**The “Mémorial des Milles” in Aix-en-Provence – An Experiment of Reflection**

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The factory of Les Milles near Aix-en-Provence (France) had a singular history. It was built in 1882 as one of the first site of industrial production of tiles in the South of France. During decades, it produced a lot of bricks and tiles. In 1939, for economic reasons, the factory was closed.

From September 1939, when the war was declared to Germany, up to June 1940, when the French army was defeated, the Austrian and German citizens who were refugees or residing in France, were considered as enemy aliens. They were arrested and interned in the dormant factory, living in the red powder of burnt clay. Most of them were opponents to the Nazi regime or Jews fleeing the persecutions, in particular several Nobel prizes like Otto Meyerhof, artists and members of the intelligentsia, Lion Feuchtwanger, Golo Mann, Max Ernst, Hans Bellmer, etc.

Under the Vichy regime, from July 1940 up to July 1942, Les Milles became a Transit camp for unwanted people, Jews from Eastern Europe, War veterans of the International brigades, foreign inmates in other camps of the South West France.

The third period of the camp began in August 1942 after the agreement of the government of Vichy to hand over to the Germans 10 000 Jews of the Unoccupied Zone. 2 500 men, women, children caught in roundups in Marseille and the surroundings were interned in the camp of Les Milles, then deported to Drancy, before to be sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The camp was under the authority of the French ministry of Interior and the rail transportation was organized by a French company under the control of the French local police.

After 1945, the industrial activity resumed and it maintained the factory in the same condition as it was before and during the war. It is one the rarest or unique site of deportation in France in such a well conserved condition.

This good condition, and the absurdity of the system of internment of citizens of a country considered as enemy although they were fleeing this country, the quality of those inmates, scholars, artists and scientists who had a rich intellectual activity during their stay in Les Milles; the fact that this deportation of the Jews from Marseille and the surroundings took place in the Zone Libre, an unoccupied part of France; all this could justified not only a historical and memory-based project but also an educational one.

This is what gives to the Memorial des Milles its particularity. Les Milles are not another memorial dedicated to the Shoah.

The visiting tour presents three main components. First, the visit begins by an historical overview, with the increasing tensions after 1933 and the situation of France at the beginning of the war. The second part is a remembrance visit of the factory with the traces left by the inmates during the war. At the end of the tour, the third part is dedicated to the analysis and reflection about the human behavior which leads to the worse.

Some secondary themes are included in the visiting tour, like the car of deportees, the exhibition by Serge Klarsfeld dedicated to the 11 thousand children deported from France, the refectory with the wall paintings by Karl Bodek, Franz Meyer and Max Lingner.

It has been a very long and difficult process to achieve what was considered as a very daring project. The third component, the reflective one, was not easily accepted by the stakeholders and the members of the Steering Committee. Actually, very few people believed that this idea of the leader of the project, the sociologist Alain Chouraqui, would be successful. The principle of asking reflection and requiring a lot of attention at the end of the visit, with a series of questions concerning moral and individual responsibility, could seem boring for a visitor. After a long elaboration, the response to the challenge was to break down the causes and to analyze the process in which ordinary people would could become perpetrators or accomplices of mass crimes. How the extraordinary engages within the ordinary.

A breeding ground and determine three steps of a vicious cycle.

The breeding ground is stereotypes, prejudices, racism, fear or reject of the other.

1st step: the devil in the daily life (A. Einstein The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it). An acting minority and a silent majority.

2nd step, an authoritarian regime bases itself on a loss of moral values and references of the majority.

3rd step, extension of persecutions, targeting not only the group scapegoat, but also all the opponents, democrats, deviants.

The question is how this cycle is resistible. How to give to the visitor the feeling that he is responsible not only for himself but for the others.

Through several scientific experiments like the Milgram experience or Philip Lombardo’s, it shows the necessity to develop consciousness of the human tendency to be submitted to authority.

In this last part, Alain Chouraqui did not want to focus only on the genocide of the Jews. The genocide of the Armenians as well as the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda were included in the content of the reflective part of the visit and give a more universal value to the example of Les Milles as a part of a process of social exclusion and racist discrimination.

It gave to the project an universal trend which could upgrade the Memorial at a national level, escaping from the unpredictable fate of a local museum, depending on the local authorities. In placing the Memorial under the control of a Foundation whose members are the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, the Region, the Department of Bouches-du-Rhône, the city of Aix, and the Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah, and the industrialist Lafarge, it gave the strength to appear as a competitor of the Memorial of the Shoah in Paris. Because, it is difficult to accept in the world of memorials competitions.

In France more than 600 000 people were interned in 200 camps. Concerning the Jews, the Memorial de la Shoah in Paris is considered as the national museum for the persecution in France. The other museums and memorials are dedicated to regional or local history, like the Train Station of Bobigny, the camps of Pithivier and Beaune-la-Rolande, etc. The camp des Milles should have focused on the period of 1942 in Marseille, and was not supposed to deal with a larger scope of the persecution. In creating this educational and reflective component about genocides, it gave to him an international position. In this regard, the camp of Les Milles appears as experimental, trying to make the visitors, especially the youngest ones, feel that they could be responsible, that their personal acts could prevent the worse.