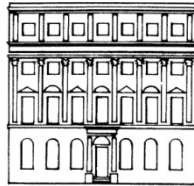


# German Historical Institute London



## BULLETIN

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*The Allied Occupation of Germany Revisited: New Research on the Western  
Zones of Occupation, 1945-1949*

Conference Report

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## CONFERENCE REPORTS

*The Allied Occupation of Germany Revisited: New Research on the Western Zones of Occupation, 1945–1949.* Conference organized by the Institute of Contemporary British History at King's College London, the German Historical Institute London, the German History Society, the Society for the Study of French History, and the Beyond Enemy Lines project at King's College London, funded by the European Research Council, and held at the GHIL, 29–30 Sept. 2016. Convenors: Camilo Erlichman (Amsterdam) and Christopher Knowles (King's College London)

After many years of neglect, there is now renewed interest in the Allied occupation of Germany. The conference showcased new international research by both established academics and early career historians. Since there have been few opportunities over the last two decades for scholars of the different zones of occupation to meet and discuss, the conference created a forum for future exchange.

The conference focused on the Western zones because significant differences between the Western zones had previously been neglected as historians concentrated on the emergence of a Cold War Europe, divided between East and West. The panels covered a broad range of themes: ideology and ruling strategies, interactions between occupiers and occupied, the handling of crime and punishment, and the experience of occupation in daily life, which is now emerging as a major new research area being explored by early career historians.

Although most of the papers looked mainly at one of the three Western zones, the conference aimed to bring together those researching the postwar occupation of Germany and starting to formulate comparative questions. Until now, historians have rarely

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undertaken an inter-zonal analysis of the occupation, and there have been few in depth comparisons of the policies, activities, impacts, and legacies of the Western occupiers. As a result, the conference attempted to disseminate and encourage novel research that could contribute to a new integrated history of occupation.

In his introduction, Christopher Knowles (London) emphasized that occupation is a transnational phenomenon. At the end of the war almost all European countries had either been recently occupied, or were themselves now occupiers. However, occupations in different countries have been analysed and interpreted differently. One aim of the conference was to explore whether a common framework can be applied to the study of different occupations. Camilo Erlichman (Amsterdam) suggested a new conceptual framework for analysing the period that revolved around understanding occupation as a dynamic power relationship. He proposed an exploration of the subject around four themes: ideologies and ruling strategies; interactions between the occupiers and occupied; placing the occupation into the context of the broader history of Germany and Europe in the mid twentieth century; and analytical comparisons between and across zones.

In the first panel on contextualizing occupation, Susan Carruthers (Rutgers) showed that research on occupation must also include consideration of the occupying country's previous experiences of war and of earlier occupations. In the case of the United States this extended back to the 'occupation' of the defeated Southern states after the American Civil War. She showed that the occupation of Germany and Japan after the Second World War had a particular role in US history and popular memory as examples of 'good' occupations. Carruthers discussed the training courses provided for future US occupation officers in Charlottesville, Virginia, during the war. She concluded that good planning and training was considered essential for a successful occupation. However, she showed that officers in occupied Germany did not feel well prepared, despite their training, when faced with numerous practical problems.

Peter Stirk (Durham) located the occupation of Germany within the broader history of the international law of occupation since the nineteenth century. Exploring the three themes of hostages, food, and regime transformation, all of which played a decisive role in the gradual codification of the law of military occupation, he emphasized the ambiguity of British and US policymakers in accepting that

international law should apply to the case of Germany. Their recognition of the obligation to feed the population can be seen as a watershed in the practice of occupation, but the problem of how to deal with regime transformation has had a contested legacy with implications for more recent debates on the legality of regime change.

During the second panel, Andrew Beattie (Sydney) provided a comparative study of managing cooperation and conflict by examining the internment of German civilians. According to Beattie, each of the three occupying powers understood internment (without trial) to be within their rights as occupiers and an important political means of removing former Nazis from positions of power. The American occupiers interned 170,000 German civilians in camps, the British almost 100,000, and the French 21,500. Most of the interactions between those interned and the occupiers can be described as conflicts. Nevertheless, there were also friendly contacts and cooperation with some German groups who supported the policy of internment.

Trond Ove Tøllefsen's (Florence) paper focused on the removal of industrial plants as reparations in the British occupation. He showed that by 1949, the peak year for dismantling in the British zone, the Germans were convinced that the British were continuing to dismantle purely for commercial reasons. It caused a crisis in the relationship between British and Germans, with the paradoxical outcome that German campaigns against dismantling resulted in the British continuing to do so in order to demonstrate their strength. However, the dismantling programme conflicted with the overall goals of re-education and incorporating Germany into new political structures in Western Europe. Therefore this is an example not only of conflicts between occupiers and occupied, but also of internal conflicts within an occupying force.

The high level of complexity was emphasized during the subsequent discussion. Conflict and cooperation on the same issue co-existed. In addition, neither the Germans nor the Allies were a single homogeneous group because of the diversity of different views among those involved.

Caroline Sharples (Central Lancashire) presented a most interesting approach towards a comparative history of the occupation by investigating how the Allies disposed of the bodies of Nazis executed for war crimes. Most were buried, but how these burials were handled affected public as well as private memories, as they concerned

the families of those executed as well as attracting general public interest. The British occupiers gave no information to relatives about the grave or its location, nor did they take family wishes into account. The Americans, on the other hand, created graves for war criminals and gave more information to families. But when the British occupiers left, some bodies were exhumed and re-buried elsewhere. This led to political protests and demonstrates that the treatment of executed Nazis was a long-lasting issue. Sharples showed that occupiers implemented different policies.

Similarly, denazification policies need to be examined individually for each of the occupying powers. In her keynote presentation, Rebecca Boehling (Maryland) presented her current project on the comparative history of denazification in the Western zones. She outlined the major themes, which included the overall process, the responsible persons, the consistency or inconsistency of decisions, the involvement of Germans, and the common understanding of denazification as the basis for democratization. From a comparative perspective, such an inter-zonal analysis of denazification can be connected to broader debates about the function and legacy of 'transitional justice'.

Heather Dichter (Western Michigan) examined the role of sport in implementing democracy. She described how sport was part of the Allied policy of re-educating the Germans. All the Western Allied forces employed experts who worked on transforming the Nazi sports system into one with a democratic leadership. Ideas of re-organization and re-education were promoted through exchanges and visits by sports leaders and organizers. Some Germans were sent to the United States to learn about training techniques, fair play, and leadership. Even though the Americans had the widest programme, all three Western Allies recognized the importance of sport as part of a broader policy of cultural exchange.

One of the most interesting panels covered experiences and encounters in daily life. Bettina Blum (Paderborn) presented her research on the requisitioning of houses by the British in Westphalia. Based on sources and testimonies provided by around a hundred individuals, Blum discussed some key problems that affected the relationship between victors and vanquished: requisitioned properties left empty and unoccupied for a long period; German resistance to requisitioning; and compensation for the loss of property. A build-

ing programme that provided accommodation for British troops and their families reduced the need for requisitioning of German properties, but also led to the isolation of British forces and made contacts between Germans and British more difficult.

In her paper, Ann-Kristin Glöckner (Magdeburg) illustrated German–French encounters in Freiburg under French occupation, using a gender studies approach to analyse the occupiers’ power and interactions with the population. She suggested that comparing public spaces such as streets or bars with private houses was a useful framework to adopt, especially because many of the French occupiers (unlike the British or Americans) shared houses with German families. Glöckner highlighted that this could result in a power struggle between the French and Germans within the shared home, and concluded that the occupiers were not always in a stronger position.

A different perspective on occupation was provided by Daniel Cowling (Cambridge) who introduced two British women and their experiences of occupied Germany as revealed in ego documents, mostly letters and photographs. According to these documents, they experienced occupation as a form of personal enrichment and adventure. Despite the revealing insights provided by such documents, further research is needed to determine the extent to which private narratives such as these influenced British perceptions of the occupation more widely.

Questions raised in the subsequent discussion included whether the case studies presented drew on a sufficiently large number of encounters between occupiers and occupied Germans to be representative, and how much significance should be given to individual cases.

Complex interactions and the role of intermediaries were explored among others by Julia Wambach (Berkeley). She pointed out that the French occupiers did not start an occupation from zero when they arrived in Germany in 1945. In contrast, they experienced occupation themselves on both sides—as occupiers and occupied. She demonstrated that Vichy officials were deeply involved in the French occupation and held high positions in Baden-Baden, the capital of the French zone. These officers appeared to possess expertise and experience, which to those in the French postwar government who appointed them seemed to be more relevant than the fact that they had cooperated with Nazi Germany.

The multiple conflicts between Germans and occupiers illustrated the need for mediators. Johannes Kuber (Aachen) provided an insight into the relationship between the German Catholic Church and the French and American occupiers in Baden-Württemberg. Priests often acted as intermediaries between occupying officials and the local population. Relations between Catholic clergy and the occupiers were mostly friendly and respectful, as the occupiers generally allowed the church to continue its spiritual and pastoral work without interference, and priests were exempted from requisitioning. Shared religious beliefs seemed to facilitate encounters and encouraged interaction, allowing local priests to present themselves as the protectors of their congregation.

Dominik Rigoll (Potsdam) analysed the role of what he termed the 'original 1945ers', those officials who took up leading positions in the immediate postwar period, and discussed their historiographical marginalization in the last three decades. Through a detailed analysis of individuals employed by the Federal Republic's Ministry of the Interior, he produced a typology of officialdom, showing how certain types of officials who had come to the fore during the occupation period took over key positions within a crucial ministry of the Federal Republic of Germany.

The question of the legacy of occupation was also addressed. Drew Flanagan (Brandeis) presented his findings on the role of German Francophiles during the occupation, followed by Michael Wala (Bochum), who described a shift in how the British and American occupiers treated of a group of former SS, SD, and Gestapo members. After initially being perceived as untrustworthy criminals, they were able to persuade their US interrogators that they were experts who possessed extensive knowledge which would be useful in uncovering communist agents. A significant number were recruited and worked for the new intelligence and secret services established by the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1950s.

The concluding discussion illuminated the high potential of comparative work on the different zones for achieving a better understanding of Germany during the immediate postwar period. Participants agreed that the Cold War does not provide an adequate framework for understanding either occupation policies or the political and social history of the emerging Federal Republic. The complexity of occupation was described in many ways during the con-

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ference. Power relationships, everyday experiences, and interactions between occupiers and occupied emerged as important themes for future research. To conclude, the conference brought out multifaceted aspects of occupation and revealed differences between the zones as well as the importance of studying the legacy of occupation and the long-term impact of occupation on both Germans and the American, British, and French occupiers.

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