

Marieke Meeuwenoord, *Het hele leven is hier een wereld op zichzelf. De geschiedenis van Kamp Vught* (Dissertatie Universiteit van Amsterdam 2011; Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2014, 430 pp., ISBN 978 90 234 8912 2); Eva Moraal, *Als ik morgen niet op transport ga... Kamp Westerbork in beleving en herinneringen* (Dissertatie Universiteit van Amsterdam 2013; Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2014, 464 pp., ISBN 978 90 234 8902 3).

These two books represent reworked versions of *promotieonderzoeken* carried out under the auspices of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies and the Universiteit van Amsterdam. Both projects were conceived as in-depth studies of perhaps the two best-known camps in the Netherlands during the German occupation. Westerbork near Hooghalen in Drenthe was established by the Dutch authorities in 1939 as a central camp to house newly arrived refugees from Nazi Germany, but it was to become infamous as the primary transit camp for the majority of the 107,000 Jews deported to the East between 1942 and 1944. The camp remained in existence after the last transports had departed in late 1944 and still had a few hundred inmates when it was liberated by the advancing Allied forces in April 1945. Conversely, Kamp Vught had a much shorter existence of only twenty months from early 1943 until the late summer of 1944. Although it held Jewish prisoners, most of whom were ultimately also sent to Westerbork, it was different insofar as it also housed other types of inmates. While the camps undoubtedly served different purposes, it is instructive to compare the methods used by these two authors in constructing what are the first comprehensive social histories of sites that have become icons of Nazi occupation and emblematic of the *Jodenvervolging*.

In her detailed history of Vught, Marieke Meeuwenoord has gone to great pains in attempting a history which encompasses not only the inmates of the camp, but also the guards and the interactions between the two groups. As she points out, in its short life, the camp had a number of parallel functions, incarcerating political prisoners, those being held on remand for investigation by the Sipo/SD and hostages. These numbered around 20,000 in total and were augmented by approximately 12,000 Jews, some of whom were temporarily protected by their particular skills and put to work inside the camp. The camp was also unusual (when compared with other German concentration camps) in having female inmates and thus also female guards. In her analysis, Meeuwenoord is keen to stress the importance of looking not just at the sources left to us by the (surviving) former inmates, but also at the evidence about the German and Dutch functionaries inside

and outside the camp. These men and women have previously been no more than cyphers in the existing narratives – commanding at most a few lines of basic description – yet their dismissal in this fashion precludes any real understanding of the particularities of Vught. With more scholarly attention being paid to both Germans and non-Germans involved in crimes associated with the Nazi regime, and specifically to female perpetrators, this analysis represents a timely and apposite examination of the underlying sociology of Camp Vught. The study also highlights the role played by those inmates who were nominated as camp leaders by the Nazis. In Vught, it appears that the German commanders preferred to use their own countrymen as intermediaries – even if they were Jews. In many respects this was a pattern that was repeated in other camps and in other occupied countries.

The book begins by examining the origins of the camp and the key role played by Generalkommissar Hanns Albin Rauter in its inception and its various functions. Subsequent chapters then look at different groups of inmates; the students, the political prisoners, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the intellectuals and hostages, the 'a-socials', the Jews and the women – how they came to be in Vught, how they organised their lives inside the camp, and how they were treated by the guards. Indeed, it is the camp commanders and guards and their fates after the liberation that informs the latter part of the book. These included both German and Dutch nationals and there is an extensive discussion of the punishments meted out by Dutch judicial institutions to these individuals. Interesting in its own right for the light it sheds on Dutch attitudes to camps guards, the study also provides a wealth of detail that will contribute to comparative studies on the behaviour of camp personnel in other parts of Nazi occupied Europe.

In her study of Westerbork, Eva Moraal has analysed 112 memoirs, diaries and other texts written by former inmates of the camp, and if anything, been even more assiduous than Meeuwenoord in using her sources to speak for themselves, in order to provide both a narrative strand to the analysis, and to set the agenda for the issues discussed. After an introduction that provides an overview of the sources used and a brief outline of Westerbork's origins and early history, the majority of the book is given over to different aspects of camp life. This includes what might be regarded as standard topics like arrival and registration, life in the barracks, hygiene, medical facilities, family life and work, but the author is also prepared to raise issues about taboos such as sex and sexuality, even if these remain largely hidden in contemporary sources.

This is very much a study written from the perspective of the inmates. There is an extensive discussion about young people in the camp under the heading 'our youth was stolen from us' and also the camp population's perception of their guards. This includes a commentary on the female perpetrators (*daders*) as well as the (male) camp commanders and staff. More surprising is the degree of contact that the inmates had with what Moraal

calls bystanders (*omstanders*). This includes the Dutch Marechaussee who were in charge of the camp until 1942, but also the local population that did business in the camp, such as food suppliers and tradesmen. Although seldom mentioned in contemporary accounts, these regular visitors were known to have smuggled letters and even people out of the camp, and it is also clear that there was a black market trade for food (for those who could afford it) with local farmers. Although contact with such people was supposedly restricted, this study shows that they were very much a presence in the camp. Towards the end of the chapter, Moraal compares perceptions of *omstanders* in memoirs and recollections during and immediately after the war with those of a much later date, suggesting that as the concept of the 'bystander' became established in the literature, so survivors re-evaluated their role. She concludes that there is a difference in tone over time, with later authors saying nothing positive about the bystanders and decrying the lack of help from outside, while earlier texts spend more time on why they (the victims) had not done more to resist or attempt to escape.

A final substantive chapter goes back to the origins of the site as a central camp for refugees in 1939 in order to explain the tensions between the German Jews, who were the first inmates and became the core of the camp administration, and the much larger number of Dutch Jews who were arrested and sent to the camp as the Germans began the deportation programme to the East. The animosity between the two groups has been chronicled before but this account gives a greater level of detail. The German Jews who had established positions when the camp had been a refugee centre continued in those roles when it transferred to German control. As with Vught, it appears that the Nazis preferred to work with other Germans, even if they were Jews. Positions as barrack leaders or being in command of specific functions within the camp meant that these former refugees had much greater power and used it to discriminate against the Dutch Jews who, they claimed, had done little to help them before the Nazis had arrived. Here again, Moraal goes deeper into the literature to compare how these relationships and animosities were dealt with in texts written soon after the liberation as opposed to those written in later years.

Both these books have a great deal to offer the reader in terms of their detailed understanding of the ways Vught and Westerbork functioned – and also how they have been written about subsequently. Comparisons between these two studies, and also with those of other camps elsewhere in Nazi-occupied Europe, will undoubtedly improve our understanding of the social history of these much talked about, but under-researched elements of the *Jodenvervolging*. My one reservation is that neither study contains a summary in either German or English that would have made their work accessible to a much wider scholarly audience. One can only trust that both authors have other plans to disseminate their conclusions in other forms in the future.