

**The Holocaust in the Borderlands:
Interethnic Relations and the Dynamics of
Violence in Occupied Eastern Europe**

Veranstalter: Gaëlle Fisher / Caroline Mezger, Zentrum für Holocaust-Studien, Institut für Zeitgeschichte, München

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The international workshop set out to explore the dynamics of violence directed against Jews, Roma, and other persecuted minorities in the multiethnic borderlands of Eastern, Central, and Southeastern Europe during the Second World War and the Holocaust. Since every single borderland was characterized by its own diverse ethnic, cultural, religious, and political heritage, analyzing the Holocaust in these regions involves making sense of very different settings and scenarios. The eighteen speakers from twelve countries, who presented their research, thus embedded their insights on the Holocaust into the regions' larger prewar, wartime, and post-war social and political contexts. Presentations addressed a wide range of themes including the character interethnic relations in multiethnic societies, the rise of antisemitism in the interwar period, the dynamics of violence during the war, the role and situation of different groups during the war and in its immediate aftermath. The motives for participation in the violence and collaboration, ranging from ideology to economic enrichment, and the longer term legacies of the violence were also discussed.

The workshop opened with a keynote lecture by DORIS L. BERGEN (Toronto) which was held at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. In a paper entitled „Saving Christianity, Killing Jews: German Religious Campaigns and the Holocaust in the Borderlands,“ she presented the widely publicized effort of German occupiers to ‘rescue’ Christianity from communism. Drawing on a collection of photographs of churches reopened by the Germans in the occupied Soviet Union, Bergen posited a link between these projects of revival and destruction, and situated these

examples within a wider analysis of Christianity and its role in the Holocaust. In her analysis, Bergen also drew on the concepts of ‘cultural genocide’ and ‘genocidal culture’ and reflected on the relationship between the two.

After the opening lecture, Gaëlle Fisher and Caroline Mezger introduced the workshop's main themes and shared their thoughts on the topic. Fisher first addressed three preliminary questions: Why Eastern Europe? Why the Holocaust? And why the borderlands? She invited everyone to reflect on the contested character of Eastern Europe as a space, the Holocaust as an event, and the regions under consideration as constructions, and suggested how to draw on these insights productively. She thereby emphasized that the focus on ‘borderlands’ could be the basis for both an empirical and a theoretical approach when trying to make sense of different contexts of social upheaval during the Second World War and the Holocaust. Mezger shared further thoughts on the dynamics of violence based on her work on the region of Vojvodina. She illustrated the manner in which the Holocaust occurred in Southeastern Europe's multiethnic borderlands, and the ways in which the Holocaust was experienced, remembered, and narrated by individuals afterwards. Based on various sources, Mezger analyzed how diverse conditions of Axis occupation affected the timeline and social dynamics of violence and Holocaust perpetration in different borderlands.

The workshop's first panel focused on the contexts of social division in multiethnic societies before the outbreak of the Second World War. GRZEGORZ KRYZWIEC (Warsaw) drew on the case study of Lubelszczyzna (Lublin) to explore the character of the ‘National Revolution’ ‘from below’ and ‘from above’ on the eve of the war. He emphasized the connection between antisemitic propaganda and political violence (both nationalist and state-sponsored) in this multiethnic region. ANCA FILIPOVICI (Cluj-Napoca) then examined the daily life of students at the University of Cernăuți in the multiethnic borderland of Bukovina in the interwar period. She showed how, in the midst of the region's ‘Romanianization’, the desire for social mobil-

ity and antisemitism among Romanian students led to interethnic clashes, and the university changed from a 'space of knowledge' to a 'space of violence'. In the third paper in this panel, LEON SALTIEL offered a new interpretive scheme to analyze the Holocaust in Thessaloniki. He showed how the legacy of the Ottoman millet system (a 'millet mentality') could be viewed as a factor in the 'silence' of Thessaloniki's Christian elites during the Holocaust.

The following panel discussed how the different national and imperial agendas of the Axis powers manifested themselves in regimes of occupation. TOMMASO DELL'ERA (Viterbo) investigated the character of interethnic relations during the Italian occupation of Albania, and the persecution of local Jews and Slavs. He thereby challenged the myth of 'the good Albanian.' In her paper, MIRNA ZAKIĆ (Athens, Ohio) examined the Holocaust and persecution of the Jews and Serbs in the Nazi-occupied Serbian Banat. According to her research, ethnic Germans' relative opportunities to mistreat and despoil Slavs and Jews intersected with Nazi prejudices against Jews, Slavs, and communists. Finally, MARIANA HAUSLEITNER (Berlin) offered a long-term perspective on the relationship of ethnic Germans from Bukovina and from the Romanian Banat to National Socialism. She showed how National Socialism became more influential among these groups as a result of forced 'Romanianization' and the economic crisis of the 1930s, but also due to German efforts to Nazify the ethnic German elites.

WINSON CHU (Milwaukee, Wisconsin) started the third panel by examining how the German criminal police offered a pathway to German belonging and identity for so-called 'Volksdeutsche' in the city of Lodz / Litzmannstadt. By looking at how ethnic German biographies were constructed, he showed how these fostered violence against former neighbors. In his presentation, GORAN MILJAN (Uppsala) investigated the role of local actors and communities – particularly that of Ustaša Youth officials and members – in the Holocaust under the Ustaša regime in Croatia between 1941 and 1945. He showed that the Ustaša movement implemented radical anti-

Jewish, anti-Serbian and anti-Roma policies in order to create a 'new' Croatian state. Both speakers highlighted the importance of ideology in local radicalization processes and for the practices of occupation.

The fourth panel provided insight into the dynamics of violence and mobilization in different borderlands. JASON TINGLER (Worcester, Massachusetts) spoke about the Holocaust and interethnic violence in Chełm and showed how the atrocities transformed the region into a microcosm of mass violence. According to Tingler, the German occupiers instigated ethnic animosities among the local population by forcing them into a regime of oppression and implementing a selective system of entitlements and deprivations. NEVENA DAKOVIĆ (Belgrade) presented a paper on the Újvidék Raid and showed how the complex pattern of violence was sustained by the borderline position of Novi Sad at the intersection of three – Hungarian, German, and Romanian – occupational zones. She discussed the later representation of the event in film and drew in her analysis on the concept of „violence as a generative force”.¹ The day ended with the paper of KATERYNA BUDZ (Kiev) on the role of Ukrainian Greek Catholics during the Holocaust in Galicia. Most local Ukrainians belonged to this Church and were involved in the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and its military formation, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. Its members were notorious for the wartime killings of Poles and Jews, but as Budz argued, the attitudes of religious leaders were not always clear cut.

The workshop's second day started with a session on the local practices and perceptions of anti-Jewish persecution. Drawing on the unpublished diary of Lipman Kunstadt, SARAH ROSEN (Jerusalem) reflected on the complex relationships between Ukrainians, Jews, Romanians, and Nazi occupiers in the region of Northern Transnistria. Rosen emphasized that Kunstadt's diary, which she is planning to publish with Dalia Ofer shortly, gives privileged insight into the daily life of Jews in this region. SVETLANA SUVEICA

¹Max Bergholz, *Violence as a Generative Force. Identity, Nationalism and Memory in a Balkan Community*, Ithaca, New York 2016.

(Regensburg) analyzed how local institutions in Bessarabia dealt with Jewish property during the Holocaust in Romania. For Suveica, taking into account the 'economic' dimension of mass violence allows for a better understanding of the role of local agents and collaborators during the Holocaust. The third panelist, ANNA WYLEGAŁA (Warsaw), innovatively examined the way in which the voices of Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians contradict each other in their narratives of the Holocaust and concerning the issue of plunder of Jewish properties in Galicia in particular. Evaluating these dissonant memories gives insight into the context of the interethnic relations between an ethnic majority (the Ukrainians) and two minorities of different status (the Jews and the Poles).

Central questions in panel four included how different groups and postwar societies confronted the legacies of the Holocaust in the immediate postwar period, and how narratives of various ethnic groups differed. VOLHA BARTASH (Vienna) shed light on the situation of the Roma community in the Belarusian-Lithuanian border region during the Holocaust. Drawing on Roma narratives introduces a widely ignored and understudied view of the different actors, local collaboration, and interethnic relations under occupation. OLHA KOLESNYK (Warsaw) discussed Jewish perspectives on the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland until 1941 on the basis of different types of ego-documents. She thereby showed how Jewish perceptions of the Soviet occupation in Lviv and their understanding of interethnic relations in this city depended on where they spent the war.

In the last panel, entitled „Conveying Catastrophe in Language and Art,“ MIRIAM SCHULZ (New York) gave an original insight into the use of the Yiddish language in the aftermath of the war. She examined new Yiddish words and idioms, which reveal how the speakers thought about interethnic relations, violence, and mass murder in the borderlands of occupied Eastern Europe. The workshop's final speaker, IRINA REBROVA (Berlin) focused on Soviet trials against Nazi perpetrators in the North Caucasian region. She discussed how films, documentary novels and even poems, which appeared in the Soviet

Union on this topic shaped the archetypal image of German perpetrators and local collaborators.

In the concluding remarks, FRANK BAJOHHR (Munich), Doris Bergen, Gaëlle Fisher, and Caroline Mezger discussed the potential of a 'borderlands approach' to the study of the Holocaust. Frank Bajohr emphasized that the Holocaust was a social process: the genocide itself was an important factor in the wider dynamics of violence during the Second World War and afterwards. He also highlighted the strong German influence on social processes and violence in the borderlands of Eastern Europe during the Holocaust and the need to keep this in mind. Doris Bergen skillfully summed up and connected the insights of the diverse contributions and called for defining the Holocaust more broadly, moving forwards and backwards in time. For Bergen, the multiplicity of the victims in particular, as well as the movement between Western and Eastern Europe, require further analysis. Gaëlle Fisher highlighted the way in which borderlands showcase the entanglement of cultural, social, and political struggles that accompanied the Holocaust and physical violence, and the challenge of weighting, connecting, and disentangling these retrospectively. On a methodological level, she illustrated the problem of uncovering absent voices (such as women and Roma) and the potential of paying more attention to emotions (greed, betrayal, empathy, etc.), which were often mentioned during the conference but not dealt with systematically.

Finally, Caroline Mezger questioned the units historians commonly employ in relation to the 'borderlands.' Besides 'empires,' 'nations,' 'borders,' 'occupational zones,' and 'from above' and 'from below' dynamics, the Holocaust in the borderlands also was defined by individual life courses, families, neighborhoods, congregations, and other units of social analysis that transgressed geographical and ideological categories. All four speakers highlighted the importance of crosschecking our understanding of wider social and political trends with individual testimonies, biographies, and memories for a better contextualization of the Holocaust and Second World War in Europe's borderlands.

Conference Overview:

Welcome and Introduction

Frank Bajohr / Kim Wünschmann / Gaëlle Fisher / Caroline Mezger (Munich)

Opening Lecture

Doris Bergen (Toronto): Saving Christianity, Killing Jews: German Religious Campaigns and the Holocaust in the Borderlands

Welcome & Introduction

Gaëlle Fisher and Caroline Mezger (Munich): The Holocaust in the Borderlands: Introductory Remarks

Panel I – Contexts of Social Division in Multi-ethnic Societies

Grzegorz Krzywiak (Warsaw): 'Borderlands' (Kresy) as a Laboratory for Space without the Others? Eastern Europe, Multi-Ethnic Realm and 'National Revolution' from below and above at the Eve of WWII. The Case Study of Lubelszczyzna

Anca Filipovici (Cluj-Napoca): Interethnic Clashes among Students at the University of Chernovtsy (1930-1940). Daily Life, Propaganda and the Rise of Anti-Semitism in the Multiethnic Borderland of Bukovina

Leon Saltiel (Thessaloniki): The Legacy of the Millet as a Factor in the 'Silence' of the Thessaloniki Christian Elites during the Holocaust

Panel II – National Agendas and Regimes of Occupation

Tommaso Dell'Era (Viterbo): Italian Imperialism, Albanian Nationalism and the Holocaust during the Occupation Period (1939-1943)

Mirna Zakić (Athens, Ohio): „The soil which drank German blood will become our living space“: Ethnic Germans, Jews, and Serbs in the Occupied Banat

Mariana Hausleitner (Berlin): The Germans in the Bukovina and the Romanian Banat after 1935

Panel III - Engineering Social Differences: Ideology and Radicalization

Winson Chu (Milwaukee, Wisconsin): "... Reich Germans believe in the German Reich,

the Volk Germans believe in the German Volk“: Violence and Intraethnic Hierarchies in the Kriminalpolizei in Lodz / Litzmannstadt

Goran Miljan (Uppsala): The 'Ideal Nation-State' for the 'Ideal New Croat' - Fascism and the Holocaust in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941-1945

Panel IV – Dynamics of Violence and Mobilization

Jason Tingler (Worcester, Massachusetts): Mosaic of Destruction. The Holocaust and Mass Violence in Chełm, 1939-1944

Nevana Daković (Belgrade): Ujvidek Raid: Holocaust and Interethnic Violence

Kateryna Budz (Kiev): The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Holocaust in Galicia (1941-1944)

Panel V – Local Practices and Perceptions of Anti-Jewish Persecution

Sarah Rosen (Jerusalem): Northern Transnistria: Ukrainians, Jews, Romanians and Nazi Occupiers as Reflected in the Diary of Lipman Kunstadt

Svetlana Suveica (Regensburg): Dealing with Jewish Property in the Borderlands. Local Public Institutions in Bessarabia during the Holocaust

Anna Wylegała (Warsaw): Listening to the Contradicting Voices: Jewish, Polish and Ukrainian Narratives on the Holocaust and Plunder of the Jewish Property in Galicia

Panel VI – Reckoning with the Holocaust in the Immediate Postwar Period

Volha Bartash (Vienna): „The war ended in 1950“: German Occupation and Interethnic Relations in the Belarusian-Lithuanian Border Region through the Eyes of the Local Roma Community

Olha Kolesnyk (Warsaw): Jewish Perception of Soviet Occupation in Lviv in 1939-1941 (Based on Ego-Documents)

Panel VII – Conveying Catastrophe in Language and Art

Miriam Schulz (New York): Of Ablaves, Uksinikes, and Negers. The Yiddish Lan-

guage as a Mirror Image of Interethnic Relations and Violence in the Borderlands

Irina Rebrova (Berlin): „German monsters escaped, but there is the entire Hitler system on the dock“: Literary Representation of the Soviet Trials against Nazi Perpetrators in the (Post)War Society (the North Caucasian Case)

Closing Discussion

Gaëlle Fisher / Caroline Mezger / Doris Bergen / Frank Bajohr (Munich)

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