The *Börgermoorlied*: The Journey of a Resistance Song throughout Europe, 1933–1945

Élise Petit

ABSTRACTS

Das Börgermoorlied, Moorsoldatenlied oder Lied der Moorsoldaten entstand im nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager Börgermoor im Sommer 1933. Komponiert und gedichtet von kommunistischen Häftlingen in einem der ersten KZs des Dritten Reiches, kann dieses Lied als ein einzigartiges Beispiel für die europäische und internationale Zirkulation von Musik vor, während und nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg gelten. Ausgehend von den ersten Konzentrationslagern und über die Vernichtungslager von Auschwitz-Birkenau hinaus wurde dieses Deportationslied in ganz Europa verbreitet, und in London ebenso gesungen wie von den Internationalen Brigaden im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg oder in französischen Internierungslagern. Dieser Beitrag geht der Geschichte und Entwicklung dieses Liedes von seinen Ursprüngen bis heute nach. Er untersucht zudem die unterschiedliche Verwendung des Liedes von verschiedenen Künstlern und in unterschiedlichen Kontexten, die dazu beitrug, einen spezifischen Kommunikationsraum zu schaffen sowie den geistigen Widerstand gegen den Totalitarismus zu befördern.

The *Börgermoorlied*, *Moorsoldatenlied* or *Lied der Moorsoldaten*, better known in English as *The Peat Bog Soldiers* or *The Soldiers of the Moor*, was born under the Third Reich in the camp of Börgermoor during the summer of 1933. Created by communist inmates in one of the first Nazi camps, this song represents a unique example of a European and even international musical circulation before, during, and after the Second World War. From the first Nazi camps in Germany to the death camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau, London, the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), and French internment camps, this Song of deportation spread throughout Europe. This article traces the history and evolution of the song from its origin to

Comparativ | Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung 28 (2018) Heft 1, S. 65–81.

nowadays. It also shows how this song was used by many artists, from the early camps to the exile, to help to build a "space of communication" and spiritual resistance against totalitarianism.

The *Börgermoorlied*, *Moorsoldatenlied* or *Lied der Moorsoldaten*, better known in English as *The Peat Bog Soldiers* or *The Soldiers of the Moor*, was born under the Third Reich in the camp of Börgermoor during the summer of 1933. It offers a unique example of European musical circulation before, during, and after the Second World War. From the first Nazi camps in Germany to the death camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau, London, the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), and French internment camps, this *Song of deportation* spread throughout Europe and helped build a "space of communication" and spiritual resistance against totalitarianism.

The presence of music in concentration camps was emphasized by Nazi authorities in April 1933, in a propagandist pseudo-news report shot at the Oranienburg camp[1] that presents an inmate ensemble consisting of a violin, guitar, and three mandolins. A few months later, the first accounts by freed political opponents or escapees from the first "preventive detention camps" (*Schutzhaftlager*) confirmed the use of music for propaganda purposes. They also spoke of the role certain songs played in creating symbolic spaces of solidarity or resistance.[2] In 1948, the violonist Simon Laks and the saxophonist René Coudy were the first to bear witness after the war to the existence of an official orchestra in the men's camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, and to provide details regarding its activities.[3] That same year, two collections of songs composed in the camps and ghettoes were published.[4] In the 1950s, Aleksander Kulisiewicz, the composer who survived Sachsenhausen, collected hundreds of songs from dozens of camps, and gave numerous recitals throughout the world to introduce people to this musical repertory of spiritual resistance to the Nazi program of destruction.

The role and presence of music in the concentration camp system began to draw the interest of researchers and musicians only during the late 1980s. After *Music in Terezin*[5] by Jožа Karas, the Czech musicologist Milan Kuna published in 1993 his *Musik an der Grenze des Lebens*.[6] While he was solely interested in Czech deportees, Kuna provided the first accounts of the destructive role of music in concentration camps. Since then, Guido Fackler's "*Des Lagers Stimme." Musik im KZ*[7] has emerged as the work of reference. This

1 Die neuesten Aufnahmen aus dem Konzentrationslager Oranienburg, April 1933.
2 See, for example, G. Seger, Oranienburg. Erster authentischer Bericht eines aus dem Konzentrationslager Geflüchteten, Karlsbad 1934, or Wolfgang Langhoff, Die Moorsoldaten, Zürich 1935.
3 S. Laks, Music of Another World, Evanston 2000.
4 S. Kaczerginski, Lider fun di Getos un Lagern, New York 1948, and Lazar Weiner, Songs of the Concentration Camps, New York 1948.
5 J. Karas, Music in Terezin: 1941–1945, New York 1985.
6 M. Kuna, Musik an der Grenze des Lebens. Musikerinnen und Musiker aus böhmischen Ländern in nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern und Gefängnissen, Frankfurt a. M. 1993.
7 G. Fackler, „Des Lagers Stimme." Musik im KZ. Alltag und Häftlingskultur in den Konzentrationslagern 1933 bis 1936, Bremen 2000.

meticulous study, which focuses primarily on camps from 1933 to 1936, offers a first attempt to identify the different functions of music within the camps. Fackler's book was followed by other complementary works, such as Shirli Gilbert's *Music in the Holocaust*[8] in 2005, or more recently Juliane Brauer's *Musik im Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen*.[9] In the wake of these works, our research focuses more specifically on the destructive uses of music in the concentration camp system, especially by the SS.[10]

While no written evidence from the Reich has been found regarding the creation of musical ensembles in the camps, inmate orchestras were nevertheless established on the orders of commanding officers in almost every camp, and varied greatly in numbers. In Treblinka, the first ensemble consisted of a mandolin, violin, and wind instrument, while the Auschwitz I orchestra numbered over one hundred and twenty musicians in 1944.[11] The function of a "camp orchestra" (*Lagerkapelle*) was first and foremost to synchronize the steps of prisoners as they left with their work units, in an effort to facilitate counting them as they exited the camp gate in the morning and returned in the evening. The orchestra was also requisitioned to accompany executions and punishments,[12] or to entertain the SS. Music chiefly served the machine of physical and moral destruction, however from the very first days of captivity in the camps, collective singing established spaces for communication and spiritual and artistic resistance for certain inmates.

The origins of a resistance song

The *Börgermoorlied* was born in the Börgermoor camp, one of the first *Emslandlager* established in Emsland in Lower Saxony. These fifteen camps or so were initially *Schutzhaftlager* that held political opponents from the Rhine-Ruhr region; Börgermoor became a *Strafgefangenenlager* ("disciplinary camp") in 1934, and then a *Kriegsgefangenenlager* ("prisoner of war camp") in 1939. When the song was born in 1933, the camp was still partially under construction, and the inmates were German political or religious opponents under the surveillance of SS recruits.

The "Night of Long Slats" (Die "Nacht der langen Latten")

One Sunday in August 1933, the prisoners were given permission to smoke for the first time since arriving at the camp. The tobacco that had been seized was given back to them for a period of two hours, after which they would have to return whatever had not been

8 S. Gilbert, Music in the Holocaust. Confronting Life in the Nazi Ghettos and Camps, Oxford 2005.

9 J. Brauer, Musik im Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen, Berlin 2009.

10 On this subject see E. Petit, Velléités et utopies de rupture : Les politiques musicales en Allemagne, de 1933 à 1949, PhD diss. in Music History directed by G. Mathon, Université Paris-Est, 2012. Music in the camp system is also the focus of our current research, which is being conducted at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

11 Gilbert, Music in the Holocaust, pp. 178-179.

12 The most famous example is the hanging of Hans Bonarewitz in Mauthausen in July 1942; photographs taken by SS members show the orchestra playing to accompany him to the gallows.

smoked. For a moment the inmates enjoyed a pleasure that had been forbidden during the weeks of degrading treatment and terror inflicted by the SS. It was a favorable moment for establishing social bonds, as the actor Wolfgang Langhoff bore witness:

> *On that Sunday afternoon we developed stronger bonds of friendship. We held each other tight around the tables, spoke of home, our families, our political activity, and little by little the stupor that had hung over us since our arrival in camp melted away*.[13]

Amid this "festive mood,"[14] Langhoff and other inmates thought of organizing sporting activities every Sunday, in order to reinforce the bonds between inmates and preserve a human dignity indispensable to survival. Contacts were exchanged between prisoners from different barracks, and a form of talent sharing was organized. Langhoff was presented to Johann Esser, who was a Ruhr miner, German Communist Party (KPD) militant, and author of poems published in the local newspaper *Ruhr-Echo*, one of the party's organs. The idea of composing a tune to serve as the camp's "song" thus saw the light of day.

The two hours of euphoria from a seeming return to a forgotten reality ended with the return of the unconsumed tobacco.

> *The comrades paced inside the barracks with their hands in their pockets, looking for 'invisible' hiding places to safeguard the tobacco they intended to keep*.[15]

Only a tiny amount was returned, and the barracks were later searched by the SS, which initially didn't find any of the hiding places. They came back at the end of a night of drinking and ransacked barracks 9 and 10. Closets were thrown to the ground and the tobacco was found, but none of the prisoners informed on one another. The SS returned armed with slats they had found in the camp and blindly struck the inmates, provoking a state of general panic. That night, which the inmates would call the "Night of the Long Slats," would end with a number of serious injuries and dozens of lighter wounds.

The Zirkus Konzentrazani

The violence and repression of the SS only reinforced the intention of Langhoff and other inmates to organize unifying events on Sundays. They requested and obtained authorization from the Kommandantur to organize a circus show. Opinions were mixed about this initiative among the camp population. Some worried that the show would be photographed by the SS and used by the Ministry of Propaganda to minimize the poor treatment in the camps. For others, this event would be a decisive opportunity to prove to the SS that the inmates were not "subhuman" (*Untermenschen*), in the hopes that some guards would question the validity of the mistreatment they were inflicting. Finally, or-

13 W. Langhoff, Die Moorsoldaten. 13 Monate Konzentrationslager, Berlin 1947, p. 139.
14 Ibid., p. 140.
15 Ibid., p. 143.

ganizing rehearsals at night provided the participants with an unhoped for opportunity to gather, which was usually strictly forbidden.

Langhoff called for volunteers inside the camp and received many propositions: acrobats, jugglers, gymnasts, boxers, comedians, musicians, singers, and imitators of animal cries. From the convergence of this talent was born the *Zirkus Konzentrazani*, in reference to the Sarrasani circus that was greatly popular in Germany at the time. The representation took place on August 27, 1933.[16] All prisoners and SS had to attend. The show, which lasted nearly three hours, enjoyed the use of a spacious layout, as a large sandy space was cleared between the barracks and transformed into a circus ring. The spaces surrounding the ring were marked off for the occupants of each barrack. Twenty prisoners were designated to seat the spectators, and wore long rows of shiny buttons sown onto their uniforms for the occasion. The guards and commanding officer were placed facing the sun to prevent them from taking photos. A clown circulated through this heterogeneous audience to sell "bog ice cream" – what was in fact large portions of peat. The Konzentrazani Director then made his entrance with a whip in hand and a cardboard tube as a hat, his outfit decorated with bits of wood and rubber washers. He announced the acts and accompanied the performance. The program included gymnasts, two clowns, club jugglers, a comedian, and the *Moor Girls*, five cross-dressed prisoners. There were also wrestlers, acrobats, a humorous boxing match, and a number with a broom and sheet serving as a stork, which answered questions from the audience by nodding its head. Finally there were the "bog soldiers," who parodied the continual obligation of inmates to count themselves or sing upon any occasion. Musical interludes were played by a Turkish crescent (*Schellenbaum*) made of tin cans, a series of makeshift violins constructed by the inmates, and a diatonic accordion. The final numbers were songs for four voices sung a capella by a choir, with the last one being the *Börgermoorlied*.

Das Börgermoorlied

A few nights after the "Night of the Long Slats," Johann Esser had given Langhoff a six-stanza poem denouncing camp living conditions and expressing hope of a future liberation. It referred to the prisoners as "bog soldiers" (*Moorsoldaten*), alluding to their military appearance each time they moved about the camp, with their spades over their shoulders like rifles. Langhoff derived a chorus from it, and reworked some of the turns of phrase to avoid censorship by camp authorities.

1 – Wohin auch das Auge blicket,
Moor und Heide nur ringsum,
Vogelsang uns nicht erquicket,
Eichen stehen kahl und krumm.

16 A comparable albeit shorter show took place the preceding Sunday in front of a portion of the inmates.

Chorus: *Wir sind die Moorsoldaten und*
ziehen mit dem Spaten ins Moor !

2 – Hier in dieser öden Heide
Ist das Lager aufgebaut.
Wo wir fern von jeder Freude
Hinter Stacheldraht verstaut.

3 – Morgens ziehen die Kolonnen
In das Moor zur Arbeit hin.
Graben bei dem Brand der Sonne,
Doch zur Heimat steht der Sinn.

4 – Heimwärts, heimwärts jeder sehnet,
Nach den Eltern, Weib und Kind.
Manche Brust ein Seufzer dehnet,
Weil wir hier gefangen sind.

5 – Auf und nieder geh'n die Posten,
Keiner, keiner kann hindurch.
Flucht wird nur das Leben kosten
Vierfach ist umzäunt die Burg.

6 – Doch für uns gibt es kein Klagen,
Ewig kann's nicht Winter sein.
Einmal werden froh wir sagen:
Heimat, du bist wieder mein!

Final chorus: *Dann ziehn die Moorsoldaten*
Nicht mehr mit dem Spaten ins Moor.

Langhoff then set out to find a composer that could put the poem to music. One of his political acquaintances, the twenty-five-year-old sales representative and amateur musician Rudi Goguel, offered to create a version for four voices, should he find the time. Goguel wrote about composing the song:

> *So I was secretly put in the infirmary so I could put my melody on paper. It wasn't easy because some prisoners, who were tasked with painting the building, worked from morning to night while whistling and singing* [under SS compulsion]. *In three days the music was composed, and the separate voices were transcribed on paper*.[17]

17 Rudi Goguel, account reproduced in I. Lammel and G. Hofmeyer (eds.), Lieder aus den faschistischen Konzentrationslagern, Leipzig 1962, pp. 16-17. In an interview with Roger Arnould published in *Le Patriote résistant* 446

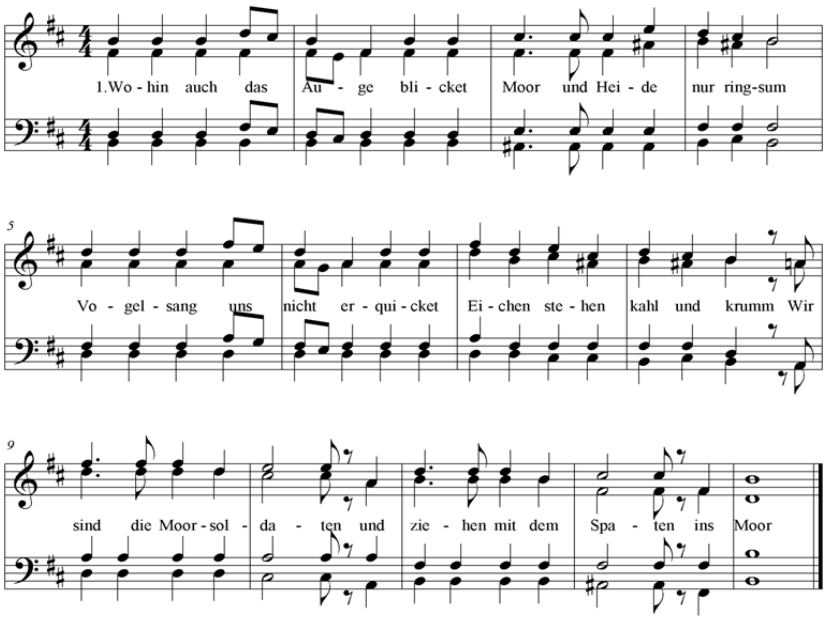

Fig. 1 *Das Börgermoorlied*, original version

Goguel wrote the song for four a capella male voices, and did not think of it as a "battle song" (*Kampflied*), which was the usual repertory for communist laborer choirs, but rather as a lament. The first three notes, which are repeated, introduce from the very beginning the mournful attitude that reigns over Börgermoor and its surroundings: "Far and wide as the eye can wander/Heath and bog are everywhere." This device reappears in the third measure. The four-beat rhythm is of course that of a march, but the minor mode seeks to convey the tiredness of the inmates, who are under forced military discipline. In contrast, the chorus begins with a jump to the sixth, and uses the major mode as well as dotted rhythms to proclaim their cohesion, "We are the peat bog soldiers" ("*Wir sind die Moorsoldaten*"), before returning to the minor shortly afterwards for "Marching with our spades to the moor" ("*und ziehen mit dem Spaten ins Moor*"). The last chorus is sung more quickly, and announces their future liberation: "No more the peat bog soldiers/ Will march with our spades to the moor" ("*Dann ziehn die Moorsoldaten/Nicht mehr mit dem Spaten ins Moor*"). To convey this optimism, Goguel also modified the song's final chord, which ends in the major mode. The strong beats of the second phrase, which fall on the *nicht*, encourage the placing of emphasis during the performance, for example by

(1976), Goguel pointed out that he had agreed to be wounded by his comrades in order to be interned in the infirmary for three days.

tapping one's foot.[18] The song's general aesthetic shows a strong influence from the repertory of Communist workers' songs during the Weimar years (*Arbeiterlieder*), which were themselves steeped in the melodic colors of the Soviet Ally.[19] While Langhoff oversaw the preparation of the circus show, Goguel taught the singing. He gathered sixteen choir members, mostly from the Solingen workers' choir, and organized secret daily rehearsals in barrack 8 after work time. The choir members sang *pianissimo*, while a lookout informed of any threat of SS intrusion by whistling.
The song, which was the final number of the *Zirkus Konzentrazani*, enjoyed great success among the inmates. Here is Goguel's account of the performance that was staged:

> *We were singing, and beginning with the second stanza the thousand or so prisoners started to hum the chorus with us. The chorus became more intense with each stanza, and during the last stanza, the SS, who were there with their commanding officer, sang in harmony with us, because it also clearly spoke to them as "peat bog soldiers." After the words [of the last chorus] "No more the peat bog soldiers/Will march with our spades to the moor," the sixteen singers stuck their spades in the sand and left the ring; the spades left in that boggy ground looked like burial crosses*.[20]

For Langhoff – who spoke of nine hundred prisoners – the show itself was a victory, a form of spiritual resistance to the process of dehumanization:

> *The SS were, so to speak, our guests. We others, who no longer led a life of men, we had dared for a few hours to decide on our acts ourselves, without having to obey orders or instructions, exactly as though we had been our own masters, and the concentration camp had never existed.*[21]

The *Börgermoorlied* also enjoyed unexpected success with the SS. In the following days some of them even ordered a copy of the sheet music from Goguel and Langhoff to send to their families.[22] The song appeared well-suited to become the camp song (*Lagerlied*), but it was ultimately forbidden by the Kommandantur. The inmates continued to sing it despite the prohibition, sometimes even upon request by certain members of the SS. It was also sung – in a low voice – by new arrivals in certain barracks. Heinz Junge gave the following account of his first night spent in Börgermoor in 1935:

> *A voice came from somewhere, I couldn't tell where exactly, and said: '"Comrades! I am welcoming those who have just arrived today. We wholeheartedly welcome you within our*

18 On this see the account by Heinz Junge in G. Probst-Effah, Lieder gegen „das Dunkel in den Köpfen". Untersuchungen zur Folkbewegung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Essen 1995, p. 51.
19 H. Eisler, Bericht über die Entstehung eines Arbeiterliedes, in: H. Eisler, Schriften und Dokumente, vol. 1, Munich 1973, p. 276.
20 Goguel, in: Lammel and Hofmeyer, Lieder, p. 17.
21 Langhoff, Die Moorsoldaten, p. 172.
22 Ibid., p. 183.

> *circle of comrades.* […] *You will now hear our peat bog song." Then someone in another corner of the room sang the song.*[23]

Through its form, aesthetic, and the conditions of its production, the *Börgermoorlied* opened the way for the composition of *Lagerlieder* in other camps. A sense of competition gradually set in, prompting the commanding officers of each camp to come up with their own song, such as in Sachsenhausen (1937), Dachau (1938) or Buchenwald (1938):

> *The camp's commanding officer, whose name was Rödl, got it in his head that like other camps Buchenwald had to have our own song, to be performed collectively. The order was thus given by loudspeaker: "Everyone listen. We need a song, a Lagerlied, every other camp has had theirs for a long time! The person who composes it will receive ten marks. But it has to be ready in three days, or the whole camp will have nothing to eat."*[24]

In three days, the Austrian Jewish prisoners Fritz Löhner-Beda, who was Franz Lehár's librettist, and the singer Hermann Leopoldi composed the *Buchenwaldlied*, which remains one of the best-known and emblematic songs today. A common structure is present in almost all of these *Lagerlieder*, primarily in the lyrics: an account of the inhuman living conditions, nostalgia for family or hearth, and then hope for a future liberation and return home, announced by a tonality in the major mode.

A dual European circulation

The journey of the *Börgermoorlied* across Europe all the way to the United States was unique in that the song experienced an almost simultaneous dual-circulation – within the camp system as well as in the countries where German political refugees went into exile – in two distinct musical versions.

Hanns Eisler's version: on the road to exile

In 1933 Börgermoor was a "preventive detention" camp (*Schutzhaftlager*). Some of the inmates were therefore liberated after serving a sentence ranging from a few weeks to a few months. At the same time, a number of inmates copied down the lyrics or the sheet music beginning the day after the *Zirkus Konzentrazani* show. The song was sometimes entitled *Lagerlied von Börgermoor*, and more frequently *Wir sind die Moorsoldaten* or *Die Moorsoldaten*. Some illustrated their sheets with a soldier sticking a spade in the ground. These documents were sometimes hidden in shoes, the lining of jackets, or behind drawings offered to family members during the rare authorized visits to the camp.[25] They also secretly found their way out of Börgermoor and the neighboring camp of Esterwegen,

23 Probst-Effah, Lieder gegen „das Dunkel in den Köpfen" (note 18), p. 51.
24 K. Eschke, Wie das Buchenwald-Lied entstand, in: Patrioten 1 (1975), p. 63.
25 Ibid., p. 52.

and immediately spread in circles opposed to the regime. After passing through the Lichtenburg concentration camp, Langhoff was finally freed in 1934 and emigrated to Switzerland. The following year in Zurich he published his account, which was entitled *Die Moorsoldaten. 13 Monate Konzentrationslager. Unpolitscher Tatsachenbericht*. The work was an immediate success – eight editions in six months – and was translated into a number of languages, including French. Langhoff reconstructed the sheet music from memory, with a great many mistakes.

On November 14, 1933, the Dutch newspaper *Het Volk* published a translation of the lyrics on its front page.[26] On April 14, 1934, the weekly *Der Gegen-Angriff* reproduced the original lyrics in its Paris edition, and referred to the song as a "*Kampflied*."[27] That same year the melody travelled from Oranienburg to Prague when Erich Mirek, a former member of the Agit-Prop troupe *Das rote Sprachrohr*, sang it to his friends whom he had joined in exile.[28] The aesthetic, which was very similar to the songs created by the troupe during the Weimar Republic, quickly proved appealing. A facsimile reproduction of an illustrated version made in Börgermoor was reproduced in the Prague newspaper *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* on March 8, 1935,[29] and the song was diffused a capella on the Radio Prague channel. That same year while passing through London, the composer Hanns Eisler and singer Ernst Busch met a German who had been "freed" from Börgermoor, who gave them the lyrics and sang them the melody with a few approximations.[30] Eisler believed it right away to be "one of the most beautiful revolutionary songs from the international workers' movement."[31] Convinced that it was a collective work, he assumed that the authors had adapted a new text to a preexisting melody. The first musical phrase immediately reminded him of a song from the Thirty Years' War, of which no record remains today.[32] He believed that a chorus modulated in a major key over words filled with hope was characteristic of Soviet funeral marches composed in honor of the revolutionaries of 1905.

Eisler kept four couplets (1, 2, 5 et 6)[33] from the a capella version that was sung to him, and produced an arrangement of *Börgermoorlied* in the vein of the *Kampflieder* that were so dear to him: the two-beat meter emphasized the character of the march, as did the numerous descending intervals (a fourth at the beginning of the melody, a third in measures 5-6 and 13-14, and a fifth in measures 7 and 15). Finally, the chorus sung

26 Lied der Gevangenen, in: Het volk. Dagblad voor de arbeiderspartij, 14 November 1933.

27 Emu (pen name), Die SS-Meuterei von Börgermoor, in: Der Gegen-Angriff. Antifaschistische Wochenschrift, Paris issue 11 (April 14, 1934) 15, p. 3.

28 L. Crome, Unbroken: Resistance and Survival in the Concentration Camps, London 1988, p. 146.

29 Hinter Stacheldraht und Kerkergittern. Ein deutscher Arbeiter erzählt, in: AIZ 14 (March 8, 1935) no. 10, p. 153.

30 Lammel and Hofmeyer, Lieder (note 17), p. 18. According to the authors, he was apparently a Gestapo informant.

31 Eisler, Bericht (note 19), p. 275.

32 The lyrics cited by Eisler are: „Kinder hört wie der Sturmwind brauset / Brauset ins Fenster / Kinder wo der Tilly hauset / Hausen Gespenster." Some have wrongly seen in this a reprise of the song Horch, Kind, horch, which may have borrowed a similar melody.

33 In later versions the second couplet would most often be absent.

two times in succession made more systematic use of dotted rhythms. The singing was written for an accompanied solo voice, with a counterpoint in the chorus that could be performed by a piano or a men's choir. It was transposed into a lower tone to adapt to Busch's range.

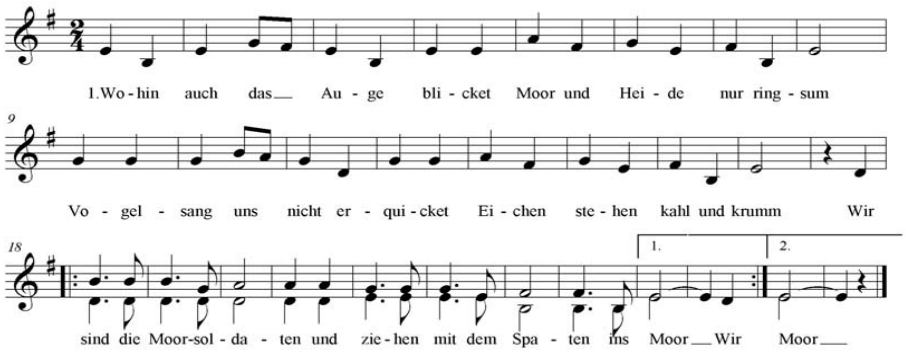

Fig. 2 *Die Moorsoldaten*, version arranged by Eisler.

The first public performance of Eisler's version took place on June 9, 1935 in Strasbourg: Busch sang it during the opening concert of the first "European Workers' Music and Singing Olympiad," whose artistic direction had been entrusted to Eisler.[34] Shortly thereafter, Eisler arranged for it to be performed in the United States during a benefit concert for child victims of the Nazi regime. An English translation appeared in 1937 in the collection *Songs of the People* published in New York by Workers Library Publishers, without mentioning the name of the translator. Two years later, the British composer Alan Bush wrote a harmonization of the song for four male voices, which was performed, with him conducting, at the Royal Albert Hall in London on April 1939, as part of the *Festival for Music and the People*.

Ernst Busch himself produced three recordings of the song, all in German. The first was made in the Soviet Union in 1935. The couplets (1, 2, 5, 6) were accompanied by a closed-mouth men's choir, while the chorus was sung collectively. A Russian translation was made shortly thereafter. That same version accompanied the film Борцы (*The Combatants*, 1935–1936) by the exiled scriptwriter Gustav von Wagenheim. In 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, Busch left to join the International Brigades and enlisted musically at their side. In Barcelona he recorded the disk *Seis canciones para la democracia*. The version of *Lied der Moorsoldaten* only includes couplets 1, 5 and 6, in a slower performance closer to a lament.[35] The choir participated in the chorus, and sang the

34 À Strasbourg, triomphe de la musique ouvrière, in: L'Humanité, June 13, 1935, p. 4.

35 The first Spanish translation, by Pi de la Serra and Pere Camps, was made only in 1997 for the album ¡No pasarán! Canciones de guerra contra el fascismo (1936–1939).

final couplet in unison. It was broadcast shortly afterwards by the Barcelona based radio station *29.8*. The song was translated many times in the various battalions of the International Brigades. The American tenor Paul Robeson, a brigadier and militant in the civil rights movement, made the song popular in the United States under the title *Song of the Peat Bog Soldiers*. Busch made a final recording in Paris in 1939, before being arrested in Antwerp in 1940 and interned in various French camps, notably in Gurs, thus introducing Eisler's version within the camp system. It was also spread through French camps by Spanish brigadiers after the *Retirada* in 1939.[36] The anonymous adaptation entitled *Le Chant des Marais*, which only included the four couplets chosen by Eisler, also dates from this period. In this version, the two final notes of the chorus are repeated to add an emphatic echo to the verbs "dig" and "love." The song circulated widely in all circles of Nazi resistance, and subsequently became a powerful symbol of the anti-Nazi struggle.

The original version: circulation within the concentration camps

While the original sheet music of the *Börgermoorlied* was widely copied and diffused outside the camps, it was Eisler's version that became established in Europe from the moment of its creation. Rudi Goguel's original version thus circulated essentially within the concentration camps. Most often called *Lied der Moorsoldaten* or *Moorsoldatenlied* outside of Börgermoor, its presence has been confirmed in numerous "camp songs collections" (*Lagerliederbücher*), particularly at Sachsenhausen.[37] The song's presence provides information regarding the circulation of inmates within the camp system, a result of the numerous transfers that took place without interruption until the end of the war. Let us consider the example of Goguel. He was sent in 1933 to take part in construction of the neighboring camp of Esterwegen, and in 1934 was freed and secretly resumed his political activities. He was arrested in September 1934 and sentenced to ten years of prison, which he served in various penitentiaries. In 1944 he was transferred to Sachsenhausen and then Neuengamme, and was one of the rare survivors from the evacuation of the *Cap Arcona* prison vessel. While numerous Börgermoor inmates ended up like him in Sachsenhausen, others were sent to Oranienburg, Buchenwald, Dachau, Ravensbrück and then Auschwitz. In these various camps, the *Lied der Moorsoldaten* was sung out during musical evenings or gatherings, both secretly or in the presence of the SS. As Stefan Cohn would later bear witness under the penname Thomas Geve, in Auschwitz the song was part of the "traditional songs of the camp,"[38] and was sung during musical evenings or occasions to promote cohesion within certain barracks. The learning and diffusion of

36 Arnould, Le Chant des Marais, in: Le Patriote Résistant 365 (1970), p. 2.

37 Notably in a number of collections made in the camps, which were collected after the war by Aleksander Kulisiewicz. Today they are conserved at the Aleksander Kulisiewicz Collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

38 T. Geve, Guns and Barbed Wire: A Child Survives Auschwitz, Chicago 2005, p. 108, first published as Youth in Chains, Jerusalem 1957.

this song thus took symbolic part in the construction of a transnational concentration camp identity.
This symbolic space of communication, which transcended political or religious divisions, can be found in the first arrangement that the Polish songwriter Aleksander Kulisiewicz made in the Sachsenhausen camp in late 1941. It preserved intact the original stanza in German, and modified the words of the two following stanzas using Polish. These couplets, which name numerous other camps, call on the community of inmates to continue their struggle against Nazism, and to not be tempted by the desire to die.

1 – Wohin auch das Auge blicket
Moor und Heide nur ringsum.
Vogelsang uns nicht erquicket
Eichen stehen kahl und krumm.

Wir sind die Moorsoldaten
und ziehen mit dem Spaten
ins Moor!

2 – Sachsenhausen, Stutthof, Dachau,
ponad wamy boży gniew
choćbym sto lat nawet zdychał
mocny, straszny jest mój śpiew

Pójdziemy, niewolnicy,
rycerze w ból zakuci
na bój!

3 – Hej, Treblinko, Auschwitz, Gusen,
serca w górę, w górę pięść!
Niech na druty idą tchórze
Nam nie wolno śmierci chcieć!

I dla nas, niewolnicy,
to samo słonce świeci
co dzień!

1 – Whatsoever the eye falls on,
Marsh and wasteland everywhere,
No bird greets us with his song,
Hump-backed oaks with branches bare.

We are the Marshland soldiers
Marching with our spades
To the marsh!

2 – Sachsenhausen, Stutthof, Dachau,
May God's curse on you come down

Should I rot for a hundred years yet
Still my mighty song resounds

Once as slaves we marched here
Now knights all armed with sadness
To war!

3 – Heh! Treblinka, Auschwitz, Gusen!
Hearts held high, and high the fist!
Barbed wire death the coward chooses
Live! Now live, death is no rest

And though we are but poor slaves
The same sun shines above us
Each day![39]

Under the symbolic title of *Hymn*, Kulisiewicz's version was translated into Czech by the inmate Jiří Maleček in 1943. In 1944, probably in preparation for a musical evening that took place in bloc 44,[40] Kulisiewicz added a final couplet to his song, a summary of the many existing variants: the Czech version by Maleček, and the anonymous French, Russian, and Italian versions that announced freedom to come and a return to home and love.

4 – Bergen-Belsen, Ebensee,
Hlavu vzhůru, vzhůru pěst!
Liberté, liberté chérie,
мы пойдём домой, oh yes!

Dai campi del dolore
rinascerà l'amore,
domani!

4 – Bergen-Belsen, Ebensee,
Head held high, and high the fist!
Liberty, oh sweet liberty
We'll soon go home I swear, oh yes!

In camps of our despairing
Love will be there again
Tomorrow!

39 English translation from Aleksander Kulisiewicz's album Songs from the Depths of Hell, Folkways Records Album No. FSS 37700 (1979).
40 Fackler, Des Lagers Stimme (note 7), p. 256.

Kulisiewicz's quotation of foreign versions, notably *Sul suolo desolato* and *Le Chant des marais*, demonstrates the combination and genuine symbiosis of the two musical versions with the camp system: these two adaptations are based on the four couplets chosen by Hanns Eisler as well as his melody, as demonstrated by the published sheet music and audio testimony by deportees after the war.[41] The similarity of the French and Italian lyrics, whose translation departs substantially from the German text, suggests that one was made based on the other.

Using the musical particularities of each version, it is possible to establish a European trajectory for the *Börgermoorlied*, which left the camp system only to return a few years later.

Postwar European circulation

The capture of the camps by the Allies ushered in the Liberation, which some had been awaiting for ten years. Yet true liberation and the return home could take a number of weeks, and sometimes even months. While the inmates gradually left the camps, numerous farewell celebrations were organized, as Thomas Geve bore witness with regard to Buchenwald.[42] On these occasions certain *Lagerlieder* rang out like hymns celebrating the end of Nazi oppression, and gradually came to constitute a repertory that would henceforth be connected to gatherings of former deportees or commemoration events. While most of them were definitively intended for a restricted listening audience, the *Börgermoorlied* enjoyed special success, firstly in the East. A number of elements can explain such an outcome.

The political element was decisive in the immediate aftermath of the war, as the authors of the song, along with Hanns Eisler and Ernst Busch, were all either members of the German Communist Party (KPD), or at least sympathizers or militant communists. The circulation of the song during the war was also largely the act of communist inmates. As a result, the song was sung a great deal in East Germany, most often in Eisler's version. It was included in the repertory of *Volkslieder* ("folk songs" from the German heritage), and its teaching in schools as an "anti-fascist" symbol took on an ideological mission: "It is a battle song, a song of consolation and victory, the song of the avant-garde of the German working class and its struggle against the barbarity of fascism and reactionism. It is a sacred song, the hymn of the undefeated."[43] It was recorded on many occasions, particularly by official musical ensembles. The orchestration gave pride of place to rolling snare drums and trumpets, as demonstrated by the version recorded by Hermann Hähnel with the *Jugendchor* of Berlin and the *Orchester des Tanzensembles der DDR* in 1969.[44] It also

41 Notably that of the Frenchwoman who learned it at Drancy. Audio testimony, "Moorsoldatenlied," Music and the Holocaust, http://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/camps/music-early-camps/moorsoldatenlied.

42 Geve, Guns and Barbed Wire (note 38), p. 212.

43 F. Selbmann, Hymne der Unbesiegbaren, in: Neues Deutschland, April 16 (1965), p. 8.

44 Das „Lied der Moorsoldaten". Bearbeitungen, Nutzungen, Nachwirkungen, Papenburg, Dokumentations- und Informationszentrum Emslandlager (DIZ), 2008, CD 1, no. 13.

went through uncountable versions at the annual Festival of Political Songs (*Festival des politischen Liedes*) organized in East Berlin from 1970 to 1990.

For all these reasons, the song was initially ignored in West Germany, without for all that being forbidden. Goguel's version was for the most part sung during gatherings of former deportees, while Eisler's circulated by word of mouth in certain youth movements. The rise of folk revival movements in the 1970s brought the *Börgermoorlied* back in the limelight in West Germany. Many teenagers discovered its English version *The Peat Bog Soldiers*, performed by the folk singer Pete Seeger at the Schaubühne in West Berlin in 1967. The simplicity of the melody, especially the rousing and easy-to-memorize chorus, boosted the song's popularity in the context of a return to folk music. In addition, its alternation of minor and major modes was an element shared by numerous oral musical traditions, and the song proved to be surprisingly adaptable to highly diverse traditional repertories. In 1972, the Greek actor Kostas Papanastasiou, who was highly involved in developing the style of the Greek έντεχνο ("entechno") artistic song, created an arrangement that he performed in the "Terzo Mondo" tavern he managed in Berlin. The instrumentation – a transverse flute and a mandolin reminiscent of a bouzouki – as well as the method for emitting the voice both borrowed directly from this musical style that was in full bloom.[45] The song was entitled *Jaros*, in reference to the island where the prisoner camps were created, particularly during the Greek military dictatorship. In 1996, the Corsican group Cinqui Sò arranged and recorded *U Cantu di i pantani*, after the translation of *Chant des marais* by Ghjuvan Ghjaseppiu Franchi, in the Corsican polyphonic *a capella* tradition. That same year, the original version of the song was included in the collection *Jiddische Lieder gegen die Nazis*.[46]

Finally, the unifying power of the poetic text should be emphasized. It does not evoke a particular place, but rather resonates both with those who feel far "from their parents, wife, and child" (couplet 4) and with "soldiers" in general, as revealed by the song's presence in the repertory of most French military divisions. The love of liberty and the call to overcome difficulties without losing hope also echoes the values of scouting. In 1945, *Le Chant des Marais* entered the repertory of the choral movement "À Cœur Joie" founded by César Geoffray, the singing teacher of the Scouts de France, in a version for four mixed voices whose harmonies he also arranged. Geoffray recorded it in 1946 with the Chorale Nationale du scoutisme français, and included it in the collection *Dix Chants de Liberté*.[47] It has since appeared in many scout songbooks, and the 1946 version was even included in the album *Les plus beaux chants scouts, 1932–1953*, published in 2007 during the centennial of scouting.[48] In France the tune was proposed by Josée Contreras during a meeting of the Mouvement de Libération des Femmes (MLF), with an aim to enriching its militant repertory. The lyrics were changed and the song was given the new

45 Ibid., CD 2, no. 7.
46 B. Ortmeyer (ed.), Jiddische Lieder gegen die Nazis: Kommentierte Liedertexte mit Noten, Bonn 1996.
47 C. Geoffray, À Cœur Joie, vol. 4, "Dix Chants de Liberté," harmonies arranged for mixed choir, Paris 1946.
48 Les plus beaux chants scouts, 1932–1953, prod. Marianne Mélodie, coll. Chansons de France, 2007.

title of *Nous qui sommes sans passé, les femmes*. The chorus calls for female solidarity: "Rise women slaves / And let us break our shackles/ Rise!" Sung for the first time during the MLF's first major protest on November 20, 1971, it ultimately became the movement's anthem, with the sheet music being printed in the newspaper *Le Torchon brûle*.[49]
There are currently close to two hundred versions of the *Börgermoorlied*,[50] with more recent translations into Hungarian, Finnish, Arabic, and Breton. Created by communist inmates in one of the first Nazi camps, this song represents a unique example of a European and even international dual-circulation in time of war. Its universal reach favored its appropriation by inmates from extremely diverse nationalities beyond barriers of language, to help create a spiritual community in the space of one night. It included the German musical tradition of worker's songs under the Weimar Republic of the 1920s, and in the postwar period was included in folk movements in both Germanies. Still today, its many translations and arrangements attest to its ability to unite a transnational community in commemoration of the Deportation and in defense of liberties, beyond any border or political or religious division.

This article was made possible thanks to the author's tenure as a 2016–2017 J. B. and Maurice C. Shapiro Fellow at the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington D.C.

49 Chansons, in: Le Torchon brûle 3, n.d. (winter 1971-spring 1972), p. 2. Josée Contreras has indicated that at the time she was not aware of the origin of the song, which she had learned at a summer camp as a teenager, adding: "I don't believe that at that time any of us knew we were drawing upon a song (Le chant des marais) that bore such a tragic burden of history." Quoted in: "40 ans de MLF en chansons," in: Le Hall de la Chanson, http://www.lehall.com/evenement/femmesenchansons/mlf/mlf_01.htm

50 Das „Lied der Moorsoldaten" (note 44), presents thirty-three of them.