

“Out of Germany”: Flossenbürg Concentration Camp, *Jakub’s World* (2005), and the Commemoration of the Holocaust in the United States

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This essay addresses survivor stories as formulations of Holocaust memory in the U.S. More specifically, it focuses on the former concentration camp at Flossenbürg in southern Germany. Compared to places like Dachau and Buchenwald in Germany or Auschwitz and Treblinka in Poland, Flossenbürg is often absent from or—if present at all—marginalized in the public and scholarly discourse of Holocaust memory. The heavily autobiographical novel *Jakub’s World* (2005) tells the story of Jakub Szabmacher, a Jewish boy who is taken from his home in Poland by the Nazis and is eventually interned at Flossenbürg. He survives many months of deprivation and hardship in the concentration camp until U.S. forces liberate it in April 1945; orphaned and homeless, he eventually relocates to the U.S., yet returns to the site of his suffering many times. Reading the book against the backdrop of ongoing debates about Holocaust memory in the U.S., this essay explores structural and plot elements in the book that complicate both a Jewish identity derived from victimhood and the notion of liberation as the moment of ultimate redemption. Both *Jakub’s World* and the Flossenbürg Concentration Camp Memorial as sites of memory actively partake in the commemoration of the Holocaust, offering narratives that not only complicate the notion of World War II as the “Good War” but also reveal the transnational dimension of memories of the Holocaust. Neither the stories and memories of survivors of the Holocaust at Flossenbürg, nor the visitors to the present-day memorial site, nor the characters central to the memoir can be framed, addressed, or understood in the context of national boundaries.

The End of WW II and the Holocaust

As numerous commemorative events on both sides of the Atlantic marked the 70th anniversary of D-Day in June 2014, the 70th anniversary of VE-Day and the end of World War II will spark commemorative ceremonies in 2015. As decadal anniversaries, compared to annual commemorations, tend to arouse more public interest and are accompanied by larger celebrations, the ceremonies with their specific scope and agenda are of scholarly interest. Furthermore, the 70th anniversary stands out, as it might be the last decadal anniversary to see the participation of contemporary witnesses. This is true not only for the soldiers who fought in the war, for those who served on the home front, and for those who were affected as civilians, but of course also for those who were the immediate victims of the German National Socialist regime, including the European Jewry.

Every year, author Jane Gross on *The New York Times* blog “The New Old Age” recently pointed out, “at an accelerating pace, there are fewer survivors left to remind us of the last century’s atrocities.” According to U.S. government figures quoted in the article, there are now only 140,000 Holocaust survivors left in the U.S. With the gradual passing away of witnesses who have experienced the war from diverse perspectives—including survivors of the Holocaust—the significance of their testimonies assumes a new magnitude. “Experience at once motivates, defies, and defeats representation,” Jewish and Gender Studies scholars Julia Epstein and Lori Hope Lefkowitz explain, “and the complex inaccuracies of remembered experience deepen with time” (1). When the people who used to remind us have passed away, it is their memoirs, both as oral histories and written narratives that form the basis of an ongoing recollection. These testimonials take diverse forms and serve a multitude of purposes, from personal and intimate to political and communal. “Testimonials,” Diane Wolf points out, “have been an effective way for Holocaust survivors to make their pasts public and to transmit a particular slice of Jewish history” (193) in the U.S. and elsewhere. In recent years, these testimonials have proliferated, possibly due to survivors reaching an advanced age and gaining a sense of urgency to record their experiences (Wolf 191).

Scholars have commented on the prominent role the commemoration of the Holocaust has assumed in U.S. society—in verbal accounts, memorials, museums, and TV and cinema productions¹—, even if only a small portion of Americans were directly affected by it. In the context of the national and international politics in the 1960s and 1970s, the memory of the Holocaust became increasingly visible in American society (Gessner 245; Rapaport 196–99). “In light of the politics of victimization in which American society validated ethnicity and the victim experience,” Lynn Rapaport writes, “American Jews sought to strengthen their inner community by raising the Holocaust to heightened levels of Jewish consciousness” (199). The establishment of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. in 1993 unmistakably demonstrated the significance of the Holocaust in the U.S.

Yet, scholars have more recently challenged the notion of the Americanization of the Holocaust, and the idea of a collective American Jewish identity derived from the experience of the Holocaust; instead they have pointed towards areas of neglect or misrepresentation. Perhaps most controversially, historian Peter Novick, author of the much-debated *The Holocaust in American Life* (1999), declared the American national narrative of the Holocaust to be non-existent. The very fact that for most Americans World War II was the “Good War,” Novick argues, indicates that the Holocaust is not central to the U.S. national narrative of the war (“National Narrative” 29).² Pointing out that virtually all representations and commemorative practices of the Holocaust in the U.S. were launched by American Jews, Novick speaks of an American Jewish, rather than an American national, narrative of the Holocaust (“National Narrative” 31). Others have drawn attention to the often-overlooked intertwinement of U.S. Holocaust narratives with the submerged discourse of ethnic minorities (Gessner 249–51). Yet others have pointed to the hardships many Jews faced in their post-war lives, often caused by other Jews, and to a sense of having erred in immigrating to the U.S. (Wolf).

Upon her visit to a Hebrew nursing home in New York, blogger Jane Gross not only observed the diverse ways in which survivors cope with their traumatizing experiences decades later; she also noted that internal antagonisms sometimes impeded a sense of shared suffering among the survivors. The social worker and the rabbi at the home “had hoped that support groups for the resident survivors would help them ‘be present’ for one another. Instead, the groups degenerated into a nasty competition. Suffering at Auschwitz trumped suffering at Dachau. Tattoos became perverse status symbols” (Gross).³ This is just one small incident reminding us to be wary about readily accepting simplified narratives of unity in the commemoration of World War II as the “Good War.” The sad notion of division among the survivors of various camps based on a ‘competition’ for and an implied ranking of the ‘worst’ camp experiences contests the idea of a universally peaceful coexistence after the war and points to complexities yet to be explored.

It is against the backdrop of these complexities that this essay seeks to accomplish two things: firstly, since narratives about particular camps, such as Auschwitz or Dachau, dominate public and academic discourse about the Holocaust, and thus its commemoration, I wish to direct attention to a concentration camp that has only been recovered and turned into a memorial site fairly recently. The Flossenbürg Concentration Camp Memorial, adjacent to the remote little town of Flossenbürg in eastern Bavaria, commemorates those who have, and have not, survived their imprisonment there during World War II. This site of memory is located on the grounds where the concentration camp once stood and includes the former SS headquarters, camp gate, camp laundry and kitchen, and guard towers, as well as the “Valley of Death,” where gravestones for various nationalities, inscribed in their respective languages, remind visitors that the victims of World War II came from diverse national, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. It stands side by side with the textual accounts that recall what happened there 70 years ago. This essay analyzes one of these accounts, the memoir *Jakub’s World*, which relates the wartime experiences of a Jewish boy who survived his internment at the Flossenbürg concentration camp. As Toni Morrison writes about the genre of the memoir: “no matter how ‘fictional’ the account [...], or how much it was a product of invention, the act of imagination is bound up with memory” (198), an “emotional memory” that cannot be suppressed or muted (199). The memories described in *Jakub’s World* complement the commemoration of the Holocaust at the Flossenbürg Concentration Camp Memorial. Secondly, a close reading of *Jakub’s World* reveals that both in structure and content, this account of the Holocaust swerves from the “dominant U.S.-American narrative of liberation” (Gessner 247). Whereas the liberation motif, James Young asserts, “conforms conveniently to America’s most powerful self-idealization” (319), it is treated in an ambivalent and anticlimactic manner in *Jakub’s World*. While the moment of liberation has assumed iconic status in the

Holocaust memory in the U.S., it is worth exploring both the time following liberation (Wolf; Abzug) and the time preceding it. This time is not only a time of victimization but a time of struggle, mutual support, self-reliance, and active survival. Visions of liberation as a climactic moment not only run the risk of attributing the binary roles of prisoner/victim and liberator/savior rather unreflectedly, but also, despite liberation factually terminating the camp system, suggest a sense of closure it did not provide.

Flossenbürg Concentration Camp, Its History and Contemporary Significance: A Very Brief Overview

The concentration camp at Flossenbürg, located in the Upper Palatinate region close to the Czech border, was founded in May 1938, with the first 100 inmates transported there from Dachau on May 3.⁴ The major reason why this location was chosen for the establishment of the camp was the existence of a granite quarry; the forced labor of camp inmates was supposed to help remedy the lack of labor and increase the extraction of raw materials and the manufacturing of building materials for the Third Reich's manifold construction projects. Over the next few years, the size of the camp and the number of inmates increased gradually, as did the annual number of people dying due to the harsh conditions or killed in deliberate acts of annihilation. Factors that made Flossenbürg stand out from among other camps as particularly brutal include the severity of the physical labor, the extremely cold winters, the inadequacy of nutrition, and the abuse of power by certain groups of inmates, who had been granted privileges. As of 1940, the composition of the inmates at Flossenbürg changed, as it did at other camps. Whereas during the first two years the majority of the inmates at the Flossenbürg concentration camp had been German criminals and political prisoners, there was now a growing number of non-Germans, particularly Czech and Polish prisoners as well as Jews from different parts of Europe. Before the summer of 1944, the number of Jewish inmates at the Flossenbürg concentration camp had not exceeded a few hundred. Their numbers rose to several thousand as deportees—mostly young men from sub-camps in Poland—were brought there as of August 1944. As early as 1941, concentration camp inmates, at Flossenbürg and at other concentration camps, were systematically killed. The victims of these executions were primarily Polish, Soviet, and Jewish inmates. As the absolute number of inmates at Flossenbürg rose constantly, sub-camps were established nearby; and yet the conditions at the main camp worsened with more and more people crammed in the barracks. The highest numbers of inmates were reached in March 1945, when the Flossenbürg concentration camp registers recorded some 15,000 in the main camp and some 37,000 in the sub-camps. The dissolution of the Flossenbürg concentration camp began in early April 1945, after the advance of U.S. forces was reported. On April 16, 1945, the remaining 1,600 Jewish inmates were sent on a death march toward Dachau. By April 20, some 20,000 inmates were marched south; only the sick and weak were left behind. Forces of the 90th U.S. Infantry Division liberated the Flossenbürg concentration camp on April 23, 1945. The liberators had been expected by those left behind in the camp to die, as rumors of their imminent arrival had reached the camp, and were welcomed with a sign that read "Prisoners happy end—Welcome." A little over a month after their arrival, the Americans had transferred the surviving former inmates out of the camp, leaving "the camp grounds at Flossenbürg practically emptied" (Skriebeleit, "Flossenbürg" 51).



Fig. 1: Plaque commemorating the liberation of the Flossenbürg concentration camp by the 90th U.S. Infantry Division in April 1945. Photo by the author.

The Flossenbürg concentration camp “for a long time was rightfully referred to as a ‘forgotten concentration camp’” (Muggenthaler 12),⁵ when, in fact, it had been “a major concentration camp” (Abzug 80). Yet, after the war, its grounds had been put to various uses—family homes were built, parts of it were used industrially—and resonances of the war crimes committed there were muffled due to the desire to save the town from stigmatization (Skriebeleit, “Flossenbürg” 54). It was not until the 1980s that initiatives to recover parts of the former concentration camp and to turn it into a memorial were launched.⁶ In 1995, 50 years after liberation, former inmates of the camp, many of who had not returned since the end of the war, reunited at Flossenbürg for the first time, and reunions have since taken place annually, the most recent one in July 2014 (KZ-Gedenkstätte Flossenbürg). It took over fifty years for constructional remains of the former camp to be integrated into the memorial and museum (*Gedenkstätte*), and since 2007 visitors have been able to view permanent exhibits in the buildings that used to house the laundry and kitchen facilities.



Fig. 2: View from the crematorium site onto the pyramid of ashes (in the foreground), the square of nations, the chapel, and two guard towers.
Photo by the author.

69 years after the liberation of the Flossenbürg concentration camp, on May 17, 2014, the European Museum of the Year Award ceremony was held for the 37th time. While the main award was granted to the Museum of Innocence in Istanbul, among those museums that received special commendations were two sites dedicated to the remembrance of World War II that were lauded for “their courage in opening up their institutions to the future, and seeking new ‘ownership’ relationships, within the context of the Second World War” (European Museum Forum). One of them is the Kazerne Dossin – Memorial, Museum and Documentation Centre on Holocaust and Human Rights at Mechelen, Belgium. The other is the Flossenbürg Concentration Camp Memorial. As the site’s nomination and eventual special commendation by the European Museum Forum documents, its historical significance has long transcended its local and even national context even if its memory was submerged for a comparatively long period. Honoring those who were deported here from diverse places of origin and, if they did survive, have dispersed in a variety of directions, revisiting the fates of people from across borders, and recognized as a site of memory by international audiences, the Flossenbürg Concentration Camp Memorial today is the locale of a transnational commemoration of World War II and the Holocaust.

Jakub’s World and the U.S. Narrative of Liberation

Evidence of the atrocities that had happened inside the concentration camps reached American and international audiences on a nearly daily basis in April 1945,⁷ when reporters traveling with U.S. forces witnessed the liberation of the concentrations camps and reported on the crimes committed there, often in radio broadcasts (Daly 279–80). Since then, the historical events have been rendered from a variety of angles, and, significantly, from the perspective of those who had been on the other side of the gates. Many of these accounts originated from within the U.S., which, even though they have circulated worldwide, has resulted in a strong association between the U.S. and representations of the Holocaust (Novick, “National Narrative” 30; Eaglestone 131). Accounts and memoirs by survivors are often subsumed under the term ‘testimony,’ which, as Bob Eaglestone points out, is debated in its “generic demands and characteristics” (127). Rather than in textual and metatextual elements, Eaglestone proposes to identify the uniqueness of the Holocaust testimony as a genre in the insurmountable gap it creates between the terrible events that are described and the readers (132).

One of these Holocaust representations is *Jakub's World*, co-authored by Alice Nitecki⁸ and Jack Terry and first published in 2005. The story revolves around young Jakub Szabmacher, as was Jack Terry's birth name, a Jewish boy then living in Bełżyce, Poland, whose world is shattered by the onset of Nazi terror. He loses his entire family and ends up at the Flossenbürg concentration camp, where he fights for survival until the camp is liberated. An American officer among the liberators takes Jakub, then fifteen, with him to the U.S., where Jakub builds a new life for himself. *Jakub's World* makes apparent the irony in calling Flossenbürg, or any other concentration camp, "forgotten" (Muggenthaler 12; Skriebeleit, "Afterword" 122), as this solely reflects the perception of either those who were not directly affected or those who deliberately overlooked its existence and after-effects; it was surely never "forgotten" by those who had experienced it during the war. As *Jakub's World* evidences, even 60 years after its liberation, it is far from "forgotten," and the book contributes to its commemoration.

Partly autobiographical, partly historiographical, *Jakub's World* combines "personal narrative" and "historical texts," which is often the case in Holocaust testimonies (Eaglestone 129): the story of Jakub's individual fate, told in the third person, is interspersed with citations from historical documents such as letters or court records, and with photographs. It further includes what Jeremy Popkin has identified as the hallmarks of Holocaust memoirs, i.e., the immediate repercussions of Nazi terror on the authors/central characters, partly because they are Jewish, their uprooting and expulsion from their homes, their internment in concentration camps, and the loss of their families (Gessner 259–60). With all these features present, I would like to direct attention toward those textual elements that make us question both received notions of the victim-redeemer-relationship and of the moment of liberation as an endpoint; instead this essay inquires into those features of Jakub's story that complicate not only the rather one-dimensional role of victim but also the notion of liberation as dénouement.

Jakub's World comprises eight chapters and a coda (as well as an afterword). The first chapter covers the gradual collapse of his pre-war life in Bełżyce; chapter two covers his deportation and stops at two other camps, Budzyń and Wieliczka; chapters three through six cover his time at the Flossenbürg concentration camp; and the last two chapters cover the time after the liberation. Unlike many other survivor stories, which do not address the time after the liberation (Gessner 260; Wolf 195–96), *Jakub's World* not only gives details about the immediate aftermath of liberation but also provides some key data of the central character's later life in the U.S. Throughout most of the book, Jakub is held prisoner, deported, forced to work, and mistreated, until he is restored to freedom when the camp is liberated. Despite his imprisonment and eventual release through others, several instances in the book defy an easy characterization of Jakub as a victim. Several factors were significant for survival: given the fact that killings were largely arbitrary, it was often a question of mere luck. Yet survival also depended on individual agency and mutual help. Early on in the book, in a decisive scene where the Nazi officer who also kills Jakub's mother and sister murders all the Jewish boys in Bełżyce, it is Jakub's presence of mind that saves his life. He takes advantage of a brief moment when the officer is inattentive and sneaks out of the row of boys, bellies into a hiding place, and from there blends into the row of men, who are not killed, stepping on stones so that he looks as tall as the grown-up men around him (Nitecki and Terry 27). Long after the separation from his family, his survival is (at least partly) attributed to the fact that he is learning throughout his horrible experiences and acquires survival strategies: "From those last days in Bełżyce, from the months he has spent in Budzyń, the months he has spent in Wieliczka, Jakub has learned to read the mute language of the camps" (50). The cruelties he is exposed to require him to adapt and learn how not to succumb. Indeed, "he lives in constant, unrelenting vigilance against death" (72). To some indeterminable extent it is his "vigilance" that keeps him alive. It runs throughout the narrative so that in his last hiding place, the typhus ward, just before the U.S. forces arrive, "even here, Jakub has to be careful" (82)—what he needs to be most careful about is not contagion with typhus but disclosure. Only by going unnoticed as a healthy Jewish boy in the sick ward can he avoid being sent on the death march with the other Jews. His resourcefulness in the face of death, his mastering of the camp "language," and his "vigilance" testify to the (admittedly limited) agency that relativizes his role as a passive victim.

Further, prior to the Americans' arrival, it is through the help of fellow inmates that Jakub survives. Even before arriving at Flossenbürg, Jakub, who is still a little boy, is often protected by older prisoners (66). At Flossenbürg, two inmates in particular help Jakub survive: Carl Schrade, a "decent man" (54), and Milos Kucera, who slightly reminds him of his father (69). Jakub can escape the death march all the Jews are sent on thanks to the two

men's initiative: "A whisper moves between Milos Kucera and Carl Schrade that tomorrow the Jews are going to be taken out of the camp. Kucera makes arrangements, [...] tells the boy to go to the boiler room beneath the laundry, that the man in there [...] will show him where he should hide" (79). It is noteworthy that while Jakub may not have the chance to help his helpers in return, he does help Herszel, a friend from his hometown who is also temporarily interned at Flossenbürg (71). So the narrative suggests a give-and-take ethos among some of the inmates that increases the chances of survival. Since the narrative at the same time includes hints at violence and distrust among inmates—for instance, not long before the liberation, a young, non-Jewish prisoner exposes that Jakub has escaped the Jews' death march, which necessitates Jakub's emergency hideout at the typhus ward (81)—, it presents a differentiated picture of the relations between prisoners. Yet, the significance of solidarity among inmates for Jakub's survival is evident throughout the book. The last chapter tells the readers of Jakub's visit to Europe as a member of the U.S. Army in 1955. On his travels, Jakub "had driven to Zürich to thank Carl Schrade for saving his life" (112).

The moment of liberation as rendered in *Jakub's World* can be described as anti-climactic. While *Jakub's World* is otherwise narrated in a largely linear manner, its chronology is interrupted just before the moment of liberation, thereby divesting it of its climactic nature. As one chapter ends with Jakub lying in hiding, uncertain about the return of the SS, the next chapter resumes the narrative in May 1945, after the liberation. "For the first time in almost two years," the readers learn, "Jakub feels something other than terror. What he feels is totally alone and profoundly depressed" (88). Only then does the narrative return to the experiences of April 23 and the following months. Thus, some momentum is taken away from the iconic single moment of liberation as a symbol of relief, joy, and abrupt change. Liberation here does not mark the decisive endpoint of the narrative, indicating that suffering persisted far beyond the moment of liberation. Holocaust survivors' texts, as Eaglestone observes, "while they finish, do not end," and post-war life is inseparable from "the continued and traumatic experience of the camps" (129). Correspondingly, the narrative also does not omit details about the Americans' struggle with the post-liberation situation (93–95). At the same time as Jakub's treatment by the Americans is described as blissfully humane (92, 96–97), the narrative also depicts the Americans encountering problems they faced at other camps (Abzug 142–52), such as the continuous dying of former inmates due to what they had been through and due to the spread of typhus (90–91, 94);⁹ occasional clashes between American soldiers and returning members of the SS (93); refugees arriving from other camps, aggravating the scarcity of housing and food (94); lootings (94–95); or fights among former inmates (95). After some time has passed since the liberation, "the camp is still chaotic, confused, and threatening" (92). Finally, in July 1945, "Colonel Leland takes Jakub out of Germany" (98). And yet, the story still does not end there. In fact, when Jakub returns to Germany only ten years later as a U.S. soldier, he revisits Flossenbürg (112), as he does many times in his memories. His continuing engagement with the horrors of his past eventually makes him become a psychoanalyst (113), "[evaluating] and [treating] people who, like him, had lived through the camps [...]" (119).

Complicating the Motif of 'Liberation'

After the end of World War II and the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps, large numbers of European Jews who had suffered in the camps immigrated to the U.S. "As Jewish Holocaust survivors tried to assimilate into American and American Jewish life," Lynn Rapaport writes, "they faced a postwar nation recovering from war. [...] The postwar victory spirit pervading America discouraged confronting wartime atrocities" (189). The liberation narrative that stressed redemption from suffering was thus naturally an integral part of the notion of World War II as the "Good War." Only belatedly and in very diverse contexts and frameworks have Holocaust testimonies been voiced and acknowledged (Rapaport 191-99). As *Jakub's World* as one example of a Holocaust testimony demonstrates, these texts complicate simplified conceptions of World War II as the "Good War" and thus add layers to and open up wider perspectives on the commemoration of the Holocaust, both as sites of memory in their own right and in dialogue with other sites of memory.

Often, representations of the Holocaust in the U.S. highlight the moment of liberation and, as a consequence of some sort, ascribe clearly defined roles of savior and victim. The sculpture *Liberation* by artist Nathan Rapoport in New Jersey is a case in point: an emaciated person, bald and with a badge stitched on his jacket identifying him as a Jew, is carried in the arms of a tall, strong soldier who benignly looks upon him. A similar image is evoked in the New England Holocaust Memorial: the inscription on one stone reads

April 29, 1945. Dachau Concentration Camp

'I was an emaciated fourteen year old boy when an American soldier lifted me into his strong arms. He looked into my tired eyes with compassion, shared his food with me and gave me a small American flag of freedom.'

Stephan B. Ross

Holocaust Survivor¹⁰

The iconography of this moment as rendered in these memorials, frozen in time, with its explicit references to heroism and humanity, is emotionally powerful and contains quintessential narrative elements of the moment of liberation and the relationship between the protagonists in this scenario. It thereby threatens to obfuscate other forms of heroism, salvation, and survival. A close reading of survivor stories, like *Jakub's World*, can sensitize readers to looking for aspects that are not as easily cast in bronze or stone. While these are prominent examples, neither of them correlates smoothly with the representation of events in *Jakub's World*. Even though Jakub was certainly emaciated, the narrative does not dwell on his physical exhaustion. In his first encounter with the Americans, it is Jakub who walks toward them, handing over to them a rifle he had taken from the SS storeroom (88). With the image of an extremely thin boy carrying a weapon for self-protection and walking towards the American soldiers, *Jakub's World* presents a take on the scenario that is very different from the two U.S. memorials.

When interviewed for an oral history project carried out for Bavarian Broadcasting (BR), Jack Terry said about April 23, 1945, the day when U.S. forces liberated Flossenbürg: "[it is] one of the most important days in my life. [...] But for me it was the saddest day of my life" ("Wir waren" 143).¹¹ For the first time, Terry explained, he no longer had to fight for sheer survival but was able to reflect on what he had lost and realized that, at fifteen, he no longer had a family and was all alone ("Wir waren" 143, 148). Despite the fact that this day marked the end of his imprisonment and suffering, Terry associates with it primarily a profound sense of sadness and loss ("Ich fühle"). In the interview with BR, he continues: "When I [...] speak about the liberation of the Flossenbürg concentration camp, I pay particular attention not to say that I was liberated. Because I can never be liberated from my experiences and loss" ("Wir waren" 152).

Epstein and Lefkowitz point out that "survivors of catastrophic loss send complicated and paradoxical messages" (7). Terry's recollections of the day when the concentration camp in which he was held captive, forced to labor, and tormented was liberated reveal an ambivalence that may be (more or less subliminally) present in many other survivor stories and that, at the same time, is mostly absent from many other forms of commemoration of the Holocaust and from the dominant discourse of liberation in the U.S. Liberation as a motif, thus, has its limits, and while the very moment of liberation has come to symbolize the rescue of hundreds of thousands of Jews from the concentration camps, it did not necessarily bring closure. Responses like Terry's, without in any way diminishing the factual significance of the liberation of the camps and while expressing deep gratitude to the liberators, reflect a more complex picture of liberation: positive feelings are mixed with sadness, desperation in the face of an often belated comprehension of the loss of loved ones, and the realization that liberation of the body can hardly bring with it liberation of the soul and mind. The recognition of survivors' emotional ambivalence, together with the emphasis that liberation was but one step in the story of survival, then sensitizes readers to misconceptions that may arise from a one-dimensional reading of survivor stories.

Rather than helping perpetuate the idea of the "Good War" in American history, scenes of liberation, as part of the history of the Holocaust, are reminders "of humankind's inhuman capacities" (Abzug 172), and as such are transnational. Their impact reaches beyond the local scale of a small Bavarian town, and beyond the national contexts of Germany or the U.S. Verbal and material sites of memory serve to continuously bring to mind the actuality and the possibility of such atrocities. Both *Jakub's World*, by telling the story of suffering and survival, and the Flossenbürg Concentration Camp Memorial, by marking the site of this suffering and survival and engaging visitors with it in a museal context, not only contribute to the commemoration of the Holocaust, but also evidence that "memory of the Holocaust is not simply a form of Jewish memory" (Rothberg, "Migratory Settings"

126). In the sense of Michael Rothberg's concept of 'multidirectional memory,' both sites of memory unfold their full range of meaningfulness against the backdrop of transnational and transcultural dynamics, as the memory they address is neither monocultural nor limitable to local or national frameworks.



Fig. 3: Jewish memorial at the Flossenbürg Concentration Camp Memorial. No names are inscribed on the gravestones in front of it. Photo by the author.

Notes

- 1 See also Novick, "National Narrative" 30.
- 2 Novick further identifies the war against Japan as more significant for Americans than the war in Europe ("National Narrative" 29).
- 3 The general questionableness of comparisons of that sort set aside, it is worth noting that Auschwitz did not fall into the same category of concentration camp, as Auschwitz, unlike Dachau, was an extermination camp.
- 4 The following historical overview is abstracted from Skriebeleit, "Flossenbürg."
- 5 All translations are mine.
- 6 The efforts of individuals, church, union, and political groups, and political leaders of the Flossenbürg community combined in this process (Skriebeleit, "Flossenbürg" 54).
- 7 Throughout the war media had covered and tried to alert the American public to the atrocities; yet skepticism about the (dimensions of the) genocide was considerable both among many American "mainstream reporters" (Lipstadt 173) and among the American public (Abzug 11–15).
- 8 Alicia Nitecki teaches at Bentley University at Waltham, MA.
- 9 For fear of the spread of diseases, the Americans continued using the crematorium and burnt 135 dead until May 1, when the practice was abandoned after survivors had protested against it (Skriebeleit, "Flossenbürg" 51).

10 It was Stephan Ross who initiated the proposal for the memorial (New England Holocaust Memorial).

11 Similarly, in an interview with the news magazine *Der Spiegel* in 2009, he called that day “the most painful day of [his] life” (“Ich fühle”).

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