

Survivors' Coalitions. Shared Efforts to Conceptualize the Holocaust on the Part of Jewish and Gentile Survivors of Nazi Persecution, 1944–1962

Presenter: Markus Wegewitz

In this paper, I aim to examine how the murder of European Jewry was discussed by the associations and networks established among survivors of National Socialism, bringing together both Jewish and gentile survivors. Emerging long before a shared basic knowledge of the most recent past was established, those coalitions mark some of the first attempts to understand of what later would be named the Holocaust. Social and material circumstances after liberation, differing perspectives on the politics of memory, and the radically different experiences of persecution and survival meant that creating a common understanding required great efforts. It resulted in political activities, including lobbying for indemnities, and campaigns for justice and for the creation of memorial sites. Although there is an evolving field of aftermath studies concerned with the agency of the survivors both on a biographical level and beyond, the history of survivors' coalitions has not been sufficiently researched yet. I explore those coalitions on the basis of two interlinked biographies. Firstly, I examine the Dutch journalist Nicolaas Rost (1896–1967), a survivor of Dachau who championed the research of the extermination of Dutch Jewry after 1945. Secondly, I focus on Miriam Novitch (1908–1990), one of the co-founders of the Beit Lohamei Haghetaot in Israel. She established an extensive post-war network, which aided her in collecting testimony and documents.

Looking closely at survivors' coalitions reveals a resilient form of political activism, which transcended borders and the Cold War divide. It poses questions about the development of transnational networks, about activism derived from historical experience and the different modes of representation, and conceptualization of the Holocaust that the members of such coalitions chose to develop and utilize.