



## **Wartime Occupations in Europe (20th-21st centuries)**

### **Socio-historical perspectives**

### **International Conference**

**CERCEC-EHESS, Paris, November 7-8, 2024**

The Russian occupation of Ukrainian territory since 2014 has brought into stark focus 20th century experiences and legacies of occupation in Europe. They are central in national memory cultures while generating polemics and conflicts up to this day, which are not resolved, but often enflamed, by the large body of historical research that has explored all the nuances and “greyness” of these difficult pasts. Beyond discrete case studies, we lack a clear understanding of the specificities of modern occupations, of the ways that people experience them, how they transform social, economic, political relations.

What happens when a territory “is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army” during on-going international military conflict, when authority is split between the “legitimate power” and its exercise “in fact” by that power’s military enemy, as defined by the Hague and Geneva Conventions?

Much of the discourse and expectations surrounding this question continue to be shaped by the post-1945 diptych of “collaboration” and “resistance” as the two emblematic responses to foreign occupation and consequently the measure of all social behavior under occupation. Both terms became loaded not just with political, but with moral meaning, providing the bedrock of European post-war memory and mythmaking. Both come with expectations of legal retribution/recognition. This framework has become so entrenched in European memory and political culture as to seem natural, although it is reductive and historically situated. It also largely ignores the dynamic and fluid aspects of occupation, which is defined by much of the same uncertainty and risk as the war experience itself. It thus has limited value as either guide for empirical research or as conceptual framework to understand the complexity of social experiences of wartime occupation. Historical research has highlighted many of these aspects, turning to “attentism”, “grey areas”, forms of “passive resistance” and “cooperation”, without succeeding in providing an alternative conceptual framework for understanding this foundational experience of modern European societies.

The aim of this international conference is to explore ways to research and conceptualize the social experience of occupation beyond this post-1945 framework, through interdisciplinary discussion between historians, sociologists, and other social scientists working on contemporary European societies, within a comparative conversation including different occupations in all regions of Europe during different conflicts. We aim to shed light on the structural conditions, shifting dynamics, social actors, and orders, as well as lived experiences of wartime occupation as a social phenomenon. We welcome submissions that address the conceptual and methodological challenges of scientific research on past and present situations of wartime occupation.

We define wartime occupations as social situations, where a belligerent exercises authority over the territory and population of a country with which it is actively at war. These situations are also marked by the primacy of military actors and objectives, the presence of violence, a high degree of unsettledness, as well as the war-induced uncertainty over future outcomes.

Among the topics we would offer for consideration are:

- **Social actors:** how to identify and map the plurality of state and non-state actors involved at different scales from the micro-social to international? State actors include various representatives of at least two states claiming legitimate authority over the territory and the population; these can be local or central actors, present or not on occupied territory, military, police or civilian, with sometimes competing agendas. Non-state actors include civilians with diverse positions relative to state authorities, parastatal actors, militant groups with autonomous agendas, criminal ones... All these actors are forced to redefine their social identities and positions, their interactions, practices, language, values with various resources and constraints. How can we analyze their various degrees of autonomy? How can we understand “occupiers” and “occupied” as new social identities and categories, whose relations are defined by radical power imbalances, which reshape feelings of belonging and collective identities?
- **Temporalities and lived experiences:** how do the circumstances of invasion or retreat of occupying troops and the duration of occupation shape its experience by civilians? How is the time of everyday life transformed? How does war remain present, how do bombings, military operations and movements shape it? How are the extraordinary temporality of occupation and the ordinariness of everyday life articulated? How are time horizons of action and future expectations redefined? In how far is occupation a transformative experience? In how far are pre-war trajectories predictive or not, what pre-war dispositions and resources are useful or not? Many European regions have known repeated wartime occupations during the 20th and the 21st centuries, and some are occupied and liberated repeatedly during the same conflict: how does past experience shape the one under examination?
- **Space:** wartime occupation is accompanied by spatial fragmentation and reconfiguration, as pre-war borders take new meaning without disappearing and occupied territory is redefined by its position relative to the front-line. The movements of people and goods are disrupted, as the occupiers restrict and redirect them to serve what they see as their security and economic needs, including through evacuations and deportations. The distance to the front-line, the proximity to or integration in the territory of the occupying state, the natural environment, the communication and transportation infrastructures, rural or urban settings, are some of the many factors that spatially define different regimes and situations of occupation.

- **Competing social orders and norms:** how do the warring states adapt their legislation to address the situation of occupation? How are jurisdictions redefined? How are the state actors using legislation and regulations, on different levels, to restrict the population's autonomy, encourage or enforce loyalty, and serve the state and army's own objectives? How are laws enforced, how is behavior under occupation judged during the war itself? How do people under occupation understand and negotiate the sudden changes in regulations? How are these changes related to the renegotiation of social norms? How are social norms enforced, or not, under uncertainty? How does the competition between irreconcilable political orders under circumstances of uncertainty shape the experience of social order? How is the extraordinariness of the situation used by different state actors to experiment policies? How, why, and when do occupied territories become "laboratories" of new policies and orders?
  
- **Economic dimensions:** the destruction of property, the absence of parts of the population, legal uncertainty on property rights, and the value of goods, state policies that aim at exploiting the economic resources of the occupied territory for war while using their redistribution for reward and retaliation, are some of the issues that characterize wartime occupations. How do economic conflicts play out under such situations? How are social and economic hierarchies and networks redefined? How do occupying authorities articulate their aims of economic exploitation and loyalty extraction? How does the population navigate this politicization of economic survival through transformed practices, relations, strategies?
  
- **Wars:** How do we conceptualize the multiplicity of violent conflicts on different scales and with various actors and goals that characterize many occupation situations? How do political, social, economic conflicts, rooted or not in pre-war conflicts and political movements, play out under occupation? How to analyze their autonomous dynamics and logics as well as their articulation with each other and with "the" war? How does a renewed and social understanding of occupation help us reconsider the use of concepts such as "civil wars", "internecine wars"?
  
- **Mass violence, war crimes and crimes against humanity:** wartime occupations are associated with widespread violence against civilians. For example, pillage, rape, and violence committed for "security" purposes, including arbitrary detention, kidnapping, torture and collective reprisals, are not only common, but are in various way "crimes of occupation", violence against civilians directly linked to the specific situation of military occupation. What are those links? How do the dynamics of military occupation produce violent situations? How do occupying powers try to curb or to exploit these? Beyond this "ordinary" violence of occupation, are there specific situations, logics and dynamics that explain how occupations become spaces of mass violence and genocide?

We welcome submissions (max. 700 words) by all social scientists, including historians, on any wartime occupation in 20th and 21st century in Europe. The conference will include a half-day workshop specifically dedicated to an interdisciplinary discussion of sources and methods; submissions should point to these as well.

All applications should be sent by May 3, 2024, to:  
[wartimeoccupations.conference@gmail.com](mailto:wartimeoccupations.conference@gmail.com).

The language of the conference will be English. Applications can be sent in most European languages, including Ukrainian, and fluency in English is not required to take part, although correct understanding is welcome. Organizers can help participants with weak English skills but strong scientific proposals during the conference.

The conference will take place on 7-8 November 2024 in Paris. The organizers will try to cover all the costs for participants who are not funded by their home institutions. Costs for all Ukrainian participants (currently in Ukraine or displaced abroad) will be entirely covered.

This conference is part of activities conducted by “War and Society in Central and Eastern Europe (20th-21st centuries)” Research Alliance (EURETES, EHESS – MESR) that bring together CERCEC-EHESS, Charles University in Prague and Lviv Center of Urban History. It is supported by the Osteuropa Network of the Max Weber Foundation, the German Historical Institute in Paris and the Marc Bloch Center (Berlin).

**Scientific committee:**

Xavier Bougarel (EHESS)

Masha Cerovic (CERCEC-EHESS)

Franziska Exeler (Freie Universität Berlin – Cambridge)

Jürgen Finger (Institut historique allemand de Paris)

Laurent Gayer (CERI-Sciences Po Paris)

Ota Konrad (Charles University, Prague)

Lukasz Krzyzanowski (Warsaw University)

Sophie Lambroschini (Centre Marc Bloch)

Anne Le Huérou, (University Paris Nanterre)

Silvia Serrano (Sorbonne Université)

Ioulia Shukan (University Paris Nanterre)

Iuliia Skubytska (Princeton University)

Ismee Tames (NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Utrecht University)