



CALL FOR PAPERS

**The Shoah as a European Project?  
New Perpetrator Research in a Transnational Perspective**

International conference at the German Historical Institute Paris

Date: 14–16 March 2023

Can the Shoah be described as a »European project«? This has recently been raised as a new research question by such eminent scholars as Mary Fulbrook and Thomas Sandkühler.<sup>1</sup> As soon as the National Socialist Party came to power, Nazi Germany masterminded and engaged in the discrimination, systematic exclusion, and murder of Jews in Germany. And as occupiers during the war years, the Germans were indisputably the initiators, architects, and executioners of the extermination of European Jewry more generally. However, they found helpers, facilitators, and partners throughout Europe in the expulsion of the Jews, the robbery of their property, their deportation and their murder. While important studies on local complicity in some occupied countries do exist, an interpretative framework to explain (co-)perpetration as a European phenomenon is still lacking. For although Holocaust studies have become increasingly international in recent decades, in this prominent field of research with Europe-wide implications, the methodology of transnational history (i.e. of transfer processes, systematic comparisons, and overarching frameworks of interpretation) is still too little used when it comes to the question of how local societies became complicit in the murder of Jews. This conference will contribute to the development of a conceptual, comparative and transnational understanding of the European dimension of non-German perpetrators in the Shoah. How can we narrate collusion or complicity in a transnational framework as part of an *entangled* or *shared* European history of the Shoah?

**Conference Aims and Research Questions**

When studying complicity in the Shoah, the diverse forms of the occupation regimes in different parts of Europe must be considered. Locals were acting in very different contexts. It is important to stress that the Germans established the framework, and were the main executors of the mass murder of European Jews.

First, we must identify which phenomena, groups or institutions are suitable for such comparisons, given the non-uniform character of the German occupation and of forms of collaboration with the Germans in different European contexts. The discussion will set an agenda for future research. Second, we must ask to what extent the German perpetrators consciously involved and implicated the local inhabitants and/ or institutions and administrations in the genocide of the Jews, and how effective the German occupiers were in doing so in different

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Fulbrook, The Holocaust as a European Project, Keynote Lecture during the conference »Holocaust and the Cold War« at the Fritz Bauer Institute, 26.5.2021; Thomas Sandkühler, Das Fußvolk der »Endlösung«. Nichtdeutsche Täter und die europäische Dimension des Völkermords, Darmstadt 2020.

regions and contexts. Furthermore, the occupiers were persecuting a minority that had already been stigmatized before the war. What significance can be attributed to pre-war anti-Semitic practices and discourses in each of the countries?

Different categories of non-German perpetrators that we would like to address during the conference include:

- Partners in mass crime, murdering Jews on their own initiative (e.g. Romanian army and other armed forces)
- Europeans in German mobile killing units and in *Aktion Reinhardt* Death Camps (e.g. Trawniki men)
- Local perpetrators and police forces under German command
- Cooperation partners (e.g. police forces, institutions, administrations, and gendarmeries in various European countries) not under German command
- Civilian population, denouncers, beneficiaries of »aryanization«
- Underground units (resistance to Germans but perpetrators vis-à-vis the Jews)

We thus aim to examine uniformed units, civil administrations, and other institutions in a comparative and transnational perspective: the role of the native police, fire departments, building brigades, lower levels of civil administration, the church, etc. How can we compare these institutions across countries? How significant a role did locals' appropriation of Jewish property play in the way in which they got involved in the killings? Can denunciations of Jews be described comparatively across countries (administrative procedures, local norms, »effectiveness«)? Inevitably, we must ask about the simultaneity of different phenomena: to what extent were non-German perpetrators at the same time victims of the German occupation or involved in the resistance; and how were perpetration, victim status, and resistance interconnected?

A change of perspectives is crucial: We must also ask how knowledge about the Shoah circulated among the Jews. Did Jewish victims consider their persecution as a European phenomenon in which they had no allies? How did they perceive the radicalization of Nazi extermination policies and practices and the behavior of local populations?

We would also like to address concepts, terms, and methodological approaches. The concept of collaboration, which is highly controversial in research and yet frequently used, must be put to the test as an analytical category.<sup>2</sup> Do we need »new collaboration research« or »new perpetrator research« that includes non-Germans?<sup>3</sup> Are other terms more appropriate, such as *collusion*, *cooperation*, *complicity*? What sources can be re-examined? What importance should be given to victim sources in »new perpetrator research«?

The conference organizers welcome proposals that address selected aspects, groups, and dynamics of non-German perpetrators in a comparative or transnational perspective. We will include papers examining the Jewish perspective on the question of the European scale of the Shoah, as well as on the circulation of knowledge.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Tatjana Tönsmeier, *Besatzungsgesellschaften. Begriffliche und konzeptionelle Überlegungen zur Erfahrungsgeschichte des Alltags unter deutscher Besatzung im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Version: 1.0, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 18.12.2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok.2.663.v1>;

<sup>3</sup> Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, *Kollaboration im Zweiten Weltkrieg und im Holocaust – Ein analytisches Konzept*, Version: 2.0, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 21.07.2020, [http://docupedia.de/zg/Rossolinski-Liebe\\_kollaboration\\_v2\\_de\\_2020](http://docupedia.de/zg/Rossolinski-Liebe_kollaboration_v2_de_2020); Jan Grabowski, *Germany Is Fueling a False History of the Holocaust Across Europe*, in: *Haaretz*, 22.06.2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/.premium-germany-is-fueling-a-false-history-of-the-holocaust-across-europe-1.8938137?lts=1621340648868>

We are also interested in methodological or conceptual questions. The core focus is on France and Germany as well as Central and Eastern Europe, but proposals on South and Southeastern Europe and on the French colonies, especially the Maghreb, are also welcome.

The conference will take place provided sufficient funding is received.

Please send proposals in English of no more than 500 words and a CV by July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022 to Agnieszka Wiercholska [conference2023@dhi-paris.fr](mailto:conference2023@dhi-paris.fr)

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