

## **Call for Papers**

### **European Literatures of Military Occupation 1938–1955**

International Conference  
April 4–7, 2022  
Villa Vigoni  
German-Italian Center for European Dialogue,  
Lake Como, Italy

Conveners: Matthias Buschmeier (Bielefeld) / Jeanne E. Glesener (Luxembourg)

#### **Europe – A History of Occupation**

The history of Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is deeply marked by the experience of military occupation during and after World War I and World War II. In the aftermath of World War I, the European political landscape went through a process of reordering and restructuring. As a consequence, many of the ethnic questions throughout Europe were neglected and passed over in favour of power politics. The severe impediment for national identity construction resulting from it in almost every European country had long-lasting effects throughout the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond.

Although World War I and its aftermath confronted many Europeans with the reality of military occupation, its character remained mainly regional, and it had arisen out of special circumstances, which can barely be brought to comparison. This situation radically changed with the German subjugation of almost every European country during World War II. After the Thirty Years' War and the Napoleonic Wars, Hitler's expansive imperial policy confronted millions of European citizens with the experience of an enduring occupation, forcing states and individuals into the dilemma of deciding between collaboration or resistance.

#### **Historical Research on Occupation – Desiderata for Literary Studies**

For some time now, historians have been investigating the history of occupations during World War II within the history of national states and focusing on everyday experience under occupation within the framework of collaboration or resistance. More recently, however, they have started to argue that such a dichotomy does not do justice to the lived reality of everyday life in the occupied societies (Tönsmeier/Dieckmann/Quinkert 2003; Tönsmeier 2014, 2015). It turns out that, by their radical opposition on the battlegrounds, the experiences of occupiers and of occupied were by far more intertwined and complex as hitherto thought, especially considering the lasting temporal character of the occupations in Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Each occupation opened a contact zone that also led to exchange and permanent communication, transforming the military front into a selectively permeable membrane of contact. Occupation was a “social process of everyday life” (Dlugoborski 1995, 15). Needless to say that, for millions, this contact zone turned into a death zone.

In different European contexts, the historiography of occupation often partook in national narratives that were supposed to foster national identities. In Germany for instance, a generation of perpetrator–historians sought to minimize the role of the Wehrmacht and its entanglement in massive war crimes and the Shoah (Meyer 2000). Only as late as the early 1990s did historians and social scientists from all over Europe gather in an EU-sponsored project (Benz et al. 1990ff, Bähr/Banken 2005) to research the national histories of occupation during World War II from a comparative perspective and to overcome national resentments and political taboos in the field. Thanks to this groundbreaking research project, historians were able on the one hand, to pinpoint the very specific and sometimes-contingent policies of Nazi Germany in its campaigns in various countries. On the other, the project opened up a new perspective beyond the investigation of national cases. As the state of occupation revealed itself as an experience that was, to a certain degree, common to almost all European societies at the time a comparative approach was deemed paramount.

In the early 1990s, hope and aspirations for a common European future gave rise to the idea of a comparative history of occupation. By contrast we see that today, in many European countries, the results of this academic endeavor are almost entirely neglected, due not only to the machinations of certain interest groups but also by official memory politics (e.g. in Poland, Hungary, or Romania). Hence, there is some urgency to examine this nationalistic backlash, where literature and cultural memory are constantly at risk of being reduced to expressions of national identity and to a tool in national-identity politics. There can be no doubt that a critical investigation of the literature of occupation (and its instrumentalization) in the vein of historical research will help us to get a better grasp of current political and cultural developments throughout Europe.

While comparative historical research has led to an extensive analysis of the political, military, and social reality of occupation, the comparison of the cultural and, more specifically, the literary responses to this experience has not yet been given the same attention however. True, there is an immense research output on specific *aspects* of literature and on individual literary texts; especially in French Studies, the French literature of occupation has attracted intensive research (for an overview, see Atack and Lloyd 2012). In Germany, however, although quite a few authors were themselves employed in the Wehrmacht and participated in the occupation, the corpus that resulted out of this experience has rarely been examined (but see O'Keeffe and O'Keeffe 2013). The literature on the Shoah in general and the devastating experiences in the Nazi concentration camps in particular have also been investigated in great detail. However, even in the field of concentration camp literature (*Lagerliteratur*), a comparative perspective that conceives of the camp as a place where Jews, Sinti and Roma, intellectuals, politicians, so-called criminals, and many others from all over

Europe, were tortured, exploited, and killed together, and thus formed a shared European history of suffering that found its articulation in literary and artistic expression, has only been broached very recently (Pabst 2019). For the more general experience of the military occupation — which, of course, includes but is not limited to the experience of pursuance and extinction — such a perspective is almost entirely absent in the field of cultural studies.

## **Hypothesis**

The experience of military occupation fundamentally shaped the conception of communities and individuals throughout Europe. Every European citizen has lived and still lives in an “implicated community” (Morris-Suzuki 2005). Literary representations play a major role in negotiating the meaning of this experience. It is important not only to look at these negotiations from national perspectives, which have become more and more prevalent today, but also to analyze them as manifestations of a heterogeneous but still conjointly experienced “harmful lesson” (Habermas 2001) of the “Europeanization of Europe.” Europe as a political entity is deeply connected to the experience of occupation.

Living under occupation means to find oneself in a situation of accelerated historical change and social pressure. Literature both affects and is affected by this process in very different ways. It can provide heroic narratives of resistance, it can incriminate collaboration and complicity, it can give insight into the often complex, tragic, and desperate situation of persecuted groups and individuals, but it can also provide the perspective of the occupiers and it can portray human encounters in inhuman situations.

Imagining life under occupation, in literature, often challenges or fortifies widespread assumptions about a nation’s identity and its collective cultural memory. More importantly still literature on occupation also displays the occupation of European *minds* and reveals their history as an intricate bundle of interwoven rather than separated and separating stories.

## **Terminology and Material**

This conference aims to shed new light on the literary and cultural representation of occupation as a European experience. We intend to bring literary scholars from Eastern, Western, Northern, and Southern Europe together to discuss the outlines and implications of a comparative perspective on the topic. Since we enter almost-uncharted territory, the conference is intended as a first step for mapping the literary representation and articulation of the experience of occupation.

In the research context of the conference, the term “occupation” is understood as an enduring presence of military forces in a territory that technically belongs to another political entity. The situation of occupation is characterized not only by military conflicts on the battlefield between armies and resistance fighters, but also by the intention of the occupiers

either to incorporate the occupied territories into or associate the occupied territories with their own. At least five different variants of occupation can be distinguished:

- 1) A foreign power invades a territory for certain ends and aims (for instance, to enforce reparation duties, to reeducate the population, or to implement bi- or multilateral agreements) but without the intention to annex it. The French and Belgian invasion of the *'Ruhrgebiet'* after World War One, the allied occupation in Germany after World War Two, or the US-led invasion of Iraq und Afghanistan are examples of this category.
2. A foreign power invades a territory with the intention to annex it and is willing to incorporate the alien population as long as it obeys the new rulers. Colonial regimes of *'indirect rule,'* as well as the German attempts to establish *'Aufsichtsverwaltungen'* (*'supervisory administrations'*) in the occupied territories (e.g., Finland, Norway), are examples of such an occupation policy. The Soviet Occupation in the Baltic States and elsewhere also seems to belong to this category.
3. A foreign power invades a territory with the intention to annex it and is *not* willing to incorporate the alien population, but instead pursues their displacement, relocation, or extinction. Examples can be drawn from many cases of ethnic cleansing.
4. A foreign power invades a territory with the intention to annex it and is willing to incorporate major groups of the alien population for certain economic needs. However, at the same time, the new rulers pursue the displacement, relocation, or extinction of other groups considered hostile, racially distinct, or simply *'not useful'* in the eyes of the intruders. The German occupational regime in Eastern Europe is the most horrific example.
5. A foreign power is accepted or even invited by a regime to move in and act without restrictions within its territory, since it considers itself an ally. Most likely, this inviter has depended on this foreign power to obtain its own power position. Short-term regimes such as in Croatia and Slovakia during World War Two would be examples of such a sort.

As a matter of course, these types can intermingle, interlock, or blend into each other over time. Regardless of the type, any occupying state, beyond military intervention and suppression, requires political, administrative, and cultural actions that, to a certain degree, need to involve and are dependent upon parts of the occupied population. Complicity and collaboration are essential to any form of occupation.

This said, we seek to differentiate occupation from other forms of restructuring of the political landscape, such as public votes for independence or voters' voluntary connection with a specific state. Nor do we consider the re-bordering of states at the conference table as forms of military occupation, although history shows that these strategic policies have very often led to further conflicts that resulted in military occupations. **Materials covered at this conference should be limited to fictional literature, travel literature, and autobiographical expressions of the experience of military occupation from either side, the occupied or the occupier (or both).** However, as some of these texts may have appeared in sources funded,

**published, and run by the occupying powers, it is also necessary to consider not only different types of genres but also different types of media. Occupiers seek to control the cultural life of occupied territories, and thus the socioeconomic conditions of the production of “cultural goods” is an important topic to scrutinize**

### **Periodization**

For many Europeans, the experience of occupation did not stop with the end of the war. Of course, for some Germans and most Europeans, the end of the war signaled the liberation from Nazi occupation. Liberation by the Allies put an end to the imperial dehumanization politics of Nazi Germany. However, in the European context, occupation is not limited to the foreign rule by the Third Reich. The American landing in southern Italy has been portrayed as an occupation in Italian literature for instance (Glynn 2015). Likewise, the subsequent East–West divide and the so-called Cold War led to a situation in which the liberators (including the soldiers of the Red Army, but not only) were also considered new occupiers. The Allies called their administered territories “occupied zones” (*Besatzungszonen*), and they meant the territories to be handled as such. Meanwhile, as in the case of the Netherlands and France, the occupied reestablished themselves as new occupiers in some of their colonial territories again. This raises the question whether colonial practices of occupations and their representations change after the experience of being occupied? A question highly discussed in France with respect to the occupation of Algeria and its War of Independence.

In Eastern Europe, the new presence of the Red Army and the populations’ involuntary integration into the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact were (perceived as) a continuation — sometimes even a fortification — of the occupation during World War Two. In the Baltic States, in particular, the Soviet occupation paved the way for national identity narratives (Velmet 2011). And after the end of the GDR some major German intellectuals (Hochhuth, Braun, Neutsch, Müller, Salomon) openly described the Unification as an occupation by the West; obviously, such a usage of the term analogizes the experience of radical political, economic, and cultural change with the experience of military occupation. This reminds us that the term itself is not exclusively a ‘scientific’ term (so to speak) for describing a specific historical situation but is essentially open to interpretation; in the interpretative sense, ‘occupation’ is conceptualized as a situation where individual agents and groups intervene in the realm of another people’s cultural politics.

For our conference, we differentiate between two periods of occupation:

- 1) From 1938 to 1945: The (heterogeneous) German occupational regimes established throughout Europe
- 2) From 1945 to 1955: A time characterized by the allied presence in Germany and Europe after the war; Dutch, Belgian and Luxembourgian plans to annex German regions to their territory; the foundation of the two German States in 1949; the death of Stalin in 1953, which

changed the occupational regime of the Soviet Union in the Baltic States; and the official end of the time of occupation in Western Germany through the “General Treaty” in 1952/1955.

Since the experience of occupation differs considerably between and within these periods one aim of the conference is to highlight the specificities of each. This can only be achieved by means of comparison which will enable us to answer the leading research questions: whether there is something common and shared in the representations of the experience of various types of occupation and, more importantly, whether literature of military occupation qualifies as a genre.

The sources that we think most likely to yield new insights could be categorized in a synchronic temporal order. We can differentiate between texts that:

- a) have been written under the experience of occupation, whether authored by occupiers or occupied
- b) have been written after the occupation ended, by authors who had experienced it firsthand
- c) have been written after the occupation by authors who did not live under nor participate in the occupation but return to it by means of historical documentation and fictional imagination. Consequently, these texts may come from our very present.

At the conference, participants are welcome to question the interplay between historical plot and its literary arrangements and to showcase how the time portrayed and the time of portraying are connected via literary representation.

### **Research Questions:**

Presentations at the conference may address some of the following questions:

- What were the social, political, and economic conditions for the production, distribution, and reception of literature under occupational regimes?
- How did the occupier’s cultural policies and politics in the occupied territories affect the production, distribution, and reception of literature?
- How do texts about the occupation circulate within Europe? Which texts have been translated into which language(s), and when? How were they received?
- Can we identify and explain why certain genres used more often than others for the representation of occupation?
  - How are these texts constructed? What type of narrator do they feature? What is the focus? Which metaphors are used, etc.?
- How was literature ‘used’ by the occupiers and by the occupied for political aims?
- How do literary texts figure the complex relationship between complicity, collaboration, and resistance? What insights can be gleaned from this relationship?

- Do such texts support or challenge other narratives about collaboration?
- Do literary texts transform into other media (cinema, television, radio)? Does such a transformation affect their public impact?
- What role do 'fantasies of occupation' play before or after a military conflict?
- Do the historical differences in the reality of occupation in various countries throughout Europe mirror the way literary texts represent them?
  - Did the racist ideology of the Third Reich, which segregated Europe into Germanic, Romance, Baltic, Slavic (East and West) races and was an important aspect of the concrete occupying practices, have an effect on the way the occupation was/is represented?
  - Can we observe changes in the representation according to the dynamics of the occupying regime? For instance: how did the intensifying repressive policies in Western and Northern European territories affect the corresponding literary representation? Can we observe, as the historians did, a move from a 'tendency to accommodate' towards a homogenization of opposition within the social strata of the occupied territories?
- What role did certain representations in literature play in the reconstitution of the occupied countries?
  - How do these representations relate to the emergence of national myths and the historiography of trauma about the occupation?
- What role did narratives by the occupiers play in their self-conceptualization as guilty perpetrators or as courageous soldiers?

We welcome brief proposals of no more than 250 words that answer any of the provided research question. In order to guarantee a comparative perspective, we strongly recommend that presenters include sources from at least two European Countries for a comparative perspective. The conference will be held in English.

Please submit your abstract and a short CV by July 15, 2021 to [matthias.buschmeier@uni-bielefeld.de](mailto:matthias.buschmeier@uni-bielefeld.de) and [jeanne.glesener@uni.lu](mailto:jeanne.glesener@uni.lu). Cost of travel and accommodation will be reimbursed. The conveners are at your disposal for any further questions.

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