoned.

Among the concentration camp prisoners were communists, Catholic clerics, teachers, journalists, manual labourers, veterans of the Spanish Civil War and members of the bourgeois elite. Some members of the latter group, like Marcel Noppeney, who was imprisoned in Dachau, nourished fervent anti-German sentiment, while others, like the writer Frantz Clément, who was murdered by the Nazis in 1942, remained lifelong admirers of German culture and literature. The mismatch between the aggressive regime of the Nazis on the one hand and German cultural achievements on the other as well as linguistic proximity explains why most Luxembourgish camp literature was written in German. Of the six Buchenwald authors I will discuss here, only Henri Rock wrote in Luxembourgish and Léon Reuter in French, while the other four chose to write in German.

Léon Reuter's *La voix du bagne* – 'Irrefutable proof' of Nazi atrocities

La voix du bagne gives a detailed account of how Buchenwald was organised. Apart from this booklet, the author Léon Reuter did not pen any other narratives, poems or stories. So, what drove him to compose this exposé of Buchenwald? In the preface, the author laments that the Nazis committed crimes so heinous that people have found it hard to believe the survivors. But the liberated concentration camps would bring 'preuve irrécusable' [irrefutable proof] of the magnitude of Nazi atrocities: 'These facts must be made known to the civilised world so that people can get a precise idea of the crimes committed by the Germans.'[3] (Reuter 1945, 3) This urge to tell the world of his plight was in line with the feelings of many other camp survivors from all nations who, like Reuter, deplored the fact that the people back home often did not want to believe the extent of the atrocities (e. g., Fohrmann 1945, 35; Bodé 1946, 8).

In his account, Reuter presents the reader with facts and descriptions. He recounts the layout of the camp with its various departments and work units, the *Kommando*s, like the *Effektenkammer* [property store], the hairdressers'

3 All translations from the Luxembourgish, German and French originals are mine.

and the firefighters' brigade, etc. He explains how the workers had to carry fifty-kilogramme bags of cement at a jogging pace, 'and as there were two rows of workers, one going up, the other down the path, there was no possibility to slow down' (Reuter 1945, 20). His matter-of-fact tone only adds to the horror of what is being described, for example, in the section about the crematorium: 'Nothing was more dismal than seeing those bodies haphazardly thrown one on top of the other. Piling up in the courtyard in front of the crematorium, they often started to decompose, and the local rats would meet there to enjoy the feast.' (Reuter 1945, 8)

Another desolate place was the *kleines Lager* [small camp]. Five to six men had to share a bunk with dimensions of 1.80 x 1.40 x 0.60 m, meaning that they had to lie on their side to fit in (Reuter 1945, 11). The dreadful sanitary conditions and lack of food led to infectious diseases, and the death rate among prisoners was high. 'If the living were strong enough, they pushed their dead to the door. But often they decided to keep their dead neighbour around for 4 or 5 days, so as to obtain double food rations.' (Reuter 1945, 11). The *Kleines Lager* is mentioned as a place of desperation and death in Beffort, Biermann, Schnog and Spielmann, but the crowded living conditions also sometimes offered a chance to avoid discovery.

Many early camp texts from Luxembourg emphasise the wit and resourcefulness of the prisoners faced with the boorish brutality of the guards. The most striking examples of this are Léon Bollendorff's *Komödie im KZ* [*Comedy in the Concentration Camp*] (1946) and Marcel Rausch's texts in the LPPD's magazine *Rappel*. These texts describe anecdotes of life in Hinzert, but there are instances of defiant self-assertion in all Buchenwald texts as well. The LPPD even actively invited their members to send in 'anekdoten a witzen aus dem KZ' [anecdotes and jokes from the camp], to be published in *Rappel* ([Call for submissions], *Rappel* 7, 1947, 10). These stories helped the survivors to cope with their memories of a situation designed to strip them of their agency, self-determination and hope. Here is an example of one such anecdote in Reuter's *La voix du bagne* about an SS guard nicknamed Tim Mix:

> To [Tim Mix's] delight, he spotted three inmates blissfully asleep on the roof of the Gustloff-Factory. Tim Mix soon found a ladder to climb up. I have to tell you that, in cases such as this, the fate of the prisoner is not enviable. Our friends were quick to sniff out the danger. In a flash they climbed down a ladder leaning against the other side of the building and quickly removed both ladders. Now our 'friend' the scoundrel was trapped, because the comrades took off at a run. Tim Mix could scream all he wanted, yelling and waving his gun around, none of this got him down from the roof. He may as well call out to the prisoners for help; they all laughed and replied: 'Nix verstehn... no boni mai... Nix compris.' (Reuter 1945, 25–26)

D'De'er war Tromp am Lager Dora! – Henri Rock in the Außenlager Dora-Mittelbau

Reuter's anecdote evokes a camaraderie, a spirit of 'us against them' which pervades the vast majority of early Luxembourgish camp literature. One notable exception to this is the book *KZ Dora: D'Geschicht vun engem 'Brongen' vun Esch* [*Camp Dora. The Story of a 'Brown' (Franciscan) Friar from Esch/Alzette*], published in 1946. Father Henri Rock recounts his wartime story in an epistolary style through a series of letters addressed to his father and signed with his former given name 'Misch'. Of the ninety-four pages, about twenty pertain to his time in Buchenwald.

Unlike other authors, Henri Rock is wary of the other prisoners, though he acknowledges: 'Iwerhâpt hun d'Letzeburger zo' Buchenwald gudd zesummegehalen, a woren och am ganze Lager gudd ugesin.' [The Luxembourgers generally stuck together and were also well-liked throughout the entire camp.] (Rock 1946, 60) Nevertheless, he prefers to keep to himself. The vicar of the French town of Nancy, a fellow inmate, advises him not to tell anyone that he is a monk. Having worked in a monastery kitchen, Rock should simply say that he is a cook (Rock 1946, 60).

On 13 March 1944, Henri Rock was transferred to the Außenlager Dora-Mittelbau. This subcamp is described in Luxembourgish camp literature as 'more or less a *Todeskommando*' [a work gang with a death sentence] ('Eine kurze Geschichte' 1947, 54; see also Reuter 1945, 16 – 17) , even though working conditions improved somewhat after the spring of 1944. Although it was the largest *Kommando* in Buchenwald with up to 40,000 prisoners, very few Luxembourgers worked there. Albert Beffort writes of Dora: 'Luxembourgers were only transported there when every last possibility to keep them in the camp had been exhausted.' (Beffort 1947e, 8)

An enterprising Luxembourgish prisoner, Nicolas Simon from Luxembourg City, worked in the prison hospital, the *Revier*. Whenever he got hold of a Luxembourger's transfer papers to Dora, he removed them from the pile. Henri Rock recalls bitterly: 'Unfortunately, his [Simon's] world-view was different from mine [...] he had promised it to me, too, but he probably thought: We have enough people of his kind at home!!' (Rock 1946, 61) Rock is convinced that Simon, a communist, deliberately left his transfer papers to Dora untouched because he was a man of the cloth. This assessment of Simon, lovingly nicknamed 'Gandhi' by his fellow inmates, is in stark contrast to all other descriptions, which uniformly praise him for his humanitarian efforts both inside the camp and after the war. This is maybe the most striking example within Luxembourg-

ish Buchenwald literature of the prime importance of connections among the prisoners and how they could shape a prisoner's experience of the camp.

Fig. 1: Henri Rock: *KZ Dora*. Esch-Uelzecht: Henry Ney-Eicher, 1946.

Henri Rock describes the gruelling work in the newly founded subcamp in great detail: after twelve hours of work in the tunnels, the prisoners had to spend another hour or two building barracks. Until the sleeping quarters were established, the workers had to sleep in the tunnels on bare rocks: 'Our lungs were literally eaten away by the dust. Many of us were coughing up blood.' (Rock 1946, 64) Worse than the meagre food rations – a litre of watery cabbage soup and a loaf of bread with a slice of margarine and some cheese – was the constant thirst, as there was no water in the tunnels (Rock 1946, 67). The most mentally taxing ex-

perience for Rock, however, was the jaded indifference of the workers to the suffering of their fellow inmates: 'We stumbled over dead bodies as if they were rocks. Your workmate collapsed next to you, no one even gave him a second glance. [...] The best turned into the worst egoists. [...] The beast triumphed in camp Dora!!' (Rock 1946, 68)

Though he resented that Nicolas 'Gandhi' Simon did not help him to avoid the labour camp, Rock was determined to accept his martyrdom and declined any offer that might get him out of Dora, as the following exchange with a supervisor shows: 'You don't belong in the quarry, what is your profession? – I said: Cook! – That fits, we are looking for a cook *kapo* for our new SS kitchen, I will suggest you.' (Rock 1946, 72) But Rock refused to cook for his masters; he felt it would be wrong for him to accept the job while the other workers were unable to escape their plight.

Father Henri Rock remained in Dora-Mittelbau until April 1945, when the camp was evacuated and the prisoners sent on a death march through Germany. Somewhere between Leipzig and Dresden he escaped, and an SS guard turned a blind eye when he found the cowering prisoner. Soon after, Rock came across a group of Russian soldiers, and one of them took pity on him: 'He gave me tobacco, chocolate and everything else he had.' (Rock 1946, 78) Rock mentions these kindnesses in passing, seemingly taking them for granted. They do not change his overall negative view of the majority of his fellow inmates, the prison guards and the Russian liberators. Some later reviewers accused the Luxembourgish camp survivors of embellishing the opportunities for resistance within the concentration camps (Lech 1989, 80), which might prompt us to wonder whether Rock did not let his antipathy towards both Nazis and communists taint his view of events. At the very least, his narrative is a reminder that, just as he accused 'Gandhi' of letting his worldview guide his actions, both concentration camp authors and their later critics might have unwittingly allowed their beliefs to colour their judgement.

I was a Librarian in Buchenwald – A Luxembourgish school teacher in the prisoners' library

Possibly the most interesting description of life in Buchenwald by a Luxembourger is Albert Beffort's *Ich war Bibliothekar im K.L. Buchenwald*. After Germany invaded Luxembourg, the twenty-six-year-old primary school teacher became involved in the Luxembourgish Patriot's League resistance organisation. Shortly

after the group's leader Raymond Petit was killed, Beffort was arrested and sent to Buchenwald, where he remained from September 1943 until the liberation of the camp in April 1945.[4] Shortly after his arrival, he obtained a post as a librarian in the *Kommando Bücherei*, joining the group responsible for running the small prisoners' library in Block 2. Over the next year-and-a-half, Beffort and his co-workers turned their unassuming book collection into a large, efficient library and one of the camp's cultural highlights. Beffort's detailed account is significant as one of the earliest, if not *the* earliest detailed account of the prisoners' library. He describes the place as follows: 'The elongated book room was bright and clean, [...] a handful of engaging pictures on the walls and shelves, the green and red of the geraniums in the windows and the thick cacti growing along the bookcases were a pleasant surprise.' (Beffort 1947c, 28)

Dealing with the camp authorities was an uneasy balancing act. *Lagerkommandant* Koch, whom Beffort describes as a brutal, smiling sadist (Beffort 1947c, 29), took inordinate pride in the library, which allowed him to boast to outsiders about his humane treatment of the prisoners (Beffort 1947c, 30). The librarians were mostly given free rein in the organisation of the book collection and the daily running of the library. But despite the library's reputation as a prestige project, the librarians had to renovate the space and enlarge the collection without any support from the Nazi camp leaders. Beffort explains how every item of furniture – bookshelves, tables and chairs – had to be 'organised', meaning they were clandestinely erased from SS inventories and stealthily repurposed for the library.

The librarians also prided themselves on being skilled diplomats: prisoners were not allowed to own books, but German-language books could be donated to the library. Foreign-language books had to be destroyed. However, Beffort and his colleagues managed to convince *Lagerleiter* Koch to incorporate these into the collection as well (Beffort 1989, 472). Thus, the number of volumes increased rapidly. In 1945, the library contained almost 15,000 volumes, including around 4,000 novels, biographies and works of travel literature as well as up to 6,000 foreign-language books, as Beffort states in a 1989 text about the library (Beffort 1989, 471): 'If you had the necessary language skills, you could read Tolstoy, Dante, Shakespeare and Ibsen in the original, and if you felt like learning Japanese, a Japanese grammar would allow you to take a first step in that direction.' (Beffort 1947c, 33) Interestingly, the camp library contained many books that had long since been purged from German public libraries, like Heinrich Heine's *Deutschland – Ein Wintermärchen* (Beffort 1989, 471). The library issued readers'

4 A.R.: Beffort 2000, 295–296.

cards with the prisoners' names, numbers and block numbers as well as the catalogue numbers of the books they borrowed. As every book was stamped 'Häftlingsbücherei K.L. Buchenwald', books from the former camp library are still being discovered to this day in libraries and private collections all over the world.[5]

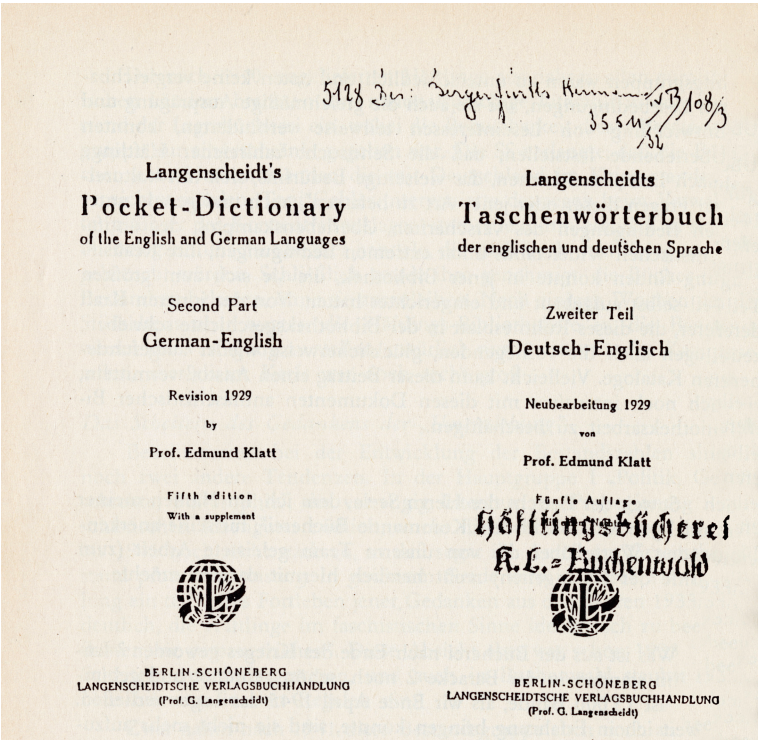

Fig. 2: A book from the Buchenwald prisoners' library, with its catalogue number *5128 Bu*, the name of the former owner of the book, his prisoner's number (35511) and cell block (32). Below, the library stamp. In: *Rappel* Sept./Oct. 1989, p. 474.

The library was well organised, with special sections for magazines, science books, philosophical treatises and volumes on mathematics and politics. Karl Schnog states in *Unbekanntes KZ* that Fritz Löhner-Beda, famous for composing

5 See, e. g., the announcement of the University of Linz, 1 August 2018: 'Bücher aus KZ Buchenwald gefunden', https://www.jku.at/news-events/news/detail/news/buecher-aus-kz-buchenwald-gefunden/. Accessed 3 August 2020.

the *Buchenwaldlied*, once jokingly said that, should he ever be allowed to leave Buchenwald, he would willingly stay for another eight days just to finish all the books in the library (Schnog 1945, 15). However, in October 1942, the renowned Austrian librettist was transported to Auschwitz, where he was murdered shortly thereafter.

Oppression and self-assertion in Beffort's account

Beffort's description of his life as a camp librarian takes up about half of the account. He also gives colourful details of other parts of the camp, which he likens to a busy, overcrowded slum (Beffort 1947d, 15 – 17). The primary school teacher's heart goes out to the children who play among the barracks: 'Many of these children have spent their whole life in the camps. [...] Most of them can neither read nor write. One is overcome by a cold rage when one thinks about all of this. What are the children doing here? What have they done to deserve this?' (Beffort 1947d, 18 – 19)

Beffort is well aware of the privileged position that his work in the library affords him. He states that most Luxembourgers have managed to secure relatively safe workplaces for themselves, not least because of their language skills. The Luxembourgers were fluent in German and also spoke French, often some Italian, and many were able to quickly gain a rudimentary knowledge of Slavic languages. They often found their niche doing secretarial or administrative work. Only a few Luxembourgers held the post of capo, but their influence in the prisoners' self-administration was, according to Beffort, 'felt up into the highest circles of the camp' (Beffort 1947b, 32). As a librarian, Beffort was allowed to move freely throughout the camp. When the daily routine in the bookroom became too boring, Beffort would go on *Buchkontrollen* – supposedly looking for books in prisoners' quarters – and take strolls through the camp. These walks sometimes led him to the 'small camp', which he describes as the 'camp's slum, where hunger, sickness, disease and death reign. Dire need looks at you through many thousand hollow, bony faces, and over it all lies an eternal, oppressive inertia, waiting for something that may never come, waiting for liberating death.' (Beffort 1947d, p. 20)

Like in most Luxembourgish camp literature, the all-pervading horror is intermingled with a harsh kind of gallows humour. While describing the huge piles of bodies in front of the barracks, the author recalls the following incident: 'Someone had lost consciousness, had been taken for dead and dragged outside. Lying in the

cold snow, he had quickly regained consciousness and scrabbled to his feet. On all fours he crawled back to his bedstead, much to the horror of his bedmates, who had already divided up all the worldly goods of the resurrected man among themselves.' (Beffort 1947d, 22) Grotesque and macabre scenes such as these not only evoke the grisly reality of life in the concentration camp but also lend a more literary note to Beffort's factual analysis. For example, the teacher recalls the work gangs of starving prisoners marching out to the eerily cheerful tune of a musical ensemble, 'an endless line of human shapes, figures in zebra dress, in plain clothes, in the most unimaginable costumes.' (Beffort 1947b, 31)

Fig. 3: Executions were often accompanied by music. Woodcut by Albert Kaiser, in Jean Fohrmann's *K.-Z. Tatsachenberichte aus deutschen Konzentrationslagern*, Luxembourg 1945, p. 56.

Time and again, the desolation and dire need of the emaciated prisoners is contrasted with ludicrous signs of abundance, seemingly designed to mock their plight, for instance, when Beffort describes the hopeless battle against vermin, an impossible task with not a single toilet or bathroom on the whole block, while flowers were being ordered to be carefully put up throughout the barracks: 'They stood on tables, dangled in hanging baskets from the ceiling or flashed out

of clean pots on the wall. Why all these flowers? I sometimes wondered. But I guess that's how it had to be, just like the music ensemble cheerfully had to play along when the dead were dragged past it to the centre square for roll call.' (Beffort 1947b, 34) And yet, adrift on this sea of desolation, Albert Beffort repeatedly finds islands of self-assertion, as in the case of the Luxembourgish prisoner named Pier, who had worked his way up to the post of barber to the commander of Außenlager Arolsen. A fearless daredevil, he typed out an order to leave the camp, put an official stamp on it, climbed into a parked car, drove past the guard, whom he greeted with a friendly smile, and returned to Luxembourg (Beffort 1947d, 9).

'The only places where you could safely discuss politics were the concentration camps' – Karl Schnog's *Unbekanntes KZ*

Such tales of successful acts of risky defiance helped the prisoners to keep up their morale. As the overwhelming majority of Buchenwald inmates from Luxembourg were political prisoners incarcerated for taking an outspoken stance against their German occupiers, it was hard for them to submit to the vicious arbitrariness of concentration camp rules.

> Wie schweig ich nur noch eine kurze Weil'
> Hat nie den Auftrag, nie das Ziel vergessen
> Der Körper wund, der Wille stark und steil!
> [How can I keep silent just a little longer
> Never forgetting about the task, the goal
> My body sore, my mind strong and bold!]

These are the thoughts of the prisoner in *Der Häftling*, a poem written in Buchenwald by the German satirist and journalist Karl Schnog (1947, 55). After emigrating to Luxembourg in 1933, Schnog, who was of Jewish ancestry, continued to warn against the rise of fascism and the imminent danger of war in his *Weltwochenschau*, a politico-satirical commentary in verses, published in the Luxembourgish newspaper *Tageblatt* from 1937 to 1940. Arrested in May 1940, Schnog spent five years in German concentration camps. Like many Luxembourgish

camp inmates,[6] he continued to write poems and political texts during this time, some of which were published in anthologies after the war (e. g. in Becher, Schnog and Eberle 1946).

After his return to Luxembourg in spring 1945, Schnog felt the urge to put his ordeal to paper (Schnog 1946). The numerous titles for his attempted autobiography reveal both his ardent desire to describe what the prisoners went through and the difficulties of doing so, as the following three examples show: *Das musste ich schreiben!* [*I Had to Write It!*], *Mein und der Zeit Gesicht: Erinnerungen, Bekenntnisse und Erkenntnisse* [*My Face and the Face of Time: Memories, Confessions and Insights*] and *Ich sollte sieben Tode sterben! Ein subjektiver Erlebnisbericht von Erlebnissen in Nazi-Konzentrationslagern* [*I was Meant to Die Seven Deaths! A Subjective Account of What I Experienced in Nazi Concentration Camps*].

In 'Mein und der Zeit Gesicht', Schnog muses that his life was a series of anecdotes, 'sketches, prose poems, short dramas and, much too often, horrible grotesques. There is no need to invent anything, it is enough to tell the story. This is what I am doing here. Autumn 1952.' (Schnog 1946, 'Mein und der Zeit Gesicht', 1) Schnog generally recounts his wartime experiences in short, sharp sentences and keywords. We might speculate that they were meant as drafts for the various chapters of his autobiography. Here are some excerpts, translated from the German original:

> Dachau is made 'free of Jews'. Off to Sachsenhausen. 3,000 in a block meant for 400. Corruption, lack of space, dirt. [...] (Of 200 Jews, there were 9 left) [...] 'Convalescence' transport to Dachau. A miracle happens: I am among those who come back. Camaraderie in Buchenwald. Mutually helping each other. Discussions. Educating people. I am writing chansons, couplets, sketches, short scenes. And I recite [my works] in secret lectures and commemorative gatherings. They want to eradicate us. Gen. Robert Sievert rescues 200 Jews by setting up masonry courses! I am ordered to work in a heavy commando (I am 45 years old) and I become very ill. Hunger, oedema, fluid around my heart. – They start to experiment with gas killings on Jewish prisoners. How I escaped death. – Most of my friends are taken to Auschwitz, with a friend's help I am put, half-dead, in the hospital ward. A Czech doctor and comrade cures my fluid. Back to the block. I weigh 40 kilos. Nevertheless, back to work. How Robert helped me. – Continued illegal activities, but also strangely legal ones: I am writing the PhD thesis of Hauptscharführer HOVEN (hanged in 1946) on a typewriter. – Illegal commemorative service for Ernst Thälmann, we are betrayed, many participants arrested, they are looking for me. Friends hide me in the 'plague barracks' block 61, where those with incurable typhus, tuberculosis, dysentery and syphilis lie and where the

6 On Luxembourgish poetry written in concentration camps, see the chapter 'Mir halen duerch. Dichtung im KZ' in Schmit 2020, 500 – 502.

SS never enter. – I help out carrying dead bodies and I have a heart attack. – After two months, back to the block. – [Working] in the 'sock darning' [commando] (Schnog 1946).[7]

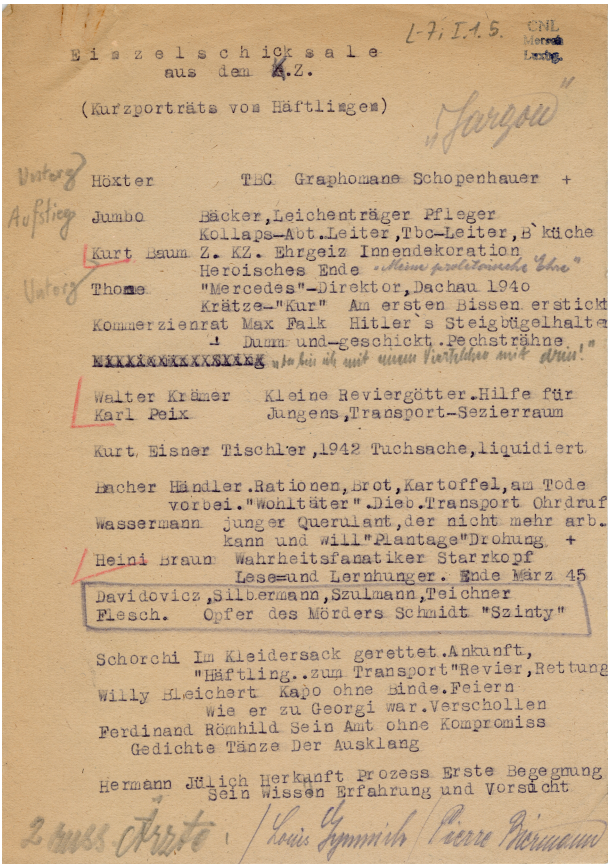

Fig. 4: Karl Schnog's initial notes, compiled in the mid-1940s for an autobiography that would never see the light of day. Below right, Pierre Biermann's name. CNL L-7; I.1.5.

As far as we know, Karl Schnog never finished his autobiography, and the drafts in his estate remain largely unpublished to this day, though some of the papers were shown to the public for the first time in an exhibition in 2020.[8] He did, how-

7 Autobiographisches. MS. CNL L-7; I.1.

8 Exhibition "Luxemburg und der Zweite Weltkrieg: Literarisch-intellektuelles Leben zwischen Machtergreifung und Epuration." Centre national de littérature, Mersch, Luxembourg, 1 August 2020 – 30 July 2021.

ever, pen a short, thirty-one-page-long account with the title *Unbekanntes KZ*, published as a small booklet in Luxembourg in 1945.

The first page displays Fritz Löhner-Beda's famous *Buchenwaldlied*. This spirited song sets the tone for the passionate, yet calm and level-headed account that follows. The book is divided into seven units with the titles 'Buchenwaldlied', 'Political life in the camp', 'What do murderers look like?', 'Prisoners' slang and gallows humour', 'How we were liberated', 'The 'Flower of the nation', and 'Back home through Germany'. The book has four main purposes, as one might guess by the titles: to reveal to the world the names and crimes of the prisoners' tormentors, to remember the solidarity and acts of kindness among the prisoners, to describe more generally what life in the camp was like and to give a truthful account of the final hours before the Allies arrived, as witnessed by a survivor.

The chapter 'What do murderers look like?' explicitly identifies SS *Lagerführers* and guards. Schnog's descriptions of the men and their crimes convey a kind of detached horror, for instance when he characterises *Scharführer* Sommer as an 'excessively clean and thin man, like an extra in a movie [...] with a small mouth, almost like a girl.' Sommer was notorious for slowly whipping prisoners to death with 'dancing, playful, sportive' moves (Schnog 1945, 10 – 11). Meanwhile, *Hauptsturmführer* Bugdalle specialised in forcing prisoners to perform endless squats right in front of him. When the exhausted men finally fell over, Bugdalle was known to shout: 'What?! Are you attacking me?!' and would shoot his victims or beat them to death with a belt (Schnog 1945, 8).

Schnog's acerbic poem 'The 'Flower of the Nation' is also dedicated to the *Lagerleiters*. It is a damning verdict of Nazi ideology, which gave power to people without any intellectual merits or humane virtues. A central stanza is:

> Sie konnten nie Deutsch, sie lasen kein Buch,
> Sie kannten nur Saufen und Zoten,
> Das war der Menschheit drohender Fluch:
> Die Herrschaft der Macht-Idioten.
> [Their German appalling, to books most averse,
> Lewdness and booze by the hour,
> This was mankind's impending curse:
> The reign of the idiots in power.]

In Buchenwald, Schnog helped to initiate a *Lagerkabarett* [camp cabaret] which staged plays ('We are playing Shakespeare! Kurt Sitte, Bruno Apitz, Otto Feuer. – Max Trauner, Roland, Willi. Ferdinand. *Twelfth Night* with some obstacles' [Schnog 1946, 'Ich sollte sieben Tode sterben', 4]) and put on social events. In *Unbekanntes KZ*, he describes how, under the cover of innocuous 'Unterhaltungs-

abende' [entertaining evenings], like a May Day celebration in the camp's basement, they sang motivating songs and renewed their pledge to fight Nazism (Schnog 1945, 5). The notes for Schnog's autobiography contain further details about these events: 'The day after Molotov's visit in Munich, I organised a major *Lagerkabarett* in Dachau with political poems and lectures on current events. In Buchenwald, I wrote and recited many political texts: camp satires, scenes with a cultural-critical background (like a dialogue on Heinrich Zille called *The Gutter Painter*) and sketches about current events. But we also recited [Wilhelm] Busch and Heine.' (Schnog 1946, 'Wie ich Sprecher wurde', [2]) Just like the concentration camp library was, according to Beffort, the only place where censored books could be read, 'the only places where you could safely discuss politics were the concentration camps' themselves, as Schnog states in *Unbekanntes KZ*. He continues: 'We checked whether new arrivals could be trusted and shared news about the progress of the war outside. We also decided on what needed to be done at the end of the war and after the liberation.' (Schnog 1945, 4)

A strong sense of camaraderie pervades Schnog's book: 'Every fellow prisoner who was a determined anti-fascist was considered reliable, regardless of his political affiliation or profession.' (Schnog 1945, 4) This is corroborated by Luxembourgish authors from a variety of backgrounds: Beffort, who as a primary school teacher was expected to publicly promote Catholic values; the humanist and socially minded high school teacher Pierre Biermann, whose experiences in the concentration camps led him to embrace communism after the war; and the young police recruit Nicolas Spielmann. None of them were communists before or during the war, but they all praised the underground prisoners' capacity for self-organisation in their works.

Like Beffort, Schnog shows ironic self-deprecation and gallows humour in his writing. He recognises that one-liners – like 'The canteen may be overcrowded, but don't worry – everyday there'll be fewer of us' (Schnog 1945, 15) – are the 'self-defence of language, which uses the horror it encounters to mock' (Schnog 1945, 13), because 'dry humour and mental superiority' (Schnog 1945, 14) are the only weapons left to the prisoners. Schnog's literary estate contains some more examples of this gallows humour, for instance in a text with the title *Bloody Grotesques*. Schnog notes down in pencil an anecdote about a man newly liberated from the concentration camp. All he wants to do is forget the hunger, the beatings and the crematorium. But when he gets off the train at Wedding station in Berlin, the first thing he lays eyes on is a signpost that says: 'To the crematorium.' (Schnog 1946, 'Blutige Grotesken')

Most Luxembourgish concentration camp survivors who wrote down their memories right after the war resorted to dark humour and reminiscences about self-assertion. When they mention the horrors of the camp, it is mostly

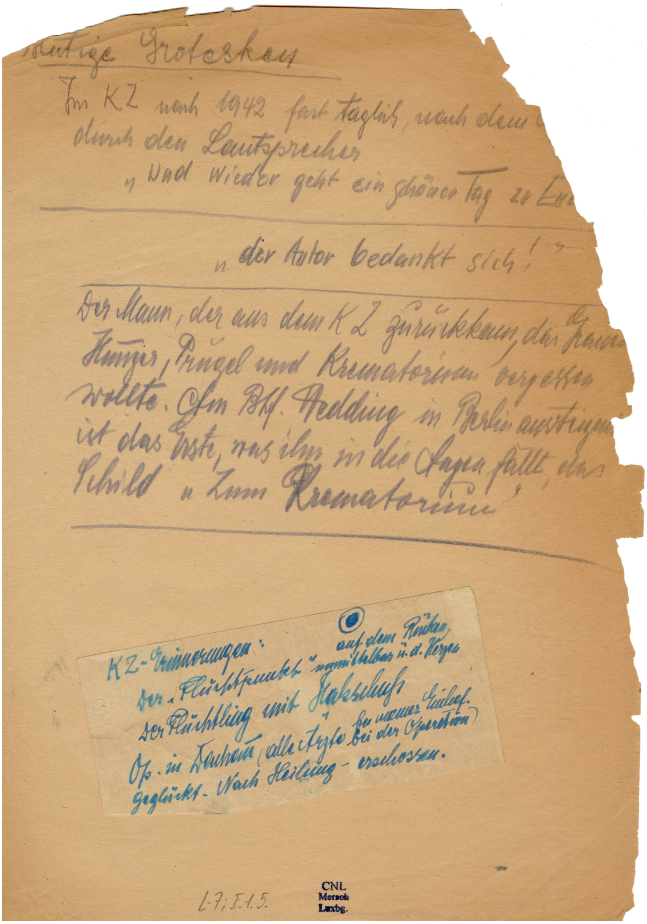

Fig. 5: Blutige Grotesken. Unpublished reminiscences by Karl Schnog, ca 1945. CNL L-7; I.1.5.

by taking an empathic look at less-fortunate prisoners, such as older inmates, Jews or prisoners from Eastern European countries. Glimpses of the trials they themselves endured are mostly found outside their publications. Thus, Karl Schnog's daughter Hannah writes in a 1979 affidavit: 'I remember [...] that he told my mother after liberation how he had been hung from a tree for hours on end, his arms pulled backward by a rope, until he lost consciousness.' (Schnog 1979, 1) The same contrast can be seen between Pierre Biermann's book, published in 1946, and his testimony at the Buchenwald trial in April 1947 (Biermann 1968). His official testimony often goes into gruesome detail, whereas his book, *Streiflichter aus Hinzert, Natzweiler, Buchenwald*, has a more

upbeat tone and focuses on the solidarity among the prisoners and their will to survive.

The liberation of Buchenwald as told by Karl Schnog and Pierre Biermann

Pierre Biermann was an outspoken pedagogue, a humanist committed to reforming the Luxembourgish school system by replacing rote memorisation with an education that would teach critical thinking and the skill of active discussion. He had outlined these ideas in articles that he had been publishing since the 1930s (Biermann 1945b; 1947, 146–147). In 1940, there were 212 teachers in state employment in Luxembourg; by mid-1944, only seventy of them were still allowed to teach. The majority had been either transferred to Germany or made redundant, two were executed and several, like Biermann, ended up in concentration camps (Dostert 1985, 160).

Fig. 6: Pierre Biermann: *Streiflichter aus Hinzert, Natzweiler, Buchenwald*. Luxembourg: Volksstimme, 1945.

Biermann's wife was incarcerated in Ravensbrück, while their young daughter Marguerite remained in Luxembourg. Despite this difficult personal situation, Biermann used his account *Streiflichter aus Hinzert, Natzweiler, Buchenwald* (1945) to paint a picture of determined endurance and solidarity among the prisoners. In Hinzert, Biermann had worked in the camp's hospital, the *Revier*. After

that, he was taken to Natzweiler in Northern France before finally being transferred to Buchenwald in late August 1944. Here, Biermann became the liaison between the Luxembourgers and the prisoners' self-administration] (Biermann 1945c, 33). The chapter about Buchenwald in *Streiflichter* is entitled 'Die letzten Tage von Buchenwald' ['The Last Days of Buchenwald']. It gives a detailed account of the events leading up to the liberation of the camp by the Allied Forces. The seventeen-page-long narrative is a more detailed account of the same events that Karl Schnog recounts in the six pages of *Unbekanntes KZ*. Both accounts agree on the main course of events.

In the typewritten memoirs kept in Pierre Biermann's estate in Luxembourg's National Literary Archives, the author states that he wrote down the text for *Streiflichter* in the days following the liberation of the camp on 11 April 1945, while he was still in Germany. After his return to Luxembourg, he gave the manuscript to the editors of the publishing house Die Volksstimme [Voice of the People] for immediate publication. In the 'Vorbemerkung' ['Preface'], he explains: 'Die Weltpropaganda ist – oder tut doch wenigstens – antifaschistisch. [...] Die Öffentlichkeit hat Interesse, hat einen Heißhunger nach Berichten über die Zustände in den Konzentrationslagern. Jeder, der die Möglichkeit hat, diesen Heißhunger durch unverfälschte Kost zu stillen, hat auch die Verpflichtung dazu.' [World propaganda is – or at least pretends to be – antifascist. (...) The public is interested, is craving accounts about what life in the concentration camps was like. Anybody in a position to quell this craving with unadulterated fare has an obligation to do so.] (Biermann 1948) This statement shows that Biermann was not eager to propagate one single truth about the liberation of Buchenwald, but rather wanted to urge all prisoners to tell their own story so that the world might get as complete a picture of the events as possible.

Biermann relates how the political prisoners, under communist leadership, prevailed over other groups of prisoners, chiefly the *Berufsverbrecher* ('professional' criminals, as opposed to political dissenters), and how they managed to establish a self-administration that was often able to save lives (Biermann 1945c, 27–29). The week leading up to the liberation of the camp was characterised by continued passive resistance. The prisoners focussed on delaying the planned evacuations and mass executions by stalling and hiding those most at risk, namely the ringleaders and the Jews. Both Biermann and Schnog paint a picture of disciplined, networked solidarity between political prisoners, who were finally able to overpower an indecisive SS camp management terrified of the approaching Allied Forces.

Here is a short summary of the events as told by Schnog and Biermann: on 4 April 1945, at 5.00 pm, the camp radio broadcast an order for all Jews to assemble at the gate. The prisoners rightly feared a mass execution, and so the Jews

were told to hide 'in plague barracks, in basements and under piles of wood and clothes. Some tried to disappear into non-Jewish barracks. Surprisingly, that worked.' (Schnog 1945, 16) This manoeuvre relied on the vast majority of prisoners ignoring explicit SS orders and not turning on their fellow inmates. Next, the ringleaders of the political prisoners were told to appear in the *Kommandantur* [commandant's office]. The secretary who had been charged with issuing the order was himself one of those destined for death, so they were all warned in time and were able to go into hiding: 'They hid in nooks, under stairs, in hidey holes under the floor or in the squalid mass quarters of those sick with tuberculosis and typhus. No one ratted on them.' (Schnog 1945, 17) From now on, the prisoners' motto was 'stalling, stalling, stalling' (Schnog 1945, 18).

Fig. 7: Pierre Biermann, holding a speech during the commemoration festivities in Buchenwald, 1954. Behind him, the banner *Nikogda bol'she lagerey* [Never again camps]. Private Archive.

On 9 April, the prisoners were told to assemble and evacuate the camp. 'To the last man, the prisoners followed the prisoner administration's orders: 'No one goes to the gate, everyone stays in the camp!' (Schnog 1945, 19) For two days, the communists argued with the SS, delayed their plans and asked for assurances. At some point, a group of exhausted Hungarian Jews was led to the central square. While other prisoners resisted the summons, some of them managed to return to their block, others were confined by the guards to one of the barracks (Biermann 1945c, 35 – 39). 'Endless back and forth', 'lengthy discussions', orders made, questioned and taken back – Biermann's narrative brilliantly evokes the

anguish and grim desperation of both the prisoners and the beleaguered SS administration.

Two days later, on 11 April, an American bomber was spotted circling above the camp, and the commander gave the order for all SS members to immediately leave the camp. Machine gun fire, carbines and the chatter of tanks announced the advancing Allied Forces. Chaos broke out as the guards tried to escape before the enemy took the camp. Biermann describes the events from his position in the *Revier:* 'There was no stopping us. The fence was quickly breached. A couple of courageous lads broke through the wires, fought their way into the next watchtower and came out with the first SS prisoners that they had managed to disarm.' (Biermann 1945c, 43) Meanwhile, some of the other prisoners – Biermann calls them the 'military cadres', Schnog the 'activists' – kept the SS from fleeing through the main gate:

> And as we witness our impending liberation, like a kitschy happy ending in the movies, ferreted-away weapons are being distributed among the camp's activists; the first of them surmount the electrical barbed wire with the help of doors and boards, they charge the towers on the other side of the camp that are still occupied and capture our guards sitting at their machine guns. The first tanks roll through the gate! We are saved!' (Schnog 1945, 21)

This last quote beautifully captures the determination of the prisoners in an exceptionally difficult situation and the relief which the long-awaited arrival of the Allied Forces brought them.

Nicolas Spielmann's Buchenwald text: Trials, ordeals and the heroic figure of 'Gandhi'

The sixth Buchenwald account, written in the mid-1940s, differs from the other five insofar as it was not published until much later. Nevertheless, the text presents many of the same topics in a very similar way, so it lends itself to recapitulating the main ideas and synthesising them into a coherent picture of Buchenwald camp literature in post-war Luxembourg.

In February 1940, twenty-year-old Nicolas Spielmann joined the Luxembourgish army, the *Freiwilligenkompanie*. After the Germans occupied Luxembourg, the young recruits were forced to enrol in the police academy in Weimar,[9]

9 For documentation on Nicolas Spielmann and other Luxembourgers in German camps and the Wehrmacht, see Fédération des Enrôlés de Forc. Spielmann Neckel Nicolas, http://www.

where they were ordered to join the German police. Like many other members of the *Freiwilligenkompanie*, he refused and was transferred first to a prison near Vienna and then to Buchenwald, a 'place, infamous throughout the world, which he and his comrades had shied away from when, only last year, they had stayed as "free people" in nearby Weimar' (Spielmann 1945, 1). With these thoughts, the author begins his tale, which he wrote down shortly after his return to Luxembourg. The account ends with the liberation of Buchenwald and the prisoners' return home. A copy of the manuscript with hand-written annotations as well as an early typewritten version of the journal is kept in the National Literary Archives in Mersch, Luxembourg.

Spielmann's manuscript is written in German and matter-of-factly entitled *BUCHENWALD*, in block letters. Spielmann describes his frightening arrival in Buchenwald, the bewildering chaos, the loud shouting of the guards, the beatings and the horror of seeing emaciated Jewish prisoners being abused as 'Zugpferde' [draft horses] (Spielmann 1945, 2–3). He records in detail the gruelling work in the *Baukommando* [construction work gang], where sadistic guards wantonly tortured prisoners from six in the morning to half past six in the evening (Spielmann 1945, 7–8). One scene is similar to a passage in Henri Rock's *KZ Dora:*

> If someone wore a nice shirt or a pair of shoes which the capo liked, he became the capo's victim. [...] The capo did everything to make him stumble taking his last steps up. Then he fell with his heavy load down the hill. Many a man came to rest at the bottom with his head bashed in. Those who didn't die during the tragic 'accident' were soon handed such heavy stones that they couldn't lift them anymore. 'The dog refuses to work', was the verdict. He was beaten up, his head bashed in with a stick, until, drenched in his own blood, he gave up the ghost. Quickly they took all his valuables, then the body carriers came. (Spielmann 1945, 10)

Jews and Russians were some of the guards' preferred targets. When a group of starved Russian prisoners was accused of stealing lettuce leaves during garden duty, *Lagerführer* Max Schobert called them 'Volksschädlinge' [pests of the nation] and sentenced them to death. The exhausted men were beaten and, instead of screams of pain, all the horrified young Johnny – Spielmann's alter ego in the text – could hear were weak moans. 'When the SS officers left, eight dead bodies were lying in a row.' (Spielmann 1945, 9) Spielmann also relates how the prisoners in the sick bays often kept their dead bed mates close in order to benefit from the deceased's food ration. 'When the stench of death became too pervading, the

ons-jongen-a-meedercher.lu/archives/personnes/spielmann-neckel-nicolas/documents. Accessed 6 August 2020.

Blockältester [block leader] often had to forcefully remove the dead.' (Spielmann 1945, 33)

Fig. 8: "A candidate for pneumonia". Illustration in Henri Rock's *KZ Dora*, p. 66.

Albert Beffort's ghoulish musical ensemble is also evoked in Spielmann's text: 'This musical parade consisted of about 25 men. They wore scarlet trousers and blue jackets with silver tresses. [...] Early in the day, on our way to roll call, drowsy from sleep through the dark night, we had to listen to that ear-shattering music.' (Spielmann 1945, 19) On the same page of the typescript, the author mentions that some prisoners were hung with their arms behind the back from a tree, just as Hannah Schnog describes it in her statement about her father's trials.

The most memorable figure in Spielmann's text is undoubtedly Gandhi, a Luxembourger who had been in Buchenwald since 1940. 'They had given him this name because he resembled the real Gandhi.' (Spielmann 1945, 7) As mentioned in the chapter on Henri Rock, Gandhi, whose real name was Nicolas Simon, was almost universally respected and loved by the prisoners. Albert Bef-

fort mentions him laudingly (Beffort 1947e, 8), and Pierre Biermann calls him the 'senior of the Luxembourgers' and his 'closest colleague' (Biermann 1945c, 33).

Probably the most detailed and dramatic incident in Spielmann's text is Johnny's fight for his life during his final months in Buchenwald (Spielmann 1945, 26–34). An Allied plane dropped an incendiary bomb on the camp, which tore off part of Johnny's leg. Gandhi carried him to safety, tied off his leg and asked a Russian doctor, himself a prisoner, to operate. In the following days, Johnny's health took a turn for the worse. The doctor wanted to keep the scarce medication for those who were more likely to survive, but Gandhi talked him into giving the young man a tetanus shot. In the end, the leg had to be amputated. 'Reluctantly, the doctor yielded to Gandhi's urgent pleas and began the hopeless operation.' (Spielmann 1945, 31) Johnny survived, but as he urgently needed a blood transfusion, Gandhi issued a call to action in the Luxembourgish community. The doctor 'was more than a little astonished when fifteen men appeared the next day, ready to donate blood. What a testament of honest camaraderie among the Luxembourgish prisoners in Buchenwald!' (Spielmann 1945, 34)

Fig. 9: Commemoration in Buchenwald, 1954. Nicolas "Gandhi" Simon is carrying an urn with ash from the crematorium. To his right, Pierre Biermann. Private Archive.

After liberation, the prisoners were eager to return home. However, under Allied rule, they had to return to their barracks every night (Spielmann 1945, 37). Tired of waiting, Gandhi found himself a bicycle, rode through half of Germany and tried to motivate the Luxembourgish government to bring the prisoners' home. The fact that they were not allowed to return home caused much bitterness among them. Incarcerated by the Nazi occupying forces under the pretence of 'protecting the people', the political prisoners did not understand why the Luxembourgish government, which had formed a *Commission du rapatriement* [repatriation committee] as early as August 1944, would not or could not help them (see also Roemen 2005). Many articles from that time, especially in the *Rappel* and the left-leaning press, urged the government to act. But after 'endless marches from government office to office, audiences and meetings, urging and pleading, even at times resorting to tough talk and forceful fist-pounding of ministerial desks, they received at last an official – refusal!' (Beffort 1947a, 248)

Simon and other former camp inmates like Pierre Biermann, who had managed to reach Luxembourg on their own, did not give up. They decided to bring their friends home in a privately organised convoy. Biermann explains the obstacles they faced in a private letter to his physician: 'The Luxembourgish administration was supposedly under strict orders to make sure any convoys were disbanded and to prevent any attempts to cross the border to take things into their own hands.' (Biermann 1946). Nevertheless, with the help of the *Unio'n* [the United Luxembourgish Resistance Groups], they finally managed to reach Buchenwald with two rented buses and bring their friends home (Spielmann 1945, 38).

We were too late: Camp survivors' shattered hopes in post-war Luxembourg

Most Buchenwald camp survivors returned to Luxembourg in May 1945, where they were eagerly awaited by their friends and relatives. Albert Beffort remembers how his colleague, Miss Ketter, welcomed him 'at the train station with all the pupils, boys and girls. What better reception for a teacher, after three years of imprisonment?' (Beffort 1990, 151) Though free at last, the hopes of the former political prisoners did not materialise. In the concentration camps, they had dreamt of building a better, fairer state with responsible, committed citizens – a state in which those who had bravely stood up for their country would have some political clout. Instead, they realised that the post-war power struggles had been fought and resolved while they were still behind

bars. Luxembourg had been liberated in September 1944, and the government that had left the country in 1940 had returned to Luxembourg. Marcel Rausch, a former inmate of Hinzert, puts the political prisoners' crushed hopes into words: 'We wanted to create a basis on which to build a new home. Party politics would not matter, nor would there be any blind ambition, hate or petty thoughts. We had developed a detailed programme – and we were proud of it! And what came of it? Our home was liberated! We returned long after. And we were too late!' (Rausch 1946b, 32)

There were some tentative attempts by former political prisoners to enter into politics. In May 1945, the National Council of the Resistance was created, which aimed to get political parties and resistance groups working together. Meanwhile, Karl Schnog, Pierre Biermann and other political prisoners like Joseph-Emile Muller, Alphonse Arend and Emil Marx founded the short-lived UNIL (National Union of Luxembourgish Intellectuals) in August 1945, a think tank working on political, cultural and economic topics with contacts to intellectuals in Belgium, Great Britain, the US and the Soviet Union (F.F. 1947). However, the concentration camp survivors faced not only an uninterested and unyielding establishment, they were also battling with the physical and psychological consequences of their imprisonment. Hannah Schnog remembers meeting her father after the war: 'I was prepared to see him very thin, but when he came home, he looked bloated and there was fluid build-up everywhere in his body. [...] His colleagues at the radio station constantly urged him to give up his work, as he was, in their opinion, clearly unable to work, and his physician, Dr Schaefer, told him the same.' (Schnog 1979, 2). Pierre Biermann was sent to Switzerland to recover, where he studied the Swiss educational system and continued his work on finding a better way to teach. Despite his bad health, he gave lectures in Luxembourg and published his ideas in the *Cahiers de l'UNIL*. Thus, in October 1945, he spoke to the pupils of Athénée high school about how Luxembourg required 'not so much material reconstruction, but first and foremost moral reconstruction' (Biermann 1945a).

The political prisoners had not only lost their health during the war, they also returned home to find many of their possessions confiscated and their former jobs filled by someone else. To make matters worse, they faced endless legal battles to claim their pension rights and damages. Their complaints were mostly met with indifference. As many texts from the late 1940s show, the general consensus among the population seems to have been: 'You could have done like us [namely, kept quiet], then you would have been all right, too.' (*Rappel* 4, 1946, 54) At the same time, the government was actively promoting the narrative that the country as a whole had resisted its German invaders. As early as 5 April 1945, Prime Minister Pierre Dupong said as much in a speech held in the Cham-

ber of Deputies (Hoffmann 2017, 348). This tendency to elevate every Luxembourger to the rank of resistance fighter was met with bitterness by those who had actually risked their lives during the war and whose health and financial problems were now being dismissed. Marcel Rausch notes sarcastically in Luxembourgish: '[Wien] am Krich ganz 'verstänneg' hannert dem Uewe so'tz an haut dach vleicht als gro'sse Resistenzler gelt, hat dé Schued natierlech net.' (Rausch 1946a, 4–5.) [They were sitting all 'reasonable' at their hearth during the war and yet today they are taken for mighty resistance fighters. Naturally, they escaped the war unscathed (without financial harm or damage to their health).] Pierre Biermann sums up the feelings of many Luxembourgers who had resisted German occupation in 1947 in another open letter to Prime Minister Pierre Dupong. Although it was intended for publication, the press refused to print it at the time. Biermann stresses that Luxembourg's independence, far from being a matter of course in the early twentieth century, had been earned through the steadfastness of the political prisoners, while the government had abandoned the country by fleeing to London at the start of the war:

> It is only since 1940 [that Luxembourg] has earned the right to be an independent country, through those who made the most dreadful sacrifices and resisted the oppressor with their lives. [...] Since the liberation, you and your entourage, despite the lip service you are paying to the resistance, have actively ruled against this resistance. You managed to break this resistance to a certain degree morally and often physically as well. [...] Your chief weapon in this covert war of demoralisation, fought with many a respectful bow and a sweet smile, has been the so-called *épuration* [purge]. A court of justice with a very democratic façade. [...] It has barely harassed those most responsible, it has generally shown leniency towards the most influential perpetrators, while making the mass of the passive followers feel the full force of the law. (Biermann 1968, letter to Pierre Dupong, 1947)

The social and political struggles in post-war Luxembourg form the backdrop against which the survivors of Buchenwald wrote and published their accounts. The authors all emphasise in their texts that they had dared to speak out against their country's aggressor and had consequently endured years of imprisonment as well as ongoing financial and physical hardships. They felt that their actions and plights had earned them the moral right to help shape the social and political future of Luxembourg. But the topic of camaraderie, central to all the texts, did not stop at national borders. The communist authors in particular wanted to apply the internationality of Buchenwald – the goal shared by all the prisoners against a common, fascist enemy – to the political landscape of post-war Europe.

The personal connections formed among the prisoners were of paramount importance to their survival in the camp, as were their mental and physical resilience, their sometimes great daring, but more often than not also sheer luck.

The determined, upbeat, frequently even satirical tone with which their texts time and again underscore this fact seems to have been deliberately chosen to demonstrate that their authors possessed the required mental strength to play a leading role in the reconstruction of Europe. And yet, no matter their political background, upon their return they all faced a largely indifferent establishment which preferred to celebrate the dead instead of honouring the survivors. The hope and enthusiasm which had sustained them throughout the war inspired them to found mostly short-lived groups that aimed to transcend ideological differences, but the former prisoners' influence on the political landscape in post-war Luxembourg was not as strong as they had formerly dreamt.

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