Semantics of the self

Preservation and construction of identity in concentration camp diaries*

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Preliminary remarks

»In any case, we decided to keep a diary from now on, which we will take weekly turns to keep!«[1] This line was written at the beginning of March 1944 by Hans Horwitz and Arnold David Koller, both of whom were deported to Bergen-Belsen, in their collective diary. Koller and Horwitz belong to those Jewish prisoners of the German concentration and transit camps who kept a diary during their imprisonment. Beyond these texts, a number of diaries exist from this period, which were written by so called political prisoners. Despite the most difficult circumstances – catastrophic hygienic situations, permanent hunger and shortage of space, physical and psychological violence and permanent agony – these prisoners managed to write about their experiences and subsequently guarded their texts – frequently aided by their fellow prisoners – from the grasp of the SS and the *Kapos*. It should not be overlooked, however, that not every prisoner had the opportunity to keep a diary in every camp and at all times. In this respect, the concrete situation of the camp and the position of the prisoner in its hierarchy were of central importance. As Primo Levi has rightly stressed, those who reached the deepest point of the abyss and were killed in the gas chambers could not bear witness anymore (Levi 1990: 83f.). As a result of this, with the ex-

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1 Hans Horwitz and Arnold David Koller: Diary from Bergen-Belsen, 8.3. to 16.4.1944, Bergen-Belsen Memorial, BT-397.

ception of a few diaries written by *Sonderkommando*-prisoners at Auschwitz, there are no known diaries from the extermination camps.[2]

The situation was different at a camp like Bergen-Belsen, where one of those diaries to be analyzed here, by Hanna Lévy-Hass, was written. As a so called »exchange camp«, Bergen-Belsen occupied a special status within the concentration camp system (Kolb 1996; Wenck 2000). As in other camps, much depended on the specific part of the camp a prisoner was placed in. Nevertheless, at least in the beginning, the environment in Bergen-Belsen – which was only established in the spring of 1943 – was relatively tolerable. The reason for this was that the SS had a special interest in these prisoners.[3] For the most part they had special identity papers or good connections. This qualified them, in the eyes of the SS, as candidates for an exchange with Germans imprisoned in enemy countries. Therefore in comparison to prisoners held at other camps, those at Bergen-Belsen had small material advantages that made it easier for them to keep a diary. Some prisoners, for example, were allowed to take some personal belongings into the camp. This is one of the reasons why an uncommonly large number of holocaust diaries stem from Bergen-Belsen. Only in the second half of 1944 the situation deteriorated rapidly. The »exchange camp« progressively turned into a concentration camp to which all prisoners from camps near the front were evacuated. After their arrival they were increasingly left to themselves, dying of hunger or as a result of insufficient medical care. This process is described in the diaries. Many of them break off in view of the deteriorating circumstances. Others explicitly describe the last days of Bergen-Belsen. One of these is the second diary to be analyzed here, written by Emile Delaunois. He was one of those who arrived with the »evacuation transports« from other camps, in this case from Mittelbau-Dora (Wagner 2001) – or to be more precise from the labor camp of Ellrich-Juliushütte, which be-

2 It should be noted that in contrast to Belzec, Sobibór or Treblinka, Auschwitz was not solely an extermination camp but also a labor camp; on the *Sonderkommando*, cf. footnote 12.

3 This remark should be understood in comparison to the other camps. It should in no way trivialize the living conditions in Bergen-Belsen.

longed to this camp complex (Wagner 2009). Delaunois wrote the largest part of his text at this camp, which, since May 1944, functioned as accommodation for prisoners who were put to work at weapons factories, in tunnel building (*Stollenbau*) or – for the largest part – on building sites. This differed markedly from the »exchange camp« of Bergen-Belsen. A further difference lay in the fact that the camps belonging to the Ellrich complex – which in September 1944 held up to over 8,000 prisoners – were built in the centre of the town of Ellrich, in no way shielded from the eyes of the public. On the contrary, as ever more *Außenkommandos* were established, the SS used more and more of the town's buildings – like the *Bürgergarten* inn – as quarters for prisoner commandos.[4] This part of the camp, however, was in no way identical with the central camp, Ellrich-Juliushütte, where as a result of decrepit buildings, deficient sanitary facilities and catastrophic hygienic conditions the circumstances were considerably worse. Improvisation was this camp's central characteristic (Wagner 2009: 64). Jens-Christian Wagner has calculated that, resulting from hard labor and the worst possible conditions, a prisoner's life expectancy was four to eight weeks, during which the prisoners reached a state of total exhaustion which usually resulted in death (Wagner 2009: 90).

Against the background of these conditions, Emile Delaunois' ability to keep a diary at Ellrich has to be attributed to the fact that – as a prisoner functionary – he had a privileged position. This point will be elaborated below. After having outlined the writing conditions, we now turn to some considerations concerning the motivations for diary writing. A special focus will be on the relation between the writing process on the one hand and the description and conservation of the self in the face of the extreme situation of the camp on the other. Subsequently, the diaries of Emile Delaunois and Hanna Lévy-Hass will be analyzed in view of the construction of the self taking place in them, with a special regard for the linguistic articulation of the political self.

4 The same phenomenon can be observed in other communities where *Außenlager* were established.

Diary writing and the construction of the self

In some academic and non-academic writings it is claimed that the Holocaust was an unthinkable and therefore indescribable and unspeakable historical event. On the other hand, we have diaries testifying that prisoners in fact tried to express themselves even during the event itself. They did not cease to speak, but tried to name and describe what they had to experience. Despite the oftenly quoted indescribability of the Holocaust, then, many prisoners of concentration camps found ways of expressing themselves and their feelings. Some of them used the cultural practice of writing a diary. There might be several motivations for this. It could function, for example, as constructing an »alternative reality« in the mind as a contrast to the camp's reality or, alternatively, as an instrument of »resistance« in the broadest sense. What could not be done in reality became possible by the medium of the diary. The boundaries of reality were broken or avoided, so to speak. Finally, writing served the differentiation and also the self-assertion of the writers. By addressing the issue of the »I« inside the text – and through this often distinguishing oneself from others in a positive way –, the individual constitutes him/herself by the act of writing. This last point is of special interest for the following considerations concerning diary writing and the construction of the writer's »self« in the text.

Ever since the phenomenon of diary writing has become a subject of systematic reflection, it has been interpreted as the writer's attempt to represent, reflect on and construct his/her self (cf. Kapp 1987; Hahn 2000; Dusini 2005).[5] By this form of communication with and about him/herself, he/she is confronted – consciously or not – with the question of identity. Writers question, deliberate about or affirm their own established positions. As such, writing about the self can be defined as the core of this genre.[6]

5 Hahn speaks of generators of biography. He understands diaries as a social institution that allows for a »recollection upon one's own existence«.

6 See also Michel Foucault who assumes writing a diary under the so called »technologies of the self« (Foucault 1993).

In the face of the world being turned upside down at the camps, writing under extreme circumstances, the significance of being committed with one's own identity has an enormously increased and different significance. All the more since prisoners were not only denied their individuality, but their humanity in general (Warmbold 2008: 31; Pollak 1988: 89). As the National Socialists systematically negated the prisoner's individuality – one has only to think of the procedures they were exposed to when entering the camp, such as the abasing removal of their personal names, property and values, as well as their separation from the people they were close to[7] – they on the other hand assigned them a new identity, as they categorised – and stigmatized (Goffman 1975) – the prisoners according to the criteria of National Socialism. Whereas so called political prisoners could find a certain sense and validity by this ascription, for many prisoners the categorization as being Jewish was more difficult to understand. Many Jewish prisoners did not understand themselves as Jews at all, they did not identify with Jewish religion and traditions, as other affiliations dominated their lives.[8] Only in the context of the persecution – by anti-Semitic laws and measures in Germany from 1933 onwards, in the »antechambers« (Todorov 1993: 35) of the camps, the Ghettos, many felt ›made‹ into Jews by the National Socialists. Already here the question of self, of identity, was posed under changed circumstances. Yet even in the Eastern-European Ghettos, if in considerably reduced measure and under worsening, sometimes catastrophic,

7 »The prisoners were [sic] robbed of their names and were numbered. But the name is the first characteristic of the individual. If guards spoke about them, they avoided concepts such as ›person‹, ›individuals‹ or ›people‹ and instead identified them as ›parts‹ or ›pieces‹ or used impersonal expressions« (Todorov 1993: 198). Or in the diary of the *Sonderkommando*-prisoner Salmen Gradowski: »One began tattooing the new arrivals. Everybody got his number. And already you are no longer the same person you were before, but instead a worthless, moving number […] From this moment on you have lost your ›I‹ and you have changed into a number« (Gradowski 1996: 130-172, 163).

8 Here it is necessary to take the individual temporal and spatial context into account. Simplifications have to be regarded with caution.

conditions, most still had ties of family and friendship, tasks and occupations, access to books or music (Löw 2006). Religious Jews were confronted with the problem that their religious practice was constrained and, finally, forbidden. As these religious practices touched the core of their identity, this called their very being into question at the camps at the latest (Rahe 1998; 1999; Michman 2002).[9]

A study of the diaries written at Nazi concentration camps has to ask how the diarists handled their self-descriptions, how they put their own identities into words. This theme is all the more pressing if one takes into account the negation of the victims' humanity, which – as previously described – the National Socialists tried to effectuate, as well as the positive identity that resulted from this process. Identity with regard to the prisoners, as constructed by the National Socialists, always had negative connotations. Besides, it made all the difference for the individual's self-image if he could formulate his identity himself or if it was attributed and proscribed from the outside: if others could decide who one was (Hahn 2000: 47f).

Taking into account Alois Hahn's sociological model, one may speculate what happens if the characteristics of the »implicit self« break away, if identity can no longer be expressed through action and loses its self-evidence. Hahn's concept of identity differentiates between two discriminate aspects: the »implicit« and the »explicit self«. Whereas the »implicit self« does not necessarily entail self-reflectivity, this aspect is constitutive of the »explicit self«. This is a self »that makes its selfness (*Selbstheit*) explicit and makes it an object of description and communication« (Hahn 1987: 10). Is not the diary a place where this – consciously or not – is put into practice? And does not the situation of the concentration camp produce the necessity of such measures of positive identity-construction (Bettelheim 1980: 59f.)? It is Alois Hahn again who pointed out that the medium, in this case the diary and the contextual origin, always already predetermines the mode as well as the function of addressing the self

9 Nevertheless, Jewish prisoners found ways to practice their religion – even at the camps itself.

(Hahn 1987: 17). In the context of the present article, this leads to the questions of what influence the situation of the concentration camp had on the process of writing, how the properties of the writing material affected this and of what significance its genre was.

Individuality and identity are constituted by interaction with as well as in contrast to others (Hahn 1987: 15). However, how can this succeed in a concentration camp, where interaction has to occur under changed, very constricted circumstances, sometimes not at all? Without being able to treat the issue exhaustively, the analysis of selected diaries can provide insight into aspects of the »semantics of auto-description« (Hahn 1987: 16). Diaries, understood as artefacts of the diarists' linguistic actions, provided them with a space beyond the grasp of the SS, where they could interact with themselves as well as with absent persons.[10] They constituted a space where identity could be negotiated by writing.

Many different ways of preserving or even constructing identity in concentration camp prisoner's diaries are imaginable. Identity can be negotiated in connection with family-related topics, for example when a writer presents herself as a caring mother.[11] In this case, one can speak of »Family Identity«. Another possibility lies in the formation of identity with regard to belonging to a specific group or religion. In this respect it might be illuminating to ask how Jewish prisoners understood themselves when facing the annihilation of their own people.[12] Did they hang on to Jewish traditions, to a positively connoted understanding of Jew-

10 It is for this reason that in her dissertation Alexandra Garbarini speaks of »letter diaries« (Garbarini 2006: 18).

11 See for example: A.B. Theresienstadt, 1942-1945, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem, JM-13.

12 A most striking example is the *Sonderkommando* at Auschwitz. Jewish prisoners were forced not to commit the murder itself but to clean the gas chambers and to cremate the bodies. They also had to supervise the undressing of the victims before the gassing later on. It happened that they discovered friends, former neighbours or close family members among the murdered (Friedler et al. 2005; Greif 1999). Some of these prisoners wrote diaries (Bezwińska & Czech 1996).

ishness (*Jüdischkeit*) despite the murder or did they consider themselves victims? Another area in which identity is articulated can be observed when prisoners regard themselves as political. This does not necessarily have to appear explicitly, but can also occur by the use of certain linguistic markers that announce the political self-conception of the prisoner in question. Considering oneself political can be articulated within the framework of the National Socialist's prisoner categories (*Häftlingskategorien*). But it does not have to be. Especially in the case of people who were arrested as »Jewish« but regarded themselves as political, the ›racial‹ categories of the SS might not have been congruent with the prisoners' own self-imaging.

The political self

In the following, the first of the mentioned concepts – family identity and Jewishness – cannot be explored extensively in this context. This relative neglect happens in favor of a deep analysis of two specific prisoner's diaries: Emile Delaunois'[13] and Hanna Lévy-Hass' (Lévy-Hass 2009),[14] with regard to the articulation of their political self-concepts. Emile Delaunois, alias Louis Lelong, was born in Belgium in 1917. He had been arrested by the Gestapo because of his activities as an officer of the »Armée Belge des Partisans« in spring 1944. After being imprisoned at Breendonck, Belgium, and Buchenwald he had been deported to the labour camp of Ellrich. Whereas Delaunois repeatedly

13 Emile Delaunois, diary from 3.4.1944 to 16.4.1945, Bergen-Belsen Memorial, BT-144 (henceforth cited as Delaunois, Diary). For the French text see: Sans Haine mais sans crainte. Journal de Mr. Delaunois, Emile prisonnier politique depuis son arrestation par la Gestapo jusqu'à sa mort en terre ennemie, Centre d'Etudes et de Documentation Guerre et Sociétés contemporaines, Bruxelles (CEGES-SOMA), AB 337.

14 This edition is based on a translation by her own hand of Hanna Lévy-Hass' original diary, which was written in Serbo-Croatian. The new edition of 2009 is identical with the translation edited by Eike Geisel (Lévy-Hass 1991).

writes about thinking of his wife at home in Belgium,[15] for the most part he holds on to his feelings and hopes for a better future together. In this regard, his diary would also have been interesting with respect to the first group of identity-attributions, family. At the same time, however, he writes about his belonging to the group of political prisoners and, beyond that, to the so-called prominents. For Hanna Lévy-Hass, neither her family nor being part of the Jewish community had been a central part of her self description. This might be a consequence of the fact that, as she writes repeatedly, despite intensive efforts she was not able to remember her past, since the experiences at the camp outweighed all what had been before. Hanna Lévy-Hass was born in Sarajevo in 1913 and was deported from Yugoslavia to Bergen-Belsen in 1944, just before she could carry out her plan to attach herself to the group of partisans with whom she was already in contact. In her text, the focus lies on her political – in this case communist – attitude, on the emphasis on the unequal behaviour of men and women, as well as on her activity as a teacher, which she tried to sustain also at the camp and which she linked to her political aspirations. Taking these two diaries, the third aspect should be described first, and secondly it can be explained how a political self-concept is drafted while facing the extreme circumstances of a concentration camp.

The texts by Hanna Lévy-Hass and Emile Delaunois have in common that they are at present only available in transcribed and, as far as Hanna Lévy-Hass' diary is concerned, translated form. Whereas on the one hand this makes them a lot easier to work with, on the other it poses the question whether they can be taken as a plausible basis for the study of their semantic-pragmatic aspects. Since this problem is unsolvable at least for the moment – information about the whereabouts of Emile Delaunois' original handwritten text is not yet available, while Hanna

15 »[…] to think ›in writing‹ a little of my Nande, of mom, dad, Albert … of all those whom I love and who return my love« (Delaunois, Diary: 37).

Lévy-Hass's original is presumed to be lost[16] –, working with the available texts seems to be the only option.[17]

Emile Delaunois wrote his diary between April 3rd 1944 and April 16th 1945 as a prisoner of the camp of Ellrich, which belonged to the concentration camp of Mittelbau-Dora, as well as at the »exchange camp« of Bergen-Belsen. On April 5th 1945 he was transported to Bergen-Belsen, where he arrived on April 11th and experienced the liberation by the British armed forces on the 15th. Emile Delaunois died on June 5th 1945, shortly after his liberation, at a hospital in Melle.[18]

The first part of his diary deals in a retrospective manner with his arrest and the subsequent interrogation by the security police (*Sicherheitspolizei*) in Belgium, who accused him of involvement in several raids upon trains as well as of the transport of weapons, ammunition and explosives. He wrote this part nine months after his imprisonment at camp Ellrich. A large part of the entries are no longer retrospective but, from November 7th onwards, promptly recorded events as they unfolded at this camp. A further section of his diary covers the evacuation transport to Bergen-Belsen, and the then following part gives details of the last days before the liberation of the camp, when unprecedented circumstances were prevailing. As becomes clear from his diary, Emile Delaunois could at least understand and speak German. His text, (except a few German insertions, for example when quoting Germans or in using camp-specific ter-

16 This statement is taken from the epilogue of the published version of the diary (Kerenji 2009: 152).

17 The fundamental question here is, of course, how published, edited or transcribed texts can be incorporated into the study of linguistic structures, or if they are to be excluded in principle from the source basis. Taking the scarcity of source material – as compared to, for example, retrospective sources – into account, this seems to be a luxury that one cannot realistically afford. Furthermore, only a fraction of prisoners had the opportunity to write a diary. To exclude their texts upon purely formal grounds seems questionable.

18 Information from the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, Email from November 27th 2009.

minology like *Kapo*) however, is written in his native language, French.[19] The text, which exists as a typescript, encompasses 82 pages on standard (DIN-A4) paper.

Hanna Lévy-Hass, by her own account, personally transcribed the diary she wrote in Bergen-Belsen some weeks after her return to Yugoslavia. If in this process she made significant changes to the original text is unknown.[20] The result was copied several times for potentially interested persons. After her arrival in Israel – her experiences in her native country Yugoslavia brought her to immigrate to Israel a few years after her return – again she made copies for a small circle of people. At this time she also translated her diary into French, as only a few people knew its original language, Serbo-Croatian. Only in the wake of the Eichmann trial, which took place in Jerusalem in 1961, the diary was made available to a larger, but still very specialized, circle of readers. Hanna Lévy-Hass handed over her diary to the International Federation of Resistance Fighters, which published it in its brochures. According to Hanna Lévy-Hass, the diary appeared in five editions,

> the first, by just a few copies, in 1946 in Serbo-Croatian; then in 1961 in French and German at the publishing house of the International Federation of Resistance Fighters. In 1963 a translation into Hebrew was published by the Israeli Fighters against Nazis, and almost 10 years later an Italian edition by the left-wing Italian

19 »This is all I am able, with great difficulty, to tell him in Flemish, taking great care not to let any German words slip out. – After long persistence he seems to be convinced both of my identity and of my ignorance of the German language. This will be of great advantage, because in the time in which the interpreter translates Fits' questions to me I have time to think and prepare answers« (Delaunois, Diary: 6).

20 But one of her remarks gives reason to be cautious: »I had a small notebook, and when I had time or courage, I wrote. Sometimes I wrote just some words or a few lines, to elaborate it later« (Geisel 1991: 61). One would wish to know when and if Hanna Lévy-Hass carried out these elaborations, but this can no longer be clarified, since she died in Jerusalem in June 2001.

> publishing house ›La Nuova Italia‹. Finally, in 1974 a private edition was published in Israel (Geisel 1991: 62-63).[21]

This article draws on the newest edition, which was published in 2009. This was based on the first French translation. Hanna Lévy-Hass already wrote a diary before her deportation to Bergen-Belsen, while still at the Gestapo-prison in Cetinje. This text, however, is believed to be lost. Her Bergen-Belsen diary, which in the published version comprises 77 pages, covers the time between August 16th 1944 and April 1945, when her evacuation transport was liberated by the Red Army near Tröbitz. After this formal characterization it is time for a closer examination of the contents of the texts, especially with regard to the linguistic forms both authors used to describe the self.

Emile Delaunois

Our starting point will be the diary of Emile Delaunois. Judging from his activities as a member of the resistance – during which he adopted the alias name Louis Lelong –, the question of identity would have been of central importance to him. To guard his real identity, he needed to create a second, coherent and resilient life history, including the appropriate documents and legends. Before his capture this second identity could possibly – according to the scope of his activities with the resistance – for a while have become more important than the real one. Since there is as yet no information available about this period, we can only speculate if this had any effect on his writing at the camp. It is noticeable, though, that in the context of the first part of the text, in which he gives a detailed account of his capture and the subsequent interrogations, he repeatedly uses the alias »Michel«, under which he was known in the resistance organisation.

21 Unfortunately it remains fully unclear if the basis of her publication in Israel is in Hebrew or some other language, for more information see Bock 2005: 261.

> But everything is exposed as they start to search me and address me as ›Michel‹, and as I pretend not to understand, they repeat ›Michel‹ several times, ›You are Michel‹, after which I finally answer: ›Louis Lelong‹ (Delaunois, Diary: 4).

Further ascriptions by the Germans follow, calling him a »terrorist« or »partisan« (Delaunois, Diary: 8, 14), and finally the confession under torture: »I am Michel« (Delaunois, Diary: 13). Whereas from the vantage point of the Germans these concepts have negative connotations, for Delaunois they underline his affiliation to the group of resistance fighters that remains of positive significance to him throughout his captivity, giving them a positive ring. Quoting these concepts in his diary, he retrospectively inscribes himself into the group of resistance fighters, even though he was in fact a (political) »prisoner« at the concentration camp.[22]

When reading Delaunois' diary, its prominent use of the first person singular is conspicuous. »I« is the central personal pronoun, followed by »we« which – coincidentally – in most cases refers to two other prisoners with whom he shares his workplace and can hear the news on the radio.[23] In his diary, Emile Delaunois wants to write down his story. He is concerned with his moods, his thoughts and events. As such, he is explicitly negotiating his own self, whereas descriptions of everyday life at the camp remain in the background. They are only elaborated upon insofar as they immediately concern him.

22 »Today, almost nine months after my capture, at the *Arbeitseinsatz*-office of our work camp B 12 I find a little time and try to collect the memories I have of this interrogation; but so many events have already invaded my poor memory that I hardly succeed with rendering the interrogation by its chronologic order« (Delaunois, Diary: 14-15).

23 »Today we could not hear the announcement, and I have to admit we are a little perplexed because of it, because now we have to wait, in trembling uncertainty, until tomorrow afternoon and endure the onslaught of news hungry comrades that have no other reliable source except us« (Delaunois, Diary: 35).

He stressed that he had an exceptional position in the hierarchy of the camp. »Since Monday we have moved into barrack nr. 2 of the new camp B 12, and since we are ›prominents‹, we have a nice ›booth‹ of about 5x4 m for ourselves« (Delaunois, Diary: 43).

Why Delaunois belonged to the small group of the camp's »prominents« cannot be reconstructed from his diary. Repeatedly he writes about »prisoners«, often abbreviated as »Prsnrs.«, and refers to them as »comrades«. It is clear, however, that he only partially includes himself in this group. Rather, he describes their actions from a distance, without taking an active part in the everyday life of the camp and the corresponding suffering.

> I am certain that the topmost Kapo's whistle tears the poor ›Prsnrs.‹ finally from a sort of obtuseness, then as they hardly have time to think most of them never reach the state of hopelessness (Delaunois, Diary: 19).

This position in the commando – he can work at the »office«, while his comrades are occupied outside under conditions of snow and ice – becomes manifest linguistically, even though he realizes that after all he, too, is part of the community of prisoners:

> But the less fortunate of our poor comrades are in misery. Day and night without bread, work from 6 o'clock in the morning to 5 at night with only a litre of soup in their stomach, feet in the mud, in wind and rain (Delaunois, Diary: 41).

Finally he declares: »Our work demands everything from us, but it is not extremely exhausting; theirs, however, is deadly. [paragraph] Aside from that, all ›Prisoners‹ are equal« (Delaunois, Diary: 44).

Whereas Delaunois in the first, retrospective part of his diary codified his identity with the help of the attributions of »terrorist« and »partisan« as a political prisoner and a member of the resistance, in the course of the text this aspect is fully lost. The self-description as a hierarchically higher placed prisoner, as »prominent«, is distinctly put into the fore. Only his classification as belonging to the prisoner categories of the Bel-

gians and French can still be taken as evidence of an immanent self-understanding as a political prisoner.[24] This might be due to the fact that in the last phase of Camp Ellrich, when the anyway inadequate provisions for the prisoners completely collapsed, his position as being »prominent« ensured the satisfaction of his elementary needs and ultimately guaranteed his temporal survival:

> For supper I just had about two litres of soup. The first was special soup, that is cooked for the 6 Kapos, both of the block leaders, the head of the camp and for both of the ›prominents‹, that is us (Delaunois, Diary: 51).

This special position is carried forward both during the transport and in Bergen-Belsen, even though it is not explained in the text. This change is accompanied by a new shift. Whereas in the first part of the diary the personal pronoun »I« is predominant, in the second part it is the collective »we« that refers to him and the other privileged prisoners. Two exceptions build a short intermezzo, in which he addresses his wife – on the occasion of her 23rd birthday – and considers their joint future after his return (Delaunois, Diary: 55) as well as the immediate experience of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, which stirs in him a plethora of conflicting emotions: »And in this moment I'm shivery and full of spite. The Americans are there after all … hurray! … but the guys still have not had anything to eat today and will not get anything« (Delaunois, Diary: unpaged).

In the case of Delaunois' diary, a relatively unambiguous shift in the use of self-descriptions can be observed in the course of time, as well as an accompanying shift in the predominant ascription of identity. This is directly linked to the situation of writing. In both cases, however, it con-

24 »This is exactly what kills us Belgians and French: thinking too much of our loved ones and of our homes« (Delaunois, Diary: 48). And: »The great majority of the prisoners of Mittelbau consisted of adult, male non-Jewish aliens and ›Reichsdeutsche‹, almost all of whom were classified as political. Almost half of these were classified as ›criminal‹, one fourth as ›political‹ and another fourth as ›antisocial‹« (Wagner 2001: 405).

cerns positive concepts that are put in opposition to specific negations of his person that are attributed to him from the outside.

Hanna Lévy-Hass

In her text, Hanna Lévy-Hass grapples with the environment that surrounds her much more engagedly than was the case for Emile Delaunois. Not only are the catastrophic circumstances investigated, as they are by Delaunois, but she especially goes into the condition of her fellow sufferers, even though in most cases she expressly separates herself from them. This demarcation functions by way of her self-understanding as a political woman whose Jewish identity plays only a secondary role. At this point this issue will only be addressed as far as it has an identity-building function for Lévy-Hass.

Whereas in the case of Delaunois it could be shown that in the course of time his self-description as a political prisoner gave way to identificating himself as »prominent«, in Hanna Lévy-Hass' diary the opposite tendency can be observed. As the external circumstances in Bergen-Belsen became more precarious and life-threatening, her adherence to communist ideals and values, which she understood as a future solution for societal problems, became ever more important to her. Accordingly, on the 24th of August 1944 she wrote:

> A world in decay … A new, a healthy world will replace it. I shiver for joy at the thought of this new life, of the coming triumph of light and of truth. […] And everything will become incomparably more simple, just, clear, there will be no more room for situations of bondage like this one (Lévy-Hass 2009: 40).

And even in an undated entry from February 1945, six months after her deportation to Bergen-Belsen, she writes with increased intensity:

> What are they waiting for? And the English? What do they want? What are their plans? Do they play, as masters of the situation, with the whole world as they maintain the situation that fits them best? If not, they would have dealt with Germany a long time ago [paragraph] The human lives, the suffering, death and the decay of

> slaves – what do they care? Nothing. Freedom – bluff, as long as they can put it to their advantage. They are exploiters of small nations, the advantaged, the privileged in the current hierarchy of nations. That is why everything is the way it is. The only thing that counts are the policies of the USSR and the belief in the triumph of the new society. What would be the sense of everything otherwise? Is war in the nature of man? What does it all mean? If there is no real victory, if the whole world does not become socialist, what good is anything? So that everything starts anew. New massacres, new corruption? I'm starting to despair of man (Lévy-Hass 2009: 103f.).

Most directly she ties her own identity to political decisions, as if she would – to a degree – negate her own person, quasi to conserve herself by her belief in a political solution:

> So I've learnt to closely associate my special fate with the general questions that determine the result of the social and international fermentation, and to seek the solution of my personal problems first and foremost in the context of the solution of problems on a world-scale (Lévy-Hass 2009: 36).

Her political self-image is affirmed by her female fellow prisoners, who designate her to act as speaker in the reorganization of the barracks self-management. Given her very limited opportunities, her self-determined actions carry forward her »struggle« against inequality und the advantages of a small group of fellow prisoners. She directly confronts the barrack leader and works for the benefit of the whole group. This would have been very much in accordance with her political self-understanding. On a linguistic level, this is expressed by the fact that she describes this form of organised resistance in a distinctly political vocabulary. In this way, in the depiction of the conflict, which takes up several pages of the diary, there is mention of »organised action«, of a »reorganisation of the regime«, of »opponents«, »bourgeois types«, of a »monopoly of the kettles« as well as repeatedly of »action« and »struggle« (Lévy-Hass 2009: 65-72).

Just as relevant for her self-image is her activity as a teacher in Bergen-Belsen. As, even within the camp, she tries in this capacity to play an active part, she again ties in with a familiar practice from before the war. In a certain sense, this aspect can be understood as a form of preservation of identity that goes beyond pure construction. Even in this context her political attitude played an important role, as can be seen from an entry of the 28th of August 1944, where she wrote:

> This is why I am so impatient in my expectation of the new era, which will help us to overcome the evil as we grab it by its roots. With tremendous joy I think of the opportunities I will have in the field of teaching (Lévy-Hass 2009: 44).

Strikingly, in the context of her activities as a teacher she writes about herself more intensively, as she writes herself into the text using the first person singular. In relation to her political identity, on the other hand, her self-designation is articulated more implicitly by way of topical or subject-related reflections on this aspect.[25]

Hanna Lévy-Hass is – in her writing – very aware of her affiliation to the group of Jewish prisoners. This is how she is categorized by the National Socialists. And this is the reason why she has been imprisoned, not her activities as a communist in Yugoslavia or the fact that she wanted to join the partisans. This becomes clear not only by the passage quoted above, about the subsumption of her personal fate within a bigger, global context, but also by the fact that she identifies other prisoners as »political prisoners« and »political captives«, whereas she never designates herself as such (Lévy-Hass 2009: 62f.). In contrast to Emile Delaunois, who removes himself partially from the group of prisoners and who ac-

25 »The class with the big ones has a special aftertaste. They like to talk with me about diverse questions of life. In this way I can convey those thoughts to them that are dear to me«. And in the same entry »[…] and I subtly got them to describe the worth of the results of labour, the role of the worker in society, with the development of the riches of the earth, in production, etc. From this, they were brought to highlight the close connection between the fate of civilized humanity and the consciousness and movement of the working class« (Lévy-Hass 2009: 75).

centuates his own position among the hierarchically better situated »prominents«, in Hanna Lévy-Hass' diary such a removal from the prisoner collective does not take place, regardless of all the linguistic demarcations from individual fellow prisoners or groups. On the contrary, she sees herself as part of a moribund community of all Bergen-Belsen prisoners and repeatedly speaks of »we« and »us«.

> We are all slaves here, and we are layered on top of one another, without leaving us enough room to breath. On purpose they look on, how we insult one another, scuffle and fight with one another: Then they are trying to make our lives unbearable, brutalize us, to even better be able to ridicule, humiliate and torment us. These beasts (Lévy-Hass 2009: 51).

The common enemy is clearly defined. These are the National Socialists that make her life and that of her fellow prisoners a hell in the full sense of the word. This attitude remains until the last entry of her diary, where the same ascription to the collective appears that could be found in Delaunois'.

> This camp is set up and established with deliberate purpose and scientific thoroughness in such a way as to eradicate thousands of human beings in a systematic and planned way. If this will go on even for one month, it is questionable if even one of us will escape it (Lévy-Hass 2009: 111f.).

Conclusion

If one tries, as a conclusion, to summarise the way in which the attribution and linguistic self-designation of a political or resistant identity is used in the diaries of Hanna Lévy-Hass and Emile Delaunois, the focus has to be on the shift that takes place in Emile Delaunois self-description, whereas in Hanna Lévy-Hass's diary no such comparable shift can be found. While for Delaunois, as his self-understanding as being »prominent« comes into the fore, in the course of time his political entity plays an ever lesser role, in the case of Hanna-Lévy Hass a constant inscription into a political identity already developed in the pre-war era can

be observed. If anything, it becomes more intense. In contrast to Emile Delaunois, Hanna Lévy-Hass does not have the resource of a favored position in the hierarchy of prisoners. It can be suspected, then, that she is more emphatically at pains to preserve the identification with positive self-ascriptions by the medium of the diary. This speculation should not be taken to imply that only by way of their diaries prisoners could secure their survival. For this, concrete physical and material concerns would have been at least just as important. However, writing a diary as well as the accompanying possibility to say »I« in the text can be understood as a strategy of mentally writing oneself out of an unbearable situation.

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