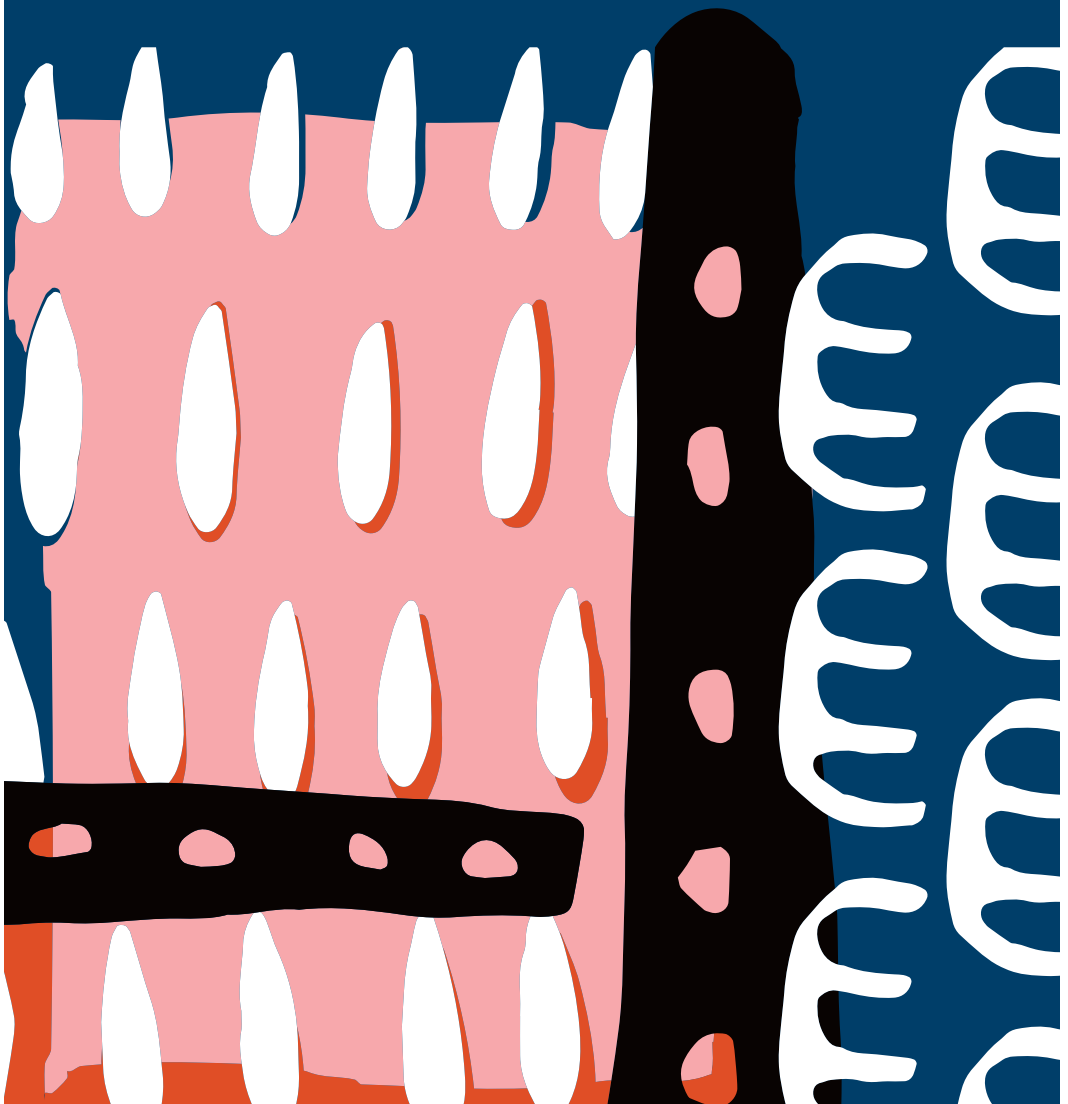


## Section II

# Interacting with Sites of Memory





## Chapter 5

# **Studies in Contrast**



# Studies in Contrast: Notes from the Field

**Dr. Charlotte Schallié** is an Associate Professor of Germanic Studies at the University of Victoria, Canada. Her research interests include post-1945 German literature and film, transcultural studies, Jewish identity in contemporary cultural discourse, and Holocaust education. She served as the director of the European Studies program at the University of Victoria for several years. Charlotte Schallié co-founded “The Future of Holocaust Memorialization: Confronting Racism, Antisemitism, and Homophobia through Memory Work” research collective. Together with Helga Thorson and Andrea van Noord, she was a co-organizer of the Global Connections: Critical Holocaust Education in a Time of Transition conference at the University of Victoria in 2015.

**Dániel Péter Biró** is an Associate Professor/Førsteamanuensis at the Grieg Academy, University of Bergen. After studying in Hungary, Germany, and Austria, he completed his PhD at Princeton University in 2004 and taught Composition and Music Theory at the University of Victoria. He has been commissioned by major festivals and venues and won international composition prizes. He has served as Visiting Professor at Utrecht University (2011) and Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University (2014-2015). He was elected to the College of New Scholars, Scientists, and Artists in the Royal Society of Canada in 2015 and awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2017. His compositions are performed around the world.

In summer 2017, we co-led an international graduate summer field school titled *Narratives of Memory, Migration, and Xenophobia in the European Union and Canada*. Using the Canadian experience with

multiculturalism and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report as comparative touch points, we designed a curriculum that brought together musicians, scholars, and students from the University of Victoria, the University of Toronto, Aix-Marseille Université (France), Eötvös Loránd University (Hungary), and the University of Osnabrück (Germany). Over a period of three weeks, a core group of eleven graduate students, complemented by a research assistant and a student filmmaker — all from diverse disciplinary backgrounds — examined narratives of the past as they shape current political decision-making processes in the face of rising nationalism and xenophobic discourse in Europe and North America.

We opted to visit four Memory Sites in which narratives of the past intersect with present-day nationalistic discourses: Keleti Railway Station (Budapest, Hungary), Ravensbrück Memorial Site (Fürstenberg/Havel, Germany), Memorial Site of Les Milles Camp (Aix-en-Provence, France), and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (Winnipeg, Canada). In each location, we explored the interlayering of cultural narratives of the past and memorialization onto current public policy challenges pertaining to the migration crisis and the resurgence of nationalist politics.

Given that our collaboration with musical scholars and musicians was an integral part of the curriculum design, the UVic research team (Dániel Péter Biró, Helga Hallgrímsdóttir, Charlotte Schallié, and Helga Thorson) commissioned three original pieces of new music to be performed in three locations: the Central European University in Budapest, Ravensbrück Memorial Site in Fürstenberg/Havel, and the Memorial Site of Les Milles Camp near Aix-en-Provence. Through these performances, we raised the question of how music can address human rights concerns and contribute to a critical engagement with social justice.

Our three composers, Andrea Szigetvári, Zaid Jabri, and Dániel Péter Biró, each wrote pieces for site-specific performances that situated the Syrian refugee crisis within a larger historical as well sociopolitical framework. Hungarian composer Andrea Szigetvári wrote a piece, “Marhakaralábé Kantáta” (“Beef Kohlrabi Cantata”) based on a 2015 field recording at Keleti Railway Station in Budapest. At that time, hundreds of refugees were provisionally camping in a metro underpass awaiting permission to continue their journey to Western and Northern Europe. The train station became a representative case study location for us, as it was also the former site of mass deportations of Hungarian

Jews in 1944. A second musical performance — “30 Articles for Viola and Electronics” by Syrian-born composer Zaid Jabri — took place at the site of the former Ravensbrück concentration camp, which was the largest women’s camp in the German Reich. The “30 Articles” referenced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was adopted in the wake of the Second World War, in 1948. The third piece, “Gvul” (גֻּבּוּל; “Border”), by Dániel Péter Biró, was performed at the Memorial Site of Les Milles Camp, a former internment camp that now serves both as a memorial site and as the UNESCO headquarters for the Chair of Education for Citizenship, Human Sciences, and Shared Memories.

At each of these locations, lectures, discussions, and guided tours were scheduled prior to and after the performances. The lectures dealt specifically with the relationships between music history, memory, and cultural trauma. As we were mindful not to create an interdisciplinary hierarchy within our various theoretical and methodological approaches, we co-designed teaching units, together with our local experts that complemented one another. Furthermore, the individual course requirements included both reading lists and listening assignments that tasked the students to personally explore colliding and intersecting narratives between historical injustices, memory politics, and present-day human rights concerns. For example, in Budapest, students were asked to listen to two string quartets, one by Béla Bartók and one by György Kurtág, probing the meaning of ideology and nationalism while comparing these works to Andrea Szigetvári’s new composition created for the makeshift camp at Keleti Railway Station. During a site visit on location with Andrea Szigetvári, students discussed how the composer integrated the spatial experiences of loss and trauma into her own work.

Up to this point, our engagement with the subject matter was entirely academic. We discussed the role of music as a tool of public protest, when—suddenly—the upcoming performance of Andrea Szigetvári’s *Marhakaralábé Kantáta* became a politically contentious issue that caused serious concerns for our concert organizers at the Central European University (CEU). Three months prior to our scheduled concert event, the ruling Fidesz party fast-tracked a law through parliament that could potentially force the Central European University, a foreign-accredited university, to close all of its academic programs. As Szigetvári had taken recordings of both refugee testimonies and right-wing Hungarian demonstrators at Keleti Railway Station and used them as raw material for her piece, the CEU was in a difficult position. Although the university unequivocally promoted freedom of

expression, they did not want to be perceived as a provocateur and risk being the target of a potential future shut-down. After negotiations with the government, a letter of support finally arrived from Michael Ignatieff, the current President of the Central European University, encouraging us to go forward: “I do hope we get an audience for this important initiative ... we have to be prudent, given our situation, but we don’t need to be overcautious.”<sup>1</sup> In the end, a compromise was reached between the university and Dániel Péter Biró, allowing us to go ahead with the event without publicizing it in the media.

In order for us to understand the competing memories and memory politics on display in front of us, we alternated several field trips — including an interactive testimony-based ‘Walk Tour’ in the Jewish Quarter — with seminar sessions at Eötvös Loránd University. The latter were facilitated by sociologist Ildikó Barna and other members of her department presenting lectures on the migration crisis in Hungary. Professor Barna also guided us through a complex set of contradictory historical narratives that were most palpable in the streets of Budapest where a government-sponsored billboard campaign targeted Hungarian-American philanthropist and CEU founder George Soros. What made these posters especially inflammatory was their use of antisemitic tropes showcasing a smiling Soros with the caption “Don’t let Soros have the last laugh”; and this inflammatory slogan was featured underneath a statement that pretended to be science-based: “99% [of Hungarian citizens] reject illegal immigration.” Suddenly, these images were all over Budapest, invading public spaces like at the height of a political campaign. The ubiquitous appearance of the anti-Soros poster campaign suggested that the country’s infrastructure was unable to adequately accommodate migrants and asylum seekers. Yet, as far as we could see during our time in Budapest, the cityscape was almost devoid of migrants; there were just so few of them.<sup>2</sup> It was only after Ildikó Barna gave a seminar presentation on Hungary’s conflicted Holocaust memory that we began to understand how the official version of Hungary’s purported role in the Holocaust was construed as a rationale for the country’s draconian anti-immigrant policies in 2017.

---

1 Email to Dániel Péter Biró, 10 July 2018.

2 According to the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, less than 500 asylum seekers were granted protection during the first half of 2017. (See <https://www.helsinki.hu/wp-content/uploads/ННС-Hungary-asylum-figures-1-August-2017.pdf>).



In stark contrast, our next destination, Berlin-Neukölln, continues to be one of the most ethnically diverse neighbourhoods in Europe. Given that our field school curriculum emphasized community-engaged learning approaches, it was critical for us to interact with refugees and immigrants on location. To that effect, a guided tour of “Berlin-Neukölln from the Newcomer perspective” (organized by the local grassroots organization *querstadtein*) allowed us to experience a brief snapshot of Berlin through the eyes of a Syrian immigrant. At the end of a thoughtful and informative tour, we visited the Sharehaus Refugio community centre and refugee housing. As it also serves as a hub for local pro-immigration initiatives (<http://www.refugio.berlin>), we requested an ad hoc meeting with one of Sharehaus Refugio’s project leaders. This discussion provided us with a fuller understanding of citizen-driven initiatives that foster intercultural dialogue and community integration in Germany’s capital.

During the next leg of our journey, which took us to the Oberhavel district in Brandenburg, several challenges came to the fore. How could we ensure that our fast-paced multilocation study tour would not end up being an accumulation of disjointed experiences and insights? How could we successfully combine the demands of on-location field studies with each participant’s need to carve out time for self-reflection? Consequently, we asked ourselves if we should include more joint on-site learning activities, or make more room for self-guided immersion at each location. Perhaps not surprisingly, these questions emerged as we arrived — together with a graduate class from the University of Osnabrück (Lower Saxony) — at the Ravensbrück Memorial in Fürstenberg/Havel. It did not escape our attention that, arriving directly from Berlin-Neukölln, we created a narrative that assumed a trajectory between Germany’s robust humanitarian response to the refugee crisis in 2017 and its catastrophic failure to protect human rights during the Second World War.

Although we selected this location for the purpose of illuminating the importance of memory work in post-Holocaust Germany, the next two days in Ravensbrück also reminded us that we could not easily assume that narratives of memory and migration were inevitably intertwined or even interrelated. The memorial narrative at Ravensbrück Memorial Site was conveyed to us by Matthias Heyl, the head of educational services, who presented the historical crime scene at Ravensbrück through the lens of individual eyewitness testimonies. Throughout our guided tours, Heyl reclaimed a sense of personal

agency and autonomy for those inmates whose lives had been completely dehumanized, and in some cases, destroyed.

On our second day at Ravensbrück Memorial Site, however, the course participants shifted the discussion from “commemoration” to “understanding.” The difficult question was asked regarding how heritage preservation sites dedicated to commemorate and memorialize state-sponsored mass crimes could become a place of dialogue and meaning. Many of our students (some of whom worked in human rights law or immigrations studies) were eager to redefine their own roles as visitors/eyewitnesses. They were keen on becoming more engaged as “memory interpreters” who would examine the history of Ravensbrück within the framework of pressing human rights concerns. With this learning objective in mind, we all looked forward to the presentation of Zaid Jabri’s “30 Articles for Viola and Electronics,” a contemporary music piece that affirmed the basic principles of human rights in a place that, over 70 years ago, did everything in its power to defy the declaration of such principles. Yet, instead of situating the history of Ravensbrück within the context of current human rights concerns, Ralf Ehler’s strong performance intensified the cognitive dissonance that reverberated for us throughout the entire memorial site. Some of us felt both intellectually and emotionally defeated. Perhaps this place was just too difficult to bear and impossible to understand. Given that we slept in youth hostel rooms that were formerly occupied by female camp guards made the experience all the more difficult.

We, the co-leaders, were at a loss for words. As both of us are Jewish, we decided to celebrate the arrival of Shabbat on Friday evening, inviting our two Jewish students to recite the blessings. It was a small act of defiance cut short by a stubborn breeze that repeatedly blew out the candles.

Despite these challenges, the last day at Ravensbrück provided us with one of the most memorable experiences of the entire field school. Our group of eleven students, complemented by the University of Osnabrück cohort and their instructors Maja and Danny Sturm, all participated in a sharing circle. For many of us who prefer an intellectual, emotionally distant engagement with difficult subjects, the communal setting of a sharing circle was a moving experience; some of us felt the weight of this place, the burden of history, more forcefully than ever before. We were deeply unsettled and perturbed but, at last, we were ready to let go.

Prior to moving on to our next location, the Memorial Site of Les Milles Camp near Aix-en-Provence, the students were given the option

of doing a self-guided tour of Jewish memorial sites in Berlin (most of us decided to visit the Jewish Museum as a group). This was only Day 8 of our field school itinerary, but the experiences on the road had been so intense, and to some extent so physically exhausting, that most of us felt that we had been together for much longer. The students had also bonded over the course of the past week, and they formed fluid group configurations, avoiding clique activities. We were especially pleased to notice that the music students felt completely at ease with learning activities that were outside of their discipline's comfort zone. Likewise, our participants whose own research was grounded in social and/or cultural theory were receptive to thinking "outside the box," immersing themselves in the literature and the practice of contemporary music.

As the two co-instructors responsible for the delivery of this field school, we complemented each other well. Each of us prepared a specific set of reading lists, as well as an outline with core learning objectives, for individual students (depending on their disciplinary background). On the road, we had clearly defined areas of responsibilities as "concert organizer" (Dániel Péter Biró), and "tour leader" (Charlotte Schallié). As the planning and staging of the individual concerts was a time-consuming undertaking, our two schedules as "concert organizer" and "tour planner" were often quite separate from one another. Yet, we always made sure that music students received mentoring throughout the study tour (provided by Dániel Péter Biró, Zaid Jabri, and Andrea Szigetvári) and also had the opportunity to participate more fully in the pre-concert preparation if they chose to do so.

Our third and final destination in Europe was Aix-en-Provence, a tourist attraction that was so visually stunning that we temporarily lost sight of our course objectives. It took a concerted effort to avoid the many sightseeing activities in the city of Paul Cézanne, reminding ourselves that we were there to study the history surrounding of the Memorial Site of Les Milles Camp. As we visited the memorial site of this large French internment and deportation camp (1938 – 1942) outside the city, we drew various parallels to Ravensbrück. Both memorial sites house large collections of artistic works that were created by the inmate populations as a means to resist systematic acts of oppression and dehumanization. Ultimately, the two sites are distinctly different, both in their curatorial choices and their educational messaging. The emphasis in the Memorial Site of Les Milles Camp's main exhibition was twofold: on the one hand, it highlighted the country's failure to save its Jewish population during the Second World War; and,

on the other hand, a large portion of the permanent exhibition was dedicated to genocide prevention. Whereas the educational tour at the Ravensbrück Memorial Site predominantly emphasized survivor testimonies, thus approaching the historical site through a forensic lens, the focus in the Memorial Site of Les Milles Camp was — as our educational expert and guide Coralie Pietrucci pointed out — on social activism and the need to fight hatred and racism in today's world. In other words, the Memorial Site of Les Milles Camp is conceptualized as a Site of Conscience,<sup>3</sup> inspiring its visitors to take action against everyday expressions of prejudice and hatred.

However, when we tried to put this mandate into action, we ran into a similar stumbling block as in Budapest. Prior to the concert that was to be performed on location — featuring an original composition by Dániel Péter Biró — the staff discreetly let us know that we would not be able to announce the concert in the local media. Southern France was on a high security alert during that time period due to elevated threats of terrorism. Therefore, a public event in a memorial site dedicated to the Second World War would have necessitated an additional set of security personnel; and this was deemed far too expensive for us to cover.

As we ended the European portion of our itinerary with this concert that was presented to a small invited audience only, we were reminded again of the intricate layering of history and memory politics. The fact that a Site of Conscience needed to be protected from publicly engaging its community with human rights issues was a difficult lesson to learn during this last stretch of our European journey. The participants of the round-table discussion, including sociologist Helga Hallgrímsdóttir, philosopher Gunnar Hindrichs, pianist Ermis Theodorakis, and composer Dániel Péter Biró, were acutely aware of the overall situation when discussing the social and aesthetic issues of the composition and the performance.

Over the ensuing two weeks, students returned home before then taking off to Winnipeg, the home of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. By the time we reconvened in Winnipeg in mid-August, our group would be one participant short. Our missing student — a PhD candidate in International Human Rights Law, and a citizen of the

---

3 “Sites of Conscience often deal with events in recent living memory and are focused on confronting the history of what happened at that place and spurring visitors to reflect on history’s contemporary implications” (<https://whc.unesco.org/document/165700>, page 15).

Republic of Côte d' Ivoire — could not join us because he was unable to obtain a visitor visa to Canada. This restrictive decision, made by the Canadian government, reignited a passionate conversation among the field school participants about racism in immigration politics. Once again, the unforeseen circumstances surrounding our study tour became valuable teachable moments and learning experiences.

Our three-day visit at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, guided by Interpretive Program Developer Sarah Watkins, addressed Canada's Residential School history, the question of reconciliation as a movement of hope or of guilt, and the curatorial choices surrounding the public exhibition of difficult knowledge. The individual lectures covered Indigenous Rights but also presented testimonies given by genocide survivors. Interactive activities included a blanket exercise, a sharing circle, and a dialogue activity. Throughout all of these teaching and learning units, students were encouraged to draw parallels or articulate distinctions between Canadian and European responses to human rights violations. Meanwhile, our music students had to excuse themselves from some of the seminar sessions in order to start rehearsing their own upcoming performances at the SALT New Music Festival and Symposium in Victoria.

The final segment of our field school consisted of four days in Victoria. It was our study tour reunion, as almost all our contributors — except for our student who was denied entrance into Canada, and two musicians who had different engagements — were able to join us again. Our field school student, violist Emily MacCallum was the solo performer in two pieces — *Engrenages: for solo violin and electronics* and *Void* — that were written by compositions students Kimberley Farris-Manning and Adam Scime, both of whom were also field school participants. This event was scheduled in tandem with a two-day *Narratives of Memory, Migration, and Xenophobia in the European Union and Canada* symposium that constituted the final research activity of our field school project. At the symposium, all participating students presented their own research to a local audience of students, faculty, and community members. Their presentation topics included: "Borders and Body Politics"; "Xenophobia: Paving the Road Toward State Violence"; "Unpacking Jewish Identity in the Wake of Ravensbrück"; "Countering Radicalization: The Role Each of Us Plays"; and "Memories of the Holocaust through Individual Narratives." The topics reflected the broad spectrum of approaches and research interests represented in our field school student population.

For the two co-leaders, *Narratives of Memory* was an extremely timely and rewarding experience. The course brought together European and Canadian students, musicians, and scholars to facilitate a fruitful exchange built around intercultural dialogues. The field school experience provided us with a deeper understanding of the interlayering of cultural narratives of the past onto current public policy challenges relating to multiculturalism and diversity. For our musicians and music scholars, the field school experience was truly unique, as it allowed them to take contemporary music out of the realm of the specialists, giving it a new social urgency and relevance. Our students from the humanities, social sciences, and law were introduced to arts-based research, and were simultaneously exposed to an interdisciplinary framework that conceptualizes music as a tool for human rights education. What made this field school so meaningful for both of us is that we took the classroom into the community, and then in reverse, drew on our community-based findings to articulate new pathways in cross-disciplinary scholarship.