

**Beyond Dichotomies:
Representing and Rewriting Prisoner Functionaries in Holocaust
Historiography**

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Abstract

Allison Ann Rodriguez: Beyond Dichotomies: Representing and Rewriting Prisoner Functionaries in Holocaust Historiography
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This paper focuses on the representation of prisoner functionaries in the traditional historiography. Starting with Eugen Kogon, it traces the development of the “good political” versus “bad criminal.” Using prisoner and prisoner functionary testimonies, it demonstrates that this current representation is too simplistic and must be re-evaluated. Prisoner functionaries were both *prisoners* and *functionaries*, and wore a Janus face at all times. This meant they hurt some as they saved others- all within the confines of their limited power. The paper ends with Primo Levi’s *The Gray Zone* and a call for the understanding to be applied to future works on prisoner functionaries.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Siegfried Halbreich arrived at Sachsenhausen in early October 1939. He was a Polish Jew who had briefly fought in the Polish Army one month prior. Several years and transfers later, Halbreich arrived at Auschwitz. There, according to his 1992 Oral History Testimony, he became a prisoner functionary almost by accident. The former *Lagerältester* escaped one night. Halbreich reported the disappearance in the morning. Several hours later, an SS guard called him back and told him, “You know, Halbreich, I decided you will be the next man in charge.”¹

As *Lagerältester* Halbreich was the highest prisoner functionary in his camp. He organized clothing and gave extra rations of food to his friends. He gave new inmates jobs that would require minimum labor. During a train transport, which was transferring people out of Auschwitz, it was his duty to receive and distribute the food rations to the people in his car. He recalled:

What they [the Germans] ask in every car, how many people? I said, “I have forty.” I had maybe twenty on there, so I got double, so I took this food, you know what was left from us, all distributed it again to friends in the other cars.²

¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Record Group 50, Oral History, Interview with Siegfried Halbreich, Call number: RG-50.042*0013. [It should be noted that for all USHMM Oral History Interviews cited I first read the transcript and then double-checked it on the tape. The transcript includes all stutters and coughs. I have removed these from the text here to aid reading, but have kept the grammar and repetitions true to the testimony.]

² USHMM, RG-50.042*0013.

In short, he used his privileged position to aid those under him, to whose ranks he had recently belonged.

Later in the interview, Halbreich related another story of how he used his position to help the other prisoners. This time, however, his actions were more ambiguous. One day an SS man informed Halbreich that a transport of prisoners would be arriving the next day; among them was a man who had killed another prisoner. Halbreich recalled, “He said, ‘Did you understand?’ ‘Yes.’”³ The next day, after Halbreich had identified this prisoner, he allowed him to have three helpings of soup. Then:

I said, “Lay down on the ground...and start to roll.” So he rolled and naturally everything came out that he ate...The following day, I sent him to work inside the camp, to a *Kapo* who was known as a killer, and I told him, “Listen, this guy killed a prisoner.” “Fine.” In the evening when they came back from work, they carried him in already, he couldn’t work...He wouldn’t admit that he got beaten up....Next day he went to work, he never showed up again because he took it right from the working place to the hospital, where he died.⁴

The next day Halbreich was questioned by the SS as to why this man had died already. Halbreich explained he had had a heart attack, which prompted the SS to reply, “I can report that.”⁵ Halbreich had again used his position as *Lagerältester*, yet this time for a very different purpose.

In the historiography of concentration camp life, prisoner functionaries hold the unique position of being nowhere and yet everywhere. Nearly every text has the obligatory (and concise) section which focuses on this group, but this description is woefully under-developed. Power hierarchies and position responsibilities are explained,

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

but only superficially. Functionaries are presented broadly, with little to no discussion of their lived experiences. The historiography that does exist places the functionaries into one of two camps- Good and Bad. Traditionally, the political prisoners have fallen into the first, while career criminals are placed in the latter. The result of this compartmentalization is the over-simplification of prisoner functionary, and, by extension, concentration camp life.

This is a skewed view of reality. In this paradigm, prisoner functionaries have been reduced to stereotypes. Their ability to consciously make choices and act as individuals disappears. In such a one-dimensional view, there is no room to explain or explore those *Kapos*⁶ who saved some and condemned others. There is no place for those who used their power to help, but only when it could also serve them. In the current state of functionary historiography, there is no room for Siegfried Halbreich.

This paper seeks to challenge the current historiography by complicating this traditional image of prisoner functionaries. After first explaining the structure in which they lived, the essay examines the early scholarship, focusing on Eugen Kogon, and addresses why it is now insufficient. Two case studies, using sources which capture the *Kapos*' own voices, highlight these insufficiencies. As will be seen, the functionaries always thought of themselves as prisoners first; their motives and actions are complex and cannot be reduced to the color triangle they wear. This complexity becomes more apparent in examining prisoner perceptions of *Kapos*. Here, it is especially evident that functionaries were not purely noble or malicious. Instead, many wore a Janus face, using

⁶ In researching this paper I have come across several sources with the spelling of *Capo*. Throughout the paper I will use the spelling *Kapo*, except when directly quoting a source with the alternate spelling. In addition, the word will be used as shorthand to include all functionary positions, unless specifically noted.

their limited power to help only those closest to them. Finally, this paper concludes with a look at popular representations of *Kapos* in film and literature, ending with a discussion of Primo Levi's "The Gray Zone."

Chapter 2

The Camp Structure

Starting with the establishment of Dachau in 1933, the SS relied on prisoner functionaries to aid them in the running of the camps.⁷ These functionaries were a fixture in the camp even before the war, when the SS began to experience staff shortages. *Kapos* and *Lager-* and *Blockälteste* served the SS philosophy of divide and rule. Giving a minority of prisoners power over the majority allowed the SS to remove itself from the day-to-day, “dirty” aspects of camp life. In addition, dividing prisoners from each other (not just with the functionaries, but also isolating every prisoner from another) made it less likely that the inmates would be able to organize a revolt. As the war wore on, more victims were caught by the Nazi net and more Germans were needed at the Front. To overcome the shortage of SS guards, the number of administrative and operational tasks delegated to prisoners expanded.⁸ In addition to the *Kapos* and *Lager-* and *Blockälteste*, the SS also employed prisoners as secretaries and clerks in various departments.⁹

While they performed similar tasks as far as discipline and order were concerned, *Kapos* and *Lager-* and *Blockälteste* occupied two different spheres in the concentration camp system. In the camp all prisoners engaged in some type of work, organized into *Kommandos*.

⁷ Danuta Czech, “The Auschwitz Prisoner Administration,” in *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, ed. Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1994/1998), p. 363- 378, here p. 363.

⁸ Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*, trans. William Templer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993/1997), p. 135.

⁹ Czech, “The Auschwitz Prisoner Administration,” p. 366.

The *Kapos* were responsible for these workers; they marched them to and from the work site and supervised the prisoners while they worked. *Kapos* themselves did not engage in hard labor; they only needed to push their workers, using what means of “encouragement” they saw fit; this usually meant severe beatings. Officially, the *Kapos* reported to their SS superiors, but in reality they were given virtual autonomy in their treatment of prisoners, especially when they were working outside the camp.¹⁰

Back in the camp, prisoners were assigned to Blocks, or barracks, in which they lived and slept. The prisoner functionaries employed in these positions operated in a different hierarchical system than did the *Kapos*. At the top, and reporting directly to the SS, were the *Lagerälteste* (camp eldests). He or she was the senior camp prisoner, responsible for relaying orders to prisoners and assisting in selecting *Blockälteste* (Block eldests). These functionaries, second in hierarchical ladder, were in charge of all the prisoners living in their Block. Their duties included waking the prisoners and distributing food. The *Stubenälteste* (room eldests) assisted them in these tasks. While reporting in different chains of command, like the *Kapos*, these functionaries were permitted to use whatever force (usually excessive) necessary to keep order in the Blocks.¹¹

When the camps first opened, German criminals held these functionary positions. Known as the “Greens” because of the green triangle sewn to their uniform, the SS trusted that the Greens, as criminals, could be counted on to carry out beatings and other forms of terror. In the first camps, located in Germany, race was not a dominant issue; career criminals were simply preferred over political ones. As concentration camps appeared across

¹⁰ Czech, p. 363 and Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, p. 132.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 364, and Sofsky, p. 131-132. Also see Hermann Langbein, *People in Auschwitz*, trans. Harry Zohn. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995/2004), p. 11.

Poland and persecution of the Jews culminated in the Final Solution, racial ideology played an ever-increasing role. As the number of inmates grew, the SS increasingly turned to political prisoners (“Reds,” mainly Communists) to assume these roles. Eventually, however, the SS was forced to assign Eastern European and Jewish prisoners to these functionary positions.¹²

These later groups were mostly ignored by early camp historiography, due in large part because of the geography of the camps. Those located in Eastern Europe, where ethnic instead of political issues were more important, were dissolved before the advance of the Red Army. The camps Allied forces liberated in the spring of 1945, however, were the original, pre-1939 camps; here the political struggle between prisoner groups was much more prevalent. Because of this, early historians focused on the power struggle between the “Reds” and the “Greens.” It was shaped by a highly political framework that highlighted (perhaps to the point of exaggeration) the Resistance of Communist and Anti-Fascist prisoners. It is to this historiography that this essay now turns.

¹² Czech, 364-66; Sofsky, p. 134-36.

Chapter 3

Historiography

One of the first treatments to mention prisoner functionaries and their place in the Nazi concentration camp system was Eugen Kogon's *The Theory and Practice of Hell*.¹³ Kogon, an Austrian arrested for anti-Nazi activities shortly after the *Anschluss*, was a prisoner of Buchenwald for the duration of the war. Upon Liberation in April 1945, he was asked to aid the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces in their task of understanding and recording the structure and function of the camps.¹⁴ *Theory* grew out of his report.

Kogon examined the camp system in general, and Buchenwald in particular, reporting on the physical layout of the camp, the types of prisoners interned there, and, of greatest importance for this essay, the prisoner functionary community. Though they do not appear much in the report outside of their clearly delineated section, the prisoner functionaries in Kogon's paradigmatic treatment strongly influenced future scholars' assumptions about the group. Although it is unclear as to whether Kogon was a Communist, he was arrested as an Anti-Fascist, and thus most likely a "Red," as political prisoners were called in the camp. This bias will be explored more below.

The report casts the prisoner functionaries in a very political light, almost as if the prisoners were running for office in a camp election. The highest prisoner position, that of

¹³ Eugen Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell*. Trans. Heinz Norden. (Berkeley: New York Publishing Corp., 1960.) Originally published in German in 1946, first published in the United States in 1950.

¹⁴ Kogon, *Theory*, p. 5-6.

Lagerältester, was appointed by the SS, but, Kogon writes, “In the course of time the prisoners...succeeded in placing their own nominees in these offices.”¹⁵ The *Lagerälteste* was the “responsible representative”¹⁶ of the camp’s inmates. In words that are not likely to be found in any recent scholarship, Kogon notes, “His job was crucial and dangerous, and to take it on required *courage* and *character*.”¹⁷ The first two prisoners appointed to the position possessed neither of these qualities, working closely with the SS and brutalizing prisoners at every opportunity. Only when Paul Mohr, a political prisoner, became *Lagerälteste* did the tide of violence begin to lessen. Outside of what Kogon calls “a single unfortunate exception,”¹⁸ a political prisoner held the post of *Lagerälteste* until Liberation. Similarly, the two *Kapos* noted as “shining examples of integrity, humanity and personal courage”¹⁹ were both Communists.

What is interesting about Kogon’s report is that, in the few pages he devotes solely to prisoner functionaries, he mentions nothing about the privileges they received and little about their abuses of power. He does, however, point out the *Kapos* themselves were not immune from SS violence; while the early *Kapos* were “men who knew how to wield a club,...the SS often enough let them feel the end of it themselves.”²⁰

As mentioned above, Kogon often portrays the functionaries as involved in a game of deadly politics. Positions were filled by prisoners of the “ruling” class- in most cases, this

¹⁵ Kogon, p. 63.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid. Italics mine.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 64.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 65.

²⁰ Ibid.

meant political prisoners- regardless of whether or not the *Kapo* possessed the skills for the job. For example, a man with medical training was never selected by his constituency of prisoners to fill the role of hospital *Kapo*. Explains Kogon, “A medical man in the leading prison function in the hospital would have inevitably precipitated a crisis. He would simply not have been equal to the far-flung network of intrigue that often had a fatal outcome.”²¹

These political intrigues manifested themselves as a fight between the Reds and the Greens- that is, between the predominantly Communist political prisoners and the violent criminals. This battle came to a head in 1942, when a Green named Ohles served as *Lagerälteste*. Through a receiver hidden in the sewer under an SS office, Ohles’ men listened nightly to the foreign radio broadcast, the news from which they passed on to the Reds the next morning. Ohles then used this information to frame the political prisoners, claiming they must be secretly listening to the broadcasts. Fifty political prisoner functionaries lost their positions and, in some cases, their lives.

Shortly after this purge, a political prisoner discovered the hidden receiver and reported this to the SS. Ohles was stripped of his position and sent to work in the quarry, where his fellow prisoners killed him. Another Green, Wolff, took Ohles’ place. In an attempt to keep the Reds under his control Wolff threatened to block the upcoming release of an influential German Communist. The Red underground, in response, threatened to reveal Wolff’s homosexuality to the SS. This stand-off ended in a Red coup, as the political prisoners (falsely) reported Wolff’s involvement in a political plot to the SS. Wolff lost his

²¹ Ibid, 148.

position, and the Reds claimed victory, as “henceforth there was no further attempt to break the absolute hegemony of the political prisoners at Buchenwald.”²²

It is the portrayal of this struggle for power, and the painting of each group in such broad strokes, that is Kogon’s legacy to the historiography of prisoner functionaries. This telling is related in greater detail in *The Buchenwald Report*.²³ It was from this report that Kogon, who was among the prisoners who assembled the reports, crafted his own individual work. A major theme running through the report is the impact and importance the Anti-Fascist prisoners had in general, and as prisoner functionaries specifically. The very language employed in the report highlights the valor and integrity of the political prisoners. For example, the opening sentence to Section XI, entitled “The Permanent Underground Struggle Between the SS and the Antifascist Forces in the Camp,” reads as follows: “In this hell created by the SS, Buchenwald concentration camp would never have experienced so much that was positive without the tough, death-defying work of the leading political men among the inmates.”²⁴ The section which discusses the position of *Lagerälteste* simply lists the men who held the position, giving their prisoner affiliation (Green or Red) and their efforts to improve quality of life in the camp.²⁵ The overthrow of Ohles and the Greens is related in more detail in the Report, under the title “The Final Victory over the Greens.”²⁶ The heroic final sentence reads, “From this time on, the backbone of the greens in

²² Ibid, 259.

²³ David A. Hackett, trans. and ed., *The Buchenwald Report*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

²⁴ Hackett, *The Buchenwald Report*, p. 81-82.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 139.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 256-7.

Buchenwald was finally broken, and the path was clear for the antifascist trend in Buchenwald concentration camp.”²⁷

The Buchenwald Report, however, does delve deeper into the issue of prisoner functionaries than does Kogon, going beyond the simple Good Red versus Bad Green. While arguing that the position of *Blockälteste* was “both necessary and on the whole useful,” the Report addresses the violence inherent in the system: “[I]t should not be forgotten that the power involved in these positions was at times badly misused...Enticements of corruption and tyranny over fellow prisoners were too much for many, whether it was a question of reds, greens, blacks or other colors.”²⁸ In a later section, *Kapos* play an important role in driving Jewish prisoners across the sentry line, so that they could be shot by an SS officer. Of the four named men who participated in this atrocity, two were former members of the Foreign Legion, one was a Jewish professional criminal, and the fourth was a political prisoner.²⁹

From these two examples it is clear that the reality of camp life was far more complex than simply a battle between the “good” and “bad” elements of the camp. These examples, however, are greatly outnumbered by the references (and language employed therein) to the antifascist struggle in the camp. The privileges afforded to and the violence enacted by prisoner functionaries are absent in this retelling. This leaves out two of the most important aspects of functionary life. In addition, this early historiography loses the voices of the prisoners underneath the functionaries and, even more important, of the functionaries themselves.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 257.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 39.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 159.

Hermann Langbein's 1972 *Menschen in Auschwitz (People in Auschwitz)* included reports of functionary violence, but for the most part he remained in the Kogon paradigm.³⁰ His discussion of the camp "VIPs" opens with the sadistic nature of the Greens: "The German Greens became the symbol of a zealous and self-satisfied henchman of the SS."³¹

Langbein bends Kogon a bit when he states, "[N]ot all those who wore a green triangle in the KZ and were given positions abused their power over their fellow inmates, and many political prisoners were in no way different from the typical Green functionaries."³² However, in the very next sentence he shifts back into the traditional structure: "[A] Red could as a rule obtain an armband and thereby gain power only if he was *able to adapt to the Greens*."³³ This sentiment is repeated later: "Many German political prisoners did not model themselves on someone like Küsel [a kind Green mentioned earlier] but adapted to the predominant type of Green VIP."³⁴

While Langbein admits that Reds could be brutal, he is still situated squarely in the Kogon paradigm. Only by adapting to the Greens and, for lack of a better term, giving up their "Redness" were political prisoners able to lower themselves to using violence. They were Reds in name only, as their actions clearly illustrated that they had switched allegiances. This explanation is still too simplistic.

³⁰ Hermann Langbein, *People in Auschwitz*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. Originally published in German as *Menschen in Auschwitz*, 1995.

³¹ Langbein, *People in Auschwitz*, p. 145.

³² *Ibid*, 147.

³³ *Ibid*, emphasis mine.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 155.

Writing nearly fifty years after the Liberation of the camps, Wolfgang Sofsky addresses at least a few of these issues, specifically that of power. In *The Order of Terror*, Sofsky offers a more complex view of prisoner functionaries. Caught between the SS above them and the majority of prisoners below, functionaries constantly had to embody both aspects of the term prisoner functionary. He describes the social network in which the functionaries integrated themselves:

First, prisoner-functionaries were obliged to maintain absolute obedience, and were dependent on the *protekcja* of the SS. Second, they had to defend their position against the attacks and intrigues of their rivals. Third, they had to keep their subordinates under supervision and make sure order was maintained. Fourth, they were surrounded by dependent clients, beneficiaries and cliques. The prisoner-functionary elite stood between guard personnel and inmates; it fought for privileges and sought accessories for support.³⁵

While Sofsky's sociological approach exposes the complexities of the system in which functionaries operated, especially in regards to power relations and gradations, it is still a rather thinly-sketched analysis. He cites primarily secondary sources in compiling this section, chief among them Kogon and Langbein. A few memoirs are cited, although for the most part their information appears only as extended footnotes. Tadeusz Borowski's account of a *Kapo* giving out seconds, for example, appears in the endnotes but not in the text proper.³⁶

In order to gain a fuller understanding of the lives of prisoner functionaries, one must look beyond Kogon's initial contribution to the historiography. Testimony, from both prisoners and prisoner functionaries alike, must be integrated into works on the concentration camp system. This new evidence serves to either seriously qualify or even fundamentally

³⁵ Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, p. 131.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 315.

subvert this traditional telling. The voices of *Kapos*, *Lagerälteste* and other functionaries, and what they can contribute to the historiography, will now be explored.

Chapter 4

Kapos

The traditional historiography described above does not allow for much complexity. The stereotypes of the noble Red and the cruel Green, which were developed in a highly political context, hinder our understanding of camp life. Individuals are placed in boxes, given labels to which they may not wholly conform. Breaking out of this paradigm, one must investigate *Kapos* empirically and see them as a more varied collection of individuals. The behavior of functionaries could change depending on the camp, circumstance and spectrum of relationships *Kapos* had with different prisoners. Only by examining and listening to the voices of actual prisoner functionaries can this complexity be integrated into the scholarship.

As will be seen below, however, doing so is no easy feat. One of the reasons for the lack of voices in the literature is because *Kapos* have predominantly remained silent. Virtually no *Kapos* have willingly given oral testimony to organizations such as the Shoah Foundation or the Holocaust Memorial Museum. Instead, their perspectives of events are mainly heard through trial transcripts or investigation statements. In both cases, the record is full of half-truths and exculpatory statements which the historian must sift through.

Despite the inherently problematic nature of the evidence, however, much can be learned by examining functionaries' statements. The following examination of cohorts of

Kapos from two different camps- Majdanek and Bergen-Belsen- goes far in exposing the complexities and continuities of prisoner functionary life.

Majdanek

In early June 1942, fifty *Reichsdeutsche* boarded a train and were sent east from Dachau. When they arrived at Majdanek several days later, the SS in charge of the camp made them functionaries- *Kapos*, *Blockälteste* and *Lagerälteste*. At the time of their arrival, the camp was still in its development stage; indeed, several of these men were in charge of the *Kommandos* which built the camp. Of the fifty men, thirty-eight are referenced, in varying degrees of detail, in the Majdanek file in the Central Office of the State Justice Ministries for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes of Violence in Ludwigsburg, Baden-Württemberg. During the mid to late 1960s, twelve men gave testimony, in some cases multiple times. Although they themselves were not being investigated (it appears that they were called to give testimony against certain members of the SS working in the camp), the men, naturally, did not give damning evidence against themselves.

Still, the men of the Dachau transport make an intriguing case study precisely because of the ways in which they do not fit the mold of traditional prisoner functionaries. None are recorded as having been violent criminals, while half of the twelve men who gave statements were political prisoners. Of the remaining six, two were military men; rounding out the group was an *Asozial*, a member of the *Fremdlegion*, or French Foreign Legion, a man charged with “sabotage”, and one who never gave a precise reason for his imprisonment. The terms *Asozial* and “sabotage” had quite fluid definitions in the Nazi

lexicon, and were used to categorize any number of offenses. Historian Klaus Scherer notes that in the Nazi-jargon “unemployed meant ‘work-shy,’ non-conformist meant ‘morally depraved’, [and] multiple offender...meant “criminal.”³⁷ “Sabotage” was also construed quite broadly, and was used even to designate simply missing work.

It must be conceded that these men constituted only one-quarter of the transport; the rest of the men were sent to the camps for unknown reasons. However, the dates of camp entry are known for fifteen additional men. Eight of these men entered Dachau or another camp in or before 1940, suggesting that they too were political or *Asozial* prisoners. Their ages at time of transport range from 22 to 48 years old; the average age was around 33 years. For several of the men in this cohort, their transfer to Majdanek was not their first. Five men traveled together in a transport to Flossenbürg on September 27, 1939, only to be transferred back to Dachau on March 2, 1940. Four men experienced Sachsenhausen at some point before their incarceration in Dachau, and two men, having been transferred to Mauthausen at different times, returned to Dachau together in August 1940. It is entirely possible, indeed quite plausible, that the men of this cohort were quite familiar with each other by the spring of 1942.³⁸

The six men who identified themselves as political prisoners had various relationships with the Communist Party. Erich *Hauser*, for example, was the *Unterbezirksleiter* (sub-regional leader) of the Communist Youth Organization in Würzburg³⁹ and Josef *Müller*

³⁷ Klaus Scherer, *‘Asozial’ im Dritten Reich: Die vergessenen Verfolgten*. (Münster, Votum Verlag, 1990), p. 10. For more on this topic, see also Wolfgang Ayaß, *“Asoziale” im Nationalsozialismus*. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1995.)

³⁸ Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg, B 162/2347 Bl. 1987-1991.

³⁹ Statement of Erich Hauser, 12.6.1964 and 12.9.1972, Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg, B 162/2348 Bl. 2146 and B 162/2359 Bl. 4316, respectively. It should be noted that all last names given here are pseudonyms starting

declared himself to be a member of the KPD.⁴⁰ Johann *Diefendorf* distanced himself somewhat from the Communist Party; instead he testified that he “belonged to the so-called left wing of the SPD and was commonly regarded as a Communist.”⁴¹ Less specifically, Georg *Getman* simply stated that he “was an opponent of the Third Reich, and had proclaimed this in words and writing long before the takeover.”⁴² The men hailed from cities across Germany, and their dates of birth ranged from 1898 (Franz *Anders*)⁴³ to 1913 (Diefendorf).⁴⁴

Johann Diefendorf, though the youngest of the group, was the first to be arrested. According to his own testimony, he was arrested and sent to Dachau in February 1933. He was released in 1935, only to be sent back a few months later.⁴⁵ Erich Hauser, only a year older than Diefendorf, was also arrested multiple times. From March 10 to May 1, 1933, he was held in a Würzburg prisoner for his involvement in the local Communist Youth Organization.⁴⁶ Later that summer, he was again arrested and imprisoned for the first time in Dachau. Following his December 1935 release, Hauser stated that he “illegally worked for the Communist Party and supplied shelters with materials.”⁴⁷ He was arrested once more and

with the same first letter of the real name. This only applies to the men found in the Ludwigsburg archive. These are noted by italics the first time they are used.

⁴⁰ Statement of Josef Müller, 24.6.1965, Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg, B 162/2349, Bl 2553.

⁴¹ Statement of Johann Diefendorf, 12.5.1964, Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg, B 162/2348, Bl. 2109.

⁴² Statement of Georg Getman, 28.11.1963, Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg, B 162/2347, Bl. 1862.

⁴³ Statement of Franz Anders, 30.4.1965, Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg, B 162/2349, Bl. 2459.

⁴⁴ Diefendorf, B 162/2348, Bl. 2109.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Hauser, B 162/2359 Bl. 4316..

⁴⁷ Ibid.

returned to Dachau in 1937.⁴⁸ By the time of their transport to Majdanek, these two men had spent most of their twenties, and therefore virtually their entire adult lives, in the Nazi concentration camp system.

The other four political prisoners also spent much of the late-1930s in the camp system but, unlike Diefendorf and Hauser, experienced more camps than just Dachau. Released from Dachau in May 1934 after being imprisoned there the year before, Getman was sent to Sachsenhausen in November 1938; four months later he returned to Dachau, where he remained until the Majdanek transport.⁴⁹ Sometime between 1938 and 1940, Anders was sent to Mauthausen from Dachau; he returned in the August 1940 transport.⁵⁰ Both Josef Müller and Paul *Topf* moved from Dachau to Flossenbürg. Müller arrived in Dachau in March 1938, and was sent to Flossenbürg the following September.⁵¹ Topf had entered Dachau in September in 1937. He testified, “On September 29, 1939 the camp was cleared, [and] we were handed over to Flossenbürg.”⁵² Both men returned to Dachau on the same March 1940 transport.

Franz *Kästner* and Walter *Leitz* were both members of the German military at the times of their arrest. The reasons for incarceration, however, could be classified as at least partially political in nature, demonstrating once again the fluidity of categorization in the Nazi system. Kästner was a relatively new member of the German military, while Walter

⁴⁸ Ibid. Other sources indicate that he returned to Dachau in 1941; Hornung himself testified that he was rearrested in 1936 and sentenced to five years; after one year in Amberg he returned to Dachau. It is possible his sentence was renewed in 1941. In this case it seems the testimony is more accurate.

⁴⁹ Getman, B. 162/2347, Bl. 1863.

⁵⁰ Anders, B 162/2349, Bl. 2459-2460.

⁵¹ Müller, B 162/2349, Bl 2553.

⁵² Statement of Paul Topf, 13.8.1964. Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg. B 162/2348, Bl. 2211.

Leitz was about to finish his time of service. Both were released from Majdanek in 1943 and reinstated into the *Luftwaffe* and *Wehrmacht*, respectively.

Kästner joined the *Handelsmarine* (merchant marine) in 1937, at the age of eighteen. Later that year, on November 1, he was conscripted in the *Luftwaffe Nachrichten Ersatzabteilung* in Berlin-Kladow/Havel. In his 1964 testimony, Kästner stated, “Because of sabotage and subversion, I was...arrested and taken to jail in Berlin, Alexanderplatz, in March 1939.”⁵³ “Sabotage and subversion” could not only mean neglecting duty, but also resisting the military system. Viewed in this light, Kästner’s offense assumes a political tint. After about a month, he was transferred to nearby Sachsenhausen, where he stayed until his 1941 transfer to Dachau.⁵⁴

By 1937 Leitz was also a member of the German military, serving in a *Wehrmacht* regiment stationed near the Mosel. Shortly before the end of his active service time, in August 1938, he was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to Dachau. Leitz stated that the main cause for his arrest was his “multiple disciplinary punishments and [his] refusal to obey orders.”⁵⁵ After a year in Dachau, he was sent to Flossenbürg on the same transport as Topf, only to return to Dachau with Topf and Müller in March 1940.⁵⁶

The last four men to give testimony comprised a rather disparate group. Accused of such vague and elastic offenses as being work-shy, committing sabotage or being an *Asozial*, these men belong to minor groups persecuted by the Nazis. That they became *Kapos* in

⁵³ Statement of Franz Kästner, 25.3.1964. Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg. B 162/2348, Bl. 2060.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Statement of Walter Leitz, 26/27.4 1965. Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg. B 162/2349, Bl. 2442.

⁵⁶ Lorz, B 162/2349, Bl. 2442-2443.

Majdanek cuts against the traditional historiographical representation of prisoner functionaries.

Peter *Ohms* reported that he “wore a black arm patch,”⁵⁷ indicating that he was classified as an *Asozial* in the camp system. The official charge which led to his arrest and subsequent placement in Dachau in May 1939 was that he was “work-shy.”⁵⁸ Kurt *Ritzer*’s charge was similar, although he did not mention being classified as an *Asozial*. While working in Hamburg, Ritzer injured his leg and was, he believed, granted a leave of absence. On the fourth day of his leave, the Gestapo arrested him; the charges were sabotage and refusal to work. After stays in Sachsenhausen and Neuengamme, Ritzer arrived at Dachau in early 1941.⁵⁹

Only two men could possibly be categorized as “criminals,” although they do not appear to fit the violent stereotype, nor do they claim to have worn the green triangle. Ernst *Fromm* served in the French Foreign Legion, starting in 1932, when he was twenty-two years old. After his release in March 1938 he took a job in Saarbrücken. His stay there, however, was short-lived, as in June 1939 he was arrested suddenly. Since one reason men joined the Foreign Legion was to escape legal trouble at home, and because he was arrested so soon after his return, it is possible, even probable, that Fischer had a criminal background. After a few weeks, he was sent to Dachau. When the camp was cleared in September 1939, Fromm was a part of the transport to Mauthausen. He would return to Dachau as a part of the August 1940 transport that also brought back Anders.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Statement of Peter Ohms, 28.11.1972, Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg, B 162/2359, Bl. 4406.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Statement of Kurt Ritzer, 7.5.1965. Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg, B 162/2349, Bl. 2522.

⁶⁰ Statement of Ernst Fromm, 1.4.1965. Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg, B 162/2349, Bl. 2430.

Josef *Ratzenberger* could also possibly be classified as a criminal in the traditional or conventional sense. He was arrested in April 1940 and sent to Sachsenhausen; by September he was in Dachau. He testified, “My previous conviction was taken as the pretext for my commitment to a camp.”⁶¹ He did not specify what the prior offense was or how long he had been out of jail.

Majdanek’s first prisoners were Soviet prisoners of war, who still composed a sizeable contingent among the prisoner population of the camp. According to the Kogon model, one would expect that the German Communists sent from Dachau would form an attachment to their fellow Soviet comrades. However, while the POWs are mentioned in the men’s testimony, this comradeship is not. Only one *Kapo* spoke of any friendship between the groups of prisoners- and this was the possible criminal Ratzenberger. He stated, “Between the Russian POWs and we German prisoners there existed a good amity [*Einvernehmen*]. In particular the Russian felt an attraction to the Communist prisoners.”⁶² This attraction is not reciprocated in the political prisoners’ testimonies. Instead, the POWs’ attempted break-out and the subsequent punishment is discussed, but only in a rather detached fashion.

While the *Kapos* received privileges in the form of food and power, they were not wholly immune from the dangers of concentration camp life. They were still prisoners on the Nazi camp system. In their testimonies, the men of the 1942 transport never forget their prisoner status. Not only did they fear for their lives, but, in several cases, they related the circumstances in which fellow *Kapos* lost theirs. Hauser, for example, collapsed one morning at *Appell*. His position as a *Lagerkapo* did not make him impervious to typhus, and

⁶¹ Statement of Josef Ratzenberger, 13.5.1964. Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg, B 162/2348, Bl. 2114.

⁶² *Ibid*, Bl. 2115.

he spent two weeks in the sick barrack [*Revier*].⁶³ Ernst *Hartung*, *Lagerältester*, contracted typhus around the same time but, unlike Hauser, did not survive.⁶⁴

More than illness, several men mentioned and described the violent death of Peter *Bose* as something akin to a “mafia hit.” According to Anders, “I also remember, that one day the German *Kapo* Peter Bose, when he was sitting with other *Kapos* in front of the Barrack, suddenly was shot and killed.”⁶⁵ It must be noted that he added, “I didn’t see this, but rather learned about it from another prisoner.”⁶⁶

Hauser, however, was not only present but also injured in the course of the shooting. He and several other *Kapos* were relaxing in front of their barrack. He recalled, “Suddenly a shot was fired. The *Kapos* sitting next to me had the cigarette shot out of his mouth, the bullet grazed my left upper arm and then hit Bose in the chest.”⁶⁷ Hauser’s testimony suggested the shooter was an *SS-Angehörige*, but this was only his opinion.

Only Hauser admitted in his 1972 statement to having beat prisoners; all the other men claimed they never did. Ritzer stated that he was removed from his position as *Kapo* “because [he] was not strict enough with the prisoners, especially because he did not hit them with the whip.”⁶⁸ Hauser, in his defense, stated, “But this happened only in their interest. If a prisoner didn’t work and was standing around and an SS man saw this, one could count on

⁶³ Hauser, B 162/2359, Bl. 4318.

⁶⁴ Ritzer, B 162/2359, Bl. 4473.

⁶⁵ Anders, B 162/2349, Bl. 2464.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Hauser, B 162/2359, Bl. 4322.

⁶⁸ Ritzer, B 162/2359, Bl. 4474.

the SS man beating him. In order to prevent this I beat the prisoners.”⁶⁹ Later in the same statement he claimed he had to beat people if he was so ordered, by either the SS or his *Lagerältester*.⁷⁰

Hauser, most likely, was trying to justify his actions to those questioning him. Because he admitted to beating prisoners, his testimony is more believable in this regard than the others. That does not, however, mean that every word of it should be taken as absolute truth. Hornung had some power, however limited, because of his position in the camp. Though he did have to follow commands given by the SS or his prisoner supervisors, Hornung would have been able to help the prisoners under him in more ways than just beating them “in their interest.” Examples of functionaries using their power to aid their fellow prisoners, however, are, interestingly enough, not found in their testimonies. Instead, the prisoners who worked and lived under the *Kapos* are the ones who, years later, relate such events. As such, they will be discussed later in this essay.

Bergen-Belsen

Unlike the Majdanek functionaries, the testimonies of *Kapos* from Bergen-Belsen were conducted directly after the camp’s liberation. Those whose testimony is discussed here were all tried, although not all were convicted. Moral guilt is quite different from the legal variety, but these diverse verdicts indicate that the British judges considered certain testimony to be more reliable than others. In addition, the Bergen-Belsen testimonies are the only ones used in this essay that include women functionaries.

⁶⁹ Hauser, B 162/2359, Bl. 4317.

⁷⁰ Hauser, B 162/2359, Bl. 4319.

This cohort is an interesting one to investigate because of the ways in which the functionaries' testimonies contradict one another. This is not surprising; they were not as cohesive a group as the Majdanek functionaries. There is no real indication that any of them knew one another before arrival in Bergen-Belsen. Although most had spent some time in Auschwitz, their experiences as a whole were quite distinct from one another. These differences serve to illustrate just how complex and diverse the prisoner functionary experience truly was.

One such contradiction involves how the functionaries ascended to their privileged position. Ilse Lothe, a German Kapo at both Auschwitz and Bergen Belsen, described how she was selected to be a *Kapo*:

We were on parade in the morning and the *Arbeitsdienstführer* went along looking at us and suddenly said, "You will take over from tomorrow on this Kommando." That is how I became a *Kapo*, and I could not do anything about it. There was no question about asking or refusing because if we had done so it would have amounted to refusing work and that meant 25 strokes.⁷¹

In this account, Lothe was powerless to stop her selection, thereby excusing herself from any responsibility. Indeed, Lothe was found not guilty.⁷² Another woman, however, testified to taking a much more active role in her own selection. According to Stanislaw Starostka, she consciously politicked to become *Lagerälteste* in Auschwitz:

All the *Kapos*, *Blockältesten* and *Lagerältesten* were Germans at the time, and I was the only Polish *Lagerälteste*. *Oberaufseherin* Drechsler appointed me at the end of August, 1943, because I was one of the oldest *Blockältesten* and had been already a long time in the concentration camps and knew the conditions. Apart from that I tried to get the job...I realized how much I could help the other prisoners if I was in any

⁷¹ Raymond Phillips, ed. *Trial of Josef Kramer and Forty-Four Others* (London, Edinburgh, Glasgow: William Hodge and Co., Ltd, 1949), p. 267.

⁷² Phillips, *Trial of Josef Kramer and Forty-Four Others*, p. 642.

position of authority...My fellow countrymen told me it was advisable of me to try to get this job.⁷³

Starostka's explanation supports Kogon's description of functionary appointments in Buchenwald, although here ethnic, not political, considerations are at the forefront; these ethnic lines of rivalries were more important in the camps of Eastern Europe. Still, prisoners jockeyed for positions, much like politicians, in order to help their "constituencies." Starostka, however, was found guilty of committing a war crime and sentenced to ten years in prison.⁷⁴

While the Majdanek cohort almost unilaterally denied ever beating their fellow prisoners, several *Kapos* from Bergen-Belsen admitted to using violence on a regular basis. Antoni Aurdzieg, who held the position of *Stubendienst* for less than a month, stated that he and a fellow *Kapo* "beat a Russian prisoner until he fell dead on the ground."⁷⁵ This occurred on April 15, 1945, the day the camp was liberated. In addition to this, Aurdzieg, testified that he "assisted Kapo Adam in his thefts of money or jewels from the prisoners, Jews in particular, to whom we had promised an extra helping of soup by way of exchange. In the end, they received nothing but blows when they claimed it."⁷⁶

Likewise, Hildegard Lohbauer, a German arrested for refusing to work in an ammunition factory, also admitted to beating her prisoners. She stated, "As *Arbeitsdienst* I have myself frequently hit prisoners to keep order, but only with my hand."⁷⁷ Lohbauer's

⁷³ Ibid, p. 416.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 463-4.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 720. Aurdzieg was *Stubendienst* from 23 March to 15 April, 1945.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 718.

testimony is unique, however, in that it also illustrates, as stated above, that functionaries were still prisoners themselves, and could thus receive as well as give beatings. She testified, “At Auschwitz regular organized beatings were given. I myself was given 15 strokes on the behind for smoking at Auschwitz in 1943. The punishment was carried out by two fellow prisoners, one of whom held me on a punishment stool while the other beat me with a solid wooden stick.”⁷⁸

Other such examples of the limitations and precarious nature of functionary power will be discussed later in this essay, as they are described by prisoners. It should be noted that neither Lohbauer nor Aurdzieg benefited from their admissions, as both were sentenced to ten years in prison.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 644.

Chapter 5

Prisoner Perceptions

The foremen, the Kapos, the supervisors that supervised that workforce, they're completely deranged. And there was absolutely no opposition on our part to do or say anything.

-Norman F.⁸⁰

I was working with a kommando...supervised by a German national who was a Kapo. His name was Kurt and he was one of the most decent man I ever met in any camp... He was just a, the biggest heart. Just an amazing individual.

- Bernard G.⁸¹

Bernard G. and Norman F. were born five years apart in Poland. Like millions of other Polish Jews, they experienced the horrors of the Nazi concentration camp system. Over fifty years later, in 1995, both recorded the above oral history testimonies for the Shoah Foundation. The quotes refer to the *Kapos* they worked under while at Majdanek, where they were both briefly held at around the same time.

How can two testimonies be so vastly different? That is the question this section will explore.

Finding references to *Kapos* in survivor testimony requires more than a quick scan through the recording's index (although technology is now making such searches faster and easier). Because *Kapos* and other functionaries were so ubiquitous in camp life, many

⁸⁰ Norman F., 1995, Interview by USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Merrick, USA, 12 March, Interview number 1459.

⁸¹ Bernard G., 1995, Interview by USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Forrest Hills, NY, USA, 12 January, Interview Number 734.

survivors never directly discuss them; they were simply a part of everyday life. Usually, they will reference the *Kapo* in an off-handed way. Only in a relatively few cases will the interviewees describe at any length their relationships with or experience under any *Kapo*. For these men and women to have made such indelible marks into the survivor's memory that it is discussed over fifty years later means that the *Kapo* must have done something extraordinary. As will be seen, this means the *Kapos* usually fall into one of two camps- the Saints and the Sinners. One is reminded of the old nursery rhyme about a small girl: "And when she was good, she was very good./ And when she was bad she was horrid!"

However, exploring such testimony does actually allow one to escape from the black-white paradigm and see the shades of gray that characterized the lives of so many functionaries. Both the negative and positive memories of prisoner functionaries highlight the use, abuse and, most important for this study, the limits of *Kapo* power. The functionaries held a unique position in the camp system. They were afforded more power and freedom, which they used to various ends. As will be seen, many used their power to beat prisoners and to steal their food and other possessions for their own self-interest. However, a few did attempt to help their fellow prisoners.

In a report made in 1944, two escaped Slovakian Jews described the *Kapos* of Auschwitz in the following way:

During work the '*Capo*' has full authority over his group of prisoners and not infrequently one of these '*Capos*' kills a man working under him.⁸²

⁸² United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Record Group 04, "Concentration and other camps," subgroup 16, sub-sub group 01, "War Refugee Board Report on Auschwitz," pg. 26. Call Number: RG-04.016*01.

Camp survivors told similar stories of all-powerful and abusive *Kapos* time and time again. Most records dealing with prisoners' impressions and memories of *Kapos* are overwhelmingly negative. The testimonies at times blur together, so similar are they, that the individual stories become lost in a collage of fists and whips. In her deposition recorded for the Belsen Trial, Miriam Weiss claimed of Hilde Lohbauer, a *Kapo*, "She beat me on the face with her fists so hard I had ear trouble for several days."⁸³ In another deposition, Ivan Karobjenikow described Vladimir Ostrowoski: "Ostrowoski beat many sick prisoners over the head with this same instrument [a soup-ladle handle]. The heads of the beaten prisoners were cut open and blood streamed from their wounds."⁸⁴

Many of the depositions taken for the Belsen Trial follow the same pattern; *Kapos* severely beat their prisoners with their fists, sticks, or, as Ostrowoski, with a make-shift weapon- a soup-ladle handle. But besides this routine violence, other themes emerge from the survivors' testimonies. Chief among these is the theme of food. Perhaps because it was always scarce, the memory of its distribution made a deep impression in the memories of the prisoners. Vladimir Sulima recalled that "Ostrowoski frequently refused to give many of us food and he did not give much to the others. He never distributed the food fairly so many prisoners starved."⁸⁵

⁸³ Phillips, pg. 694. Weiss is listed as a twenty-four year old Yugoslav. The depositions are not clear as to whether the witness is Jewish unless the witness explicitly identifies him or herself as such.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 699. Karobjenikow is listed as a twenty-two year old from the USSR.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 688. Sulima is listed as a twenty-one year old from the USSR.

Even worse for the prisoners, sometimes *Kapos* stole their food. Betti Koppel Frank, in her oral history interview, remembered how the *Kapos* robbed the children of Auschwitz: “The children got a special soup...But they stole it from the children.”⁸⁶

One day while working in the trenches of Auschwitz, Sonia Watnik’s cousin passed nearby. She recalled, “He threw a piece of bread towards me, but it fell a short distance away. I went to pick it up, but before I could do so a woman *Kapo* picked it up and kept it for herself.” She later identified the *Kapo* as Ilse Lothe.⁸⁷

Another frequent occurrence in the testimonies of survivors is the inventiveness of the punishment meted out by the *Kapos*. They not only beat prisoners during the distribution of food or while on Appell; the *Kapos* also engaged in various other forms of torture. Their inventiveness proves that they were not simply “following orders,” but that they acted of their own volition. In her deposition, Elizabeth Herbst related how Lohbauer and other *Kapos* drowned a score of women in the camp’s ditch. While the women struggled to keep afloat in the ditch (which Herbst remembered being three meters deep and half-filled with water), the functionaries taunted them with long poles. Testified Herbst:

Some of the women in the water were crying desperately for help, and I heard one in particular shout, “*Kapo*, pull me out.” Lohbauer pulled her half out. Then, with a downward thrust of the pole, pushed the woman back into the water. She and the other *Kapos* were highly amused, and Lohbauer did this with several other women.⁸⁸

The “deranged” Majdanek *Kapo* whom F. discussed in the opening quotation also employed (to phrase it euphemistically) unique forms of torture and brutal scare tactics.

⁸⁶ Holocaust Testimony of Betti Koppel Frank, no. 76. Transcript of Audio taped interview from 3 March, 1991. 1997 Holocaust Oral History Archive, Gratz College, Melrose Park, PA 19027.

⁸⁷ Phillips, p. 693. Watnik is listed as a twenty-four year old Pole.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 700. Herbst is listed as a twenty-eight year old Czech.

Seemingly at random, this *Kapo* selected a Jewish prisoner, punched him in the head, threw him to the ground, and stepped on his throat. F. remembered the man then “took an egg, peeled it very slowly, consumed and ate that egg. When he was finished he took that foot off and the man was dead.”⁸⁹

It is sometimes easy to forget that the *Kapos* and other functionaries were prisoners themselves. Their privileged position was their means of survival in the camps, and most were willing to do anything to retain it. To ensure they kept their status, they went “above and beyond” what they thought was expected of them. They beat prisoners harshly to prove their own worth to their SS overseers. They killed prisoners to demonstrate they were still the right choice for the job.⁹⁰ In his oral history testimony Ernest Weihs declared, “They [*Kapos*] hit us more than the SS did, these guys.”⁹¹ This recollection is repeated again and again throughout survivor testimonies.

Others did not explicitly state this, but rather related incidents which heavily suggested that the functionaries were more brutal than the SS. In her deposition against Helena Kopper, a Bergen-Belsen *Blockälteste*, Estera Guterman stated:

One day in February, 1945, I attended an Appell of which Kopper was in charge. It was cold and there was snow on the ground. The Appell lasted about two hours that day. After about an hour of this Appell I felt very cold and moved my position slightly. Kopper then came up to me and beat me across the head and body with a leather strap she was carrying. The beating was very painful and made me cry. After the beating Kopper made me kneel in the snow for about an hour. Whilst I was kneeling down an S.S. woman...came up and spoke to Kopper. She said to Kopper,

⁸⁹ Norman F., Interview by USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California.

⁹⁰ Sofksy, p. 137-38.

⁹¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Record Group 50, Oral History, Interview with Ernest Weihs, Call number: RG-50.042*0031.

“It is enough,” and Kopper replied, “No, she must stay there, she did not stand straight.” I had to carry on kneeling.⁹²

Wolfgang Sofsky calls this behavior “mimetic servility,” and claims that it was one adaptation strategy used by prisoner functionaries. The functionaries mimicked the actions of the SS, and “the spectrum ranged from the imitation of brief gestures to demonstrative subservience to identification with the dreaded authority and duplication of its external appearance.”⁹³ Agi Rubin witnessed first hand this “mimetic servility.” While in Auschwitz, “I was beaten once by a *Kapo*, and she enjoyed it because she was going to show to the German overseer that how...capable she is.”⁹⁴

Not all functionaries acted in such ways, however. Though certainly not the majority, these *Kapos* are remembered in the testimonies of survivors’ for their extraordinary deeds and life-saving aid. Such *Kapos* seem to have been genuinely kind in their treatment of fellow prisoners. Nathan Gutman’s memoir relates his experiences with such a *Kapo*, who sincerely attempted to help his fellow prisoners. Gutman remembers Beim in the following way:

Judging by the language he used, he was a man of little or no schooling. He yelled a lots [sic] and cursed in his juicy, unpolished Yiddish, pretending to be mad, especially with the guards around...In contrast to most of us, *capo* Beim was always full of explosive energy...*Capo* Beim was a born leader. People around him were intoxicated by his humor, his wit and by his unshaken belief that peace was somehow just around the corner. Using a seemingly inexhaustible supply of cigarettes, money and other bribes he watched over us like a hawk and shielded us from the Ukrainian

⁹² Phillips, p. 742-43. Guterman is listed as forty-two year old Pole.

⁹³ Sofsky, p. 137.

⁹⁴ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Record Group 50, Oral History, Interview with Agi Rubin. Call number: RG-50.042*0024.

guards. Right from the very first day *Capo* Beim took me under his protection and watched out for my safety.⁹⁵

Although in the minority, Beim serves as a reminder that functionaries did not always behave violently. They could act with compassion, offering aid their fellow prisoners. The important caveat to this is *Kapos* had to consciously choose to act in this way. Most did not, but those who aided, instead of harmed, are remembered in a good level of detail in survivor testimony. Bella Tovey, in her oral history testimony, also recalled fond memories of her *Kapo* in Greben, a labor camp:

We had a *Kapo*, we had a girl who was in charge of us, and she was not like some of the *Kapos* that you read about, she was really a very nice person. She was older than we were, she was about 23 at that point- very beautiful girl, and she was always walking around trying to help everybody...and sometimes, when it moved her, Salka...would sing. She had studied voice in Italy, in Milano, I think, and she had a very beautiful soprano...⁹⁶

Bernard G., quoted above, described not one but two kind *Kapos* who not only made his life in Majdanek more comfortable, but also probably saved his life. The first, Anton, will be discussed later. The other *Kapo*, Kurt, is referenced in the opening quotation. According to G., Kurt was “the most generous individual you could ever imagine.” Not only did he provide G. and others working under him with food, but, upon learning that G. had family in the camp, also began smuggling them food as well. G.’s sister later told him that “if it weren’t for this extra food, they wouldn’t have made it.” He called this “Amazing.”

Bernard G. survived the Holocaust. Kurt the *Kapo* was sent to Mauthausen, where he died in the stone quarry.

⁹⁵ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Record Group 02, “Survivor Testimonies,” Sub-group 108, “The Execution of Capo Beim, by Nathan Gutman,” p. 19-20. Call number RG-02.108.

⁹⁶ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Record Group 50, Oral History, Interview with Bela Tovey. Call number: RG-50.042*0028.

This story helps to illustrate that, while privileged, functionaries occupied a perilous place in the camp system. Should they ever fail to live up to the expectations of the SS, or simply just fall out of favor, they would lose their privileged position and be reduced to the same position as the very prisoners they had harassed. In addition to the power gained over other prisoners, the functionaries also received more food, better clothing, and their own bed.⁹⁷ However, these benefits could quickly disappear if the *Kapo* or functionary failed to do his or her job. They could be whipped by the SS (punishment the *Kapos* usually passed along to their prisoners),⁹⁸ stripped of their position and left to the mercy of prisoners' revenge, or even executed.

The prisoners often exacted revenge against their former *Kapos* once they were back on equal footing. An example of such a fall can be found in the deposition of Regina Bialek against Kopper:

Then one day in March, 1945, S.S. woman Ehlert came to the block to search for jewellery [sic], but she was unable to find any as the women had hidden it. It was reported to Ehlert by Kopper that other prisoners were in possession of jewellery [sic], and when she did not find it she struck Kopper and told other prisoners to set about her. Kopper was hated by the other prisoners and they all began to beat her. Kopper had to be taken to the hospital afterwards, and I was told by other prisoners she had a miscarriage when about four months pregnant.⁹⁹

Kopper, however, did not lose her position as *Blockälteste*.

Kapo Beim, discussed earlier, provides further evidence of the precariousness inherent in the role of camp functionaries. Coming back from work one evening, Beim noticed that two prisoners had escaped from his detail. His prisoners, knowing the

⁹⁷ Langbein, *People in Auschwitz*, p. 12, and Sofsky, p. 145.

⁹⁸ Langbein, p. 11.

⁹⁹ Phillips, p. 658. Bialek is listed as a twenty-eight year old Pole.

consequences for losing prisoners, attempted to distract the SS guard counting their detail. After a few days, however, the discrepancy was discovered. With privilege came responsibility; Beim, having failed his responsibilities, was condemned to lose not only his privileged position but also his life. Noble to the end, Beim reportedly shouted from the gallows, “Brothers...the war will be over soon. Take care of my wife and children.”¹⁰⁰

More common than functionaries who acted out of entirely good or evil motives are those who changed their behavior according to the situation and prisoner. These Janus-faced *Kapos* helped a few, while simultaneously harming many more. Like the Roman god of doors for which they are named, these *Kapos* wore two faces. What is crucial to understand is that *Kapos* wore both these faces at the same time. They completely break loose of any paradigm and dichotomy and act as true *individuals*, reacting to *individual* circumstances and *individual* prisoners. They add a complex shade of gray to camp life.

As seen above, functionaries’ grasp on power was limited and tenuous. When a *Kapo*, therefore, decided to risk him or herself to aid another prisoner, it was usually because of a previously established relationship. This was the situation in which a functionary first aided G. Upon arriving in Majdanek, he happened to see Anton, a man he knew from his hometown of Radom. The next day Anton arrived at his barrack bearing gifts. G. remembered him bringing a “flannel shirt, jacket, socks, underwear. A whole bundle of clothing. And half a loaf of bread. I was totally flabbergasted by this whole generosity of his.”¹⁰¹ In spite of this kind treatment, however, Anton was a terror to the rest of the prisoners. In response to the question of whether Anton was cruel, G. replied, “Oh yes,

¹⁰⁰ USHMM RG-02.108, p. 24.

¹⁰¹ Bernard G., Interview by USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California

absolutely. I mean people were afraid of him. Absolutely, they were scared stiff of him.”¹⁰²
Anton is a clear example of the Janus-faced *Kapo*.

Victor C. received aid from a German Communist *Kapo* in Majdanek because, in a previous camp, he had known the latter’s sister. The *Kapo*’s first response was to beat C., to save face in front of the SS, he later admitted. Once the *Kapo* was sure C. was not lying, he reassigned him to kitchen duty. Here, C. was able to eat more and conserve his strength.¹⁰³

Concerning the limits of *Kapo* power, Rubin recalled the night a *Kapo* saved her own sister from death. The *Kapo* had learned her sister was in the so-called waiting barrack and would be sent to the crematoria in the morning. The rescue, however, proved to be more complicated, as the sister had arrived with her child. Rubin explained:

Somehow she convinced one of the Germans, that she should be allowed to bring her out of there, and she did. And this woman slept in our barrack that night...When she found out what what [sic] fate awaited her child, she had the biggest fight argument with her sister....Was a horrible horrible night, to listen to her that her sister saved her against her own will, and her child went to death.¹⁰⁴

This *Kapo* had enough power to save her sister but not the child. Functionaries had limited authority in the camps; perhaps this partially explains why so few offered aid. Rubin’s *Kapo* saved a life, but it was the life of her sister. Had she been a stranger, the *Kapo* presumably would not have made the slightest effort to help. Most of the recipients of functionary aid were those prisoners who had a direct relationship to the functionary. Individuals could be saved; large numbers could not. This is not meant to be a moral

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Victor C., 1996, Interview by USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, University of Southern California, Aventura, FL, USA, 22 April, Interview Number 14326.

¹⁰⁴ USHMM, RG-50.042*0024.

condemnation; of course saving one life is nobler than saving no one. Rather, this example is meant to demonstrate the limits of *Kapos'* power.

Prisoner functionaries were always aware of this limited power; they never forgot that they were themselves prisoners. Those underneath them, however, perceived *Kapos* in a very different light. They could be a tool of the SS, or the source of salvation. Very rarely, however, do survivors concede that *Kapos* can be both at once. Indeed, this idea is for the most part absent from the traditional historiography. Only by examining and accepting the Janus-faced *Kapo* can one fully understand the complexity of functionary life.

Chapter 6

Representations of *Kapos*

As has been illustrated in the preceding sections, *Kapos*' places and roles in the Holocaust are more complicated than the established paradigm. They acted as individuals with limited power, which they could use both to aid and hinder, to save and murder. These complexities, however, will likely never be known to that majority of people who live their lives outside academia. Instead, their ideas of the *Kapo*, and indeed of the Holocaust in general, are shaped by popular representations, be they in films, fiction or memoirs. Two of the most recent and popular films- *Schindler's List* and *Life is Beautiful*- make no mention to *Kapos* at all (although Schindler himself is treated as a complex, ambiguous figure). Instead, the films' protagonists (the prisoners) and antagonists (the SS guards) occupy the different ends of the moral spectrum; there is no room for any middle ground complexity. As will be demonstrated below, films are more likely to either exclude *Kapos* altogether or place them on the same ground as the SS. Memoirs, on the other hand, tend to paint *Kapos* in more multifaceted shades.

Films

Two relatively early Holocaust films not only situate *Kapos* on one side of the moral spectrum, but also fit into Kogon's paradigm of the noble partisans versus the notorious

criminals. In both *Nuit et Brouillard*¹⁰⁵ and *Kapo*,¹⁰⁶ functionaries are viewed monochromatically; there is no room for any shades of gray.

Produced in 1955, Alain Resnais' short yet stirring documentary mentions *Kapos* only a handful of times, yet places them squarely in the political against criminal dichotomy. Approximately nine minutes into *Nuit et Brouillard* (*Night and Fog*), the narrator introduces the viewer to the *Kapos* with the following words:

The deportee with his red triangle first meets the green triangles- common criminals, masters among the underlings. Above them is the *Kapo*, again a common criminal as often as not.¹⁰⁷

The accompanying imagery is that of an armband reading “*Kapo*” and a close-up of a stern, round-faced man. Later in the film, when discussing prisoner life, the narrator notes, “[Now] they can even dispute with the common criminals their right to control camp life.” The “they” referred to here are most likely political prisoners, in keeping with the earlier reference to the “red triangles.” It should be noted that not once in the films thirty-two minutes are the words “Jew” or “Jewish” mentioned; instead, Jean Cayrol’s script exclusively uses the word “deportee.”

The film briefly focuses on the privileges and living conditions of *Kapos*. The camera pans a small room which, by any accounts, could be described as cozy. There is a bed, a desk, even what appears to be a coat rack. Over this image the narrator informs the viewer that “the *Kapo* has his own room, where he can hoard supplies and receive his

¹⁰⁵ *Nuit et Brouillard* (*Night and Fog*), 35mm, 32 min., France, 1955.

¹⁰⁶ *Kapo*, 35mm, 92 min., Vides Cinematgrafica, Italy, 1959.

¹⁰⁷ *Nuit et Brouillard*.

favorites in the evening...Luckier still, the *Kapos* had a brothel.”¹⁰⁸ Watching *Nuit et Brouillard*, one forms the following ideas about *Kapos*- they are all criminal prisoners, exclusively male, live an easy life, and often “roll drunkenly home in the moonlight.”¹⁰⁹

These images are echoed in the 1959 Italian film *Kapo*, although, uniquely, this film tells the story of a woman functionary. A Jew living in Paris, young Edith (portrayed by Susan Strasberg) is suddenly sent to a concentration camp. Scheduled to be gassed the next morning, Edith sneaks out of her barrack and, with the help of a kindly doctor, transforms herself into Nicole, a French thief with a black triangle. After a year or so in the labor camp, Nicole has not only befriended a handsome young SS officer named Karl, but also become a *Kapo*. Turning against the women she once considered friends, Nicole willingly becomes a tool of the SS. Only after a troop of Soviet POWs arrives at the camp, and handsome partisan Sascha wins Nicole’s heart, does she use her power as a *Kapo* for good. In her last act, Nicole reaffirms her Jewish identity and sacrifices her own life so that the camp’s prisoners might escape.

That it takes a Soviet prisoner to convince Nicole to change her ways and help her fellow prisoners is simply the culmination of the partisan versus criminal struggle presented throughout the film. Early in the film, Sophia mentions that one Red has become a *Kapo*, a shame, since she had been a “good partisan,” implying that once one became a *Kapo*, all former loyalties ceased to exist. Another prisoner, a political, tells Nicole she always liked her, in spite of the fact their triangles were different colors.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

The first mention of *Kapos* echoes that in *Nuit et Brouillard*. In *Kapo*, the doctor who initially saves Nicole from the gas chamber breaks down the camp system in the following way:

That black triangle on your uniform is the identification for criminals...But the blacks are treated best of all. They're the crème. Among them the SS choose the trustees. They're called *Kapos*. [It must be noted that ominous music begins to play at this point]. You must watch out for the *Kapos*. Don't trust any of them, not from the very first moment. They're monsters with the power of life and death over all the prisoners.¹¹⁰

It is interesting to note that the doctor himself is a prisoner functionary. He is a political prisoner and wears an armband reading "*Revier*." No mention to this, however, is made in the film. This again falls into Kogon's paradigm- the politicals worked to help their fellow prisoners, while the criminals kept them down.

Kapo presents camp life and functionaries' positions therein as a series of stereotypes. For example, the *Kapos*' barrack is unlike anything seen in other Holocaust films. There is music and dancing. Women sport nicely coifed hair, smoke cigarettes and read magazines. "At the other camps, *Kapos* are allowed to keep their civilian clothes," one notes. Another responds that they should petition the SS to let them keep theirs.¹¹¹ As it is, the *Kapos* dress quite differently from the prisoners they control. They wear strong boots, clean clothes, and a jacket. Although it is true that functionaries were the privileged class of prisoners, it seems highly suspect that they would be allowed to peruse fashion magazines. Even more egregious is Nicole's uniform in the last scene of the movie. Dressed in a black skirt, crisp white shirt, black tie, and jacket with a winged emblem, Nicole resembles an SS officer.

¹¹⁰ *Kapo*.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*.

That, perhaps, is the lesson of *Kapo*: functionaries were equal to the SS, only to be redeemed through the love of a partisan.

Literature

Like their cinematic counterparts, written works concerning the Holocaust treat prisoner functionaries as a part of the enemy; they, together with the SS, are a part of the death machine running the camp system. However, there is more room for character complexities in memoirs and literature, particularly in the works of Elie Wiesel, Tadeusz Borowski and, most importantly, Primo Levi. While these authors, survivors all, work within the Kogon paradigm to a certain extent, they also challenge it. They present a more multilayered account of camp life than films, and in doing so flesh out the functionaries so that they are more human than stock villains.

For the most part, the functionaries in Wiesel's *Night*¹¹² are nameless, faceless men, referred to only by their title. They are a constant, but not integral, presence, starting the first night Wiesel arrives at Auschwitz. "There were dozens of prisoners to receive us," he writes, "truncheons in their hands, striking out anywhere, at anyone, without reason."¹¹³ Although not named as such, these prisoners are clearly functionaries. The truncheons they carried were the weapon of choice of the *Kapos* (Nicole herself carried one in *Kapo*). Later, gypsy functionaries beat Wiesel and other members of his group. Once assigned to Block 17,

¹¹² Elie Wiesel, *Night*. Trans. Stella Rodway. (New York: Bantam, 1982. Originally published in French, 1958.)

¹¹³ Wiesel, p. 32.

however, he encounters a kindly *Blockältester*. The Pole greets the Jewish prisoners with the following words of encouragement:

Comrades...There's a long road of suffering ahead of you. But don't lose courage....We shall all see the day of liberation....Let there be comradeship among you. We are all brothers, and we are all suffering the same fate. The same smoke floats over all our heads.¹¹⁴

Although Wiesel does not mention what category of prisoner the Pole belongs to, his use of the term “comrade” and his position of privilege indicate that he is a political prisoner. Here *Night* conforms directly to Kogon; while the other functionaries torment the new arrivals, the Communist *Blockältester* promotes unity and fraternity. He clearly places himself on the prisoners' side against the SS.

One of the last references to a *Kapo* also highlights the functionary's relative kindness. After Wiesel's father has been ordered to stay in the camp to undergo another Selection, the members of Wiesel's work unit try to encourage him: “The *Kapo*, too, tried to reassure me. He had given me easier work today.”¹¹⁵ Because Wiesel only refers to the man as “*Kapo*,” it is difficult to ascertain the previous behavior of this specific *Kapo*. It is likely, however, that he shows sympathy to Wiesel only because of the circumstances of that day.

Borowski presents a very different type of *Kapo* in the “A Day at Harmenz” chapter of his *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*.¹¹⁶ His portrait of a prisoner functionary is one of the more well-known, quoted even in Sofsky. The *Kapo* obviously enjoys his role

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 39.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 72.

¹¹⁶ Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*. Trans. Barbara Vedder. (New York: Penguin, 1976. Originally published in Polish, 1959.) Here, p. 50-81.

and the power that comes along with it. At meal time, he is in charge of doling out the soup.

Borowski describes the scene:

All eyes look eagerly into the *Kapo's* face. There are two more caldrons- second helpings. Each day the *Kapo* relishes this particular moment. The many years spent at the camp entitle him to the absolute power he has over the men. With the end of his ladle he points out the chosen few who merit a second helping. He never makes a mistake.¹¹⁷

This *Kapo* has “absolute power” at this moment. He, and only he, can give out the soup, which the prisoners need to survive. Only those he deems worthy of survival warrant the second helping.

While this scene is perhaps the most well-known, the rest of the chapter presents the *Kapo* in a more balanced way. He can be violent, both physically and verbally, yet also clearly acts in the interest of those underneath him. At one point, an SS man starts to approach the *Kommando* with his whip. The *Kapo* quickly orders Tadek (Borowski's representative in the story) to take his men to dinner and intercepts the officer, appeasing him with words.¹¹⁸ Before this, he heard Tadek whistling the “International.” As Tadek fixates on the *Kapo's* red triangle, the functionary asks roughly what he was singing. In response to Tadek's answer, the *Kapo* asks, “And have you heard this one?”:

And in a hoarse voice he began singing the “Red Flag.” He let his spade drop, his eyes glistened excitedly. The he broke off suddenly, picked up the spade and shook his head, half with contempt, half with pity.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Borowski, p. 70

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 60

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 59.

Borowski's *Kapo* could be seen as Janus-faced, although it is more likely that he is simply playing to the SS. Although he expects his prisoners to work hard and obey him, he also looks out for them, even protecting them. Though apparently a political prisoner, Borowski's *Kapo* is above all a unique individual, not a caricature or political symbol, whose ambiguous character is explored with artistic skill.

Chapter 7

“The Gray Zone”

But by far the most important and influential author and text for this work is Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved*.¹²⁰ In the chapter entitled “The Gray Zone,” Levi explores the complexity of camp life, with a focus on prisoner functionaries. In direct opposition to the traditional historiography, which divides *Kapos* into two distinct camps, Levi argues that *Kapos*, of all categories, belong to this Gray Zone. In the concentration camp, morality cannot be viewed as black and white; instead, everything existed in a gray moral fog.

This term has become so entrenched in perceptions of the Holocaust that a 2001 film concerning *Sonderkommandos* in Auschwitz used it as a title. *The Grey Zone*¹²¹ focuses on a group of Hungarian Jews who took part in the 1944 bombing of Crematoria One and Three. Connected to these men, but set quite clearly apart, is Dr. Miklos Nyiszli, the Hungarian Jewish doctor who assisted Josef Mengele. The men discuss their unique position in the camp structure among themselves, but the film never imposes a moral judgment. Instead, the prevailing tone is one of tragic resignation. Even as the men plan the uprising, there is a sense of hopelessness in their words. Although *Sonderkommandos* were fundamentally different from prisoner functionaries, these two groups shared a similar moral quandary.

¹²⁰ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*. Trans. Raymond Rosenthal. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Originally published in Italian, 1986). Here, p. 36-69.

¹²¹ *The Grey Zone*, 35mm, 108min., Lionsgate Films, USA, 2001.

They lived privileged lives (however long or brief) while those around them perished; they worked for the Nazis against their own prisoners. The message of the film is expressed in its third act. Speaking to a young girl who miraculously survived the last gassing, Hoffmann states:

We can't know what we're capable of, any of us. How can you know what you'd do to stay alive, until you're really asked? I know this now. For most of us, the answer... is anything.¹²²

This is an uncomfortable truth few wish to acknowledge. Yet Levi calls not only for this acknowledgement, but also for the careful study of such prisoners. He is interested in the space between victims and perpetrators, the place where prisoner functionaries reside. Levi states, and this paper has argued, that this space “is studded with obscene or pathetic figures (*sometimes they possess both qualities simultaneously*).”¹²³ Prisoner functionaries, above all else, were undeniably human. Studying them in the way Levi advocates forces one to examine one’s own nature. He writes, “It is indispensable to know [them] if we want to know the human species, if we want to know how to defend our souls when a similar test should once more loom before us.”¹²⁴

Placing *Kapos* into this Gray Zone allows one to study their inherent ambiguities and complexities. According to Levi:

The hybrid class of the prisoner-functionary constitutes [the camp system’s] armature and at the same time its most disquieting feature. It is a gray zone, poorly defined, where the two camps of masters and servants both diverge and converge. This gray zone poses an incredibly complicated internal structure and contains within itself enough to confuse our need to judge.¹²⁵

¹²² *The Grey Zone*.

¹²³ Levi, p. 40. Emphasis mine.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

This understanding- that *Kapos* were hybrids, that they were both *prisoners* and *functionaries*- seems to have been lost in the majority of works on camp life. Levi highlights this here. He notes that “in the Lager, and outside, there exist gray, ambiguous persons, ready to compromise.”¹²⁶ His word choice here is important. “Persons,” he writes. Not “Communists.” Not “Criminals.” Although he mentions these groups, he does so almost in passing. In the Gray Zone, it does not so much matter who one was before he entered; what matters more is how one reacted and adapted to this new world. In such a place “the deprivations to which they were subjected led them to a condition of pure survival, a daily struggle against hunger, cold, fatigue, and blows in which the room for choices (especially moral choices) was reduced to zero.”¹²⁷

This is not to say that no moral judgment can be admitted. It is impossible to read these sources- both by and about functionaries- and not feel moral outrage. But it is futile to group all *Kapos* as either evil and morally depraved or exemplars of antifascist resistance. The challenge is to find a balance- to express judgment while realizing that their choices were limited. Because more than any other prisoner in the camp system, these functionaries, these privileged elites, *could* make choices. They could choose to help their fellow man, choose to give aid, choose to use their limited power to better camp life. The tragedy of the *Kapos*, the Holocaust, and human nature, is that so many chose *not to*.

As it began, this study ends with Siegfried Halbreich, who saved his friends and engineered the death of a stranger. He is a Holocaust Survivor and a *Lagerältester*. Is it

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 42.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 49.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 50.

possible to be both? When his position undoubtedly aided in his survival, how can he possibly *not* be both? Prisoner functionaries were privileged; they ate better, worked less, and exercised power over life and death. But they were still *prisoners*- victims of the camp system and of the Holocaust. This crucial duality must be understood and accepted in order for real gains to be made in the historiography. It is this hybridity that causes so much difficulty in studying this topic. But it is a challenge that must be taken on and overcome.

Prisoner functionaries comprised a minor yet vital part of the concentration camp universe. It is time to study these *Kapos*- not as communists and criminals, not as pawns in a political game, but as *people*. As *individuals* who gained power and used it in various ways. As men and women who reacted to their own personal situations and circumstances in contrasting and distinct ways. As prisoners who wore both their Janus faces simultaneously.

It is time to make a place for Siegfried Halbreich.

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