

## Enforcing peace? British post-war planning and administration in occupied Germany after the Second World War

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The last decade has seen a remarkable revival of historical research on the Allied presence in Western Germany after 1945, in particular with regard to the British zone of occupation. Aside from an increase in published monographs and collective volumes, evidence for this is visible due to the recurrent organization of international conferences on the topic.<sup>1</sup> Yet of greater importance is that this quantitative increase has also created a qualitative renewal. Traditional topics such as re-education, media and propaganda, individual or collective experiences and expectations are now analysed from different angles than before. The new research is driven by a novel interest in occupied Western Germany as a paradigmatic zone of contact and interaction in social, cultural, and political terms.

Of course, one reason for the renewed academic attention is connected to the decreasing British involvement within continental European matters in recent years. Yet, it would be unwise to determine interest is solely due to the most exposed current affairs, in particular the outcome and still uncertain consequences of the 2016 EU-membership referendum. In fact, one should trace the new interest for British and Allied occupation in Western Germany back to the late 2000s, when the back-then shadow Tory cabinet first expressed plans to withdraw British forces from „the Rhine“. Withdrawing became governmental policy by 2010, and by 2020 it will have led to the eventual relocation of nearly all British troops regularly stationed in Germany.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in light of the UK's decreasing interest in European matters, the British presence in the

framework of the post-war Allied occupation in Germany represents more than ever a paradigmatic historical case study; it also has

<sup>1</sup>For some of the most recent studies see David Phillips, *Educating the Germans. People and policy in the British Zone of Germany 1945–1949*, London et al. 2018 – reviewed by Marianne Zepp in: *H-Soz-Kult*, 20.03.2019: <https://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/rezbuecher-29576> (21.06.2019); Christopher Knowles, *Winning the peace. The British in occupied Germany, 1945–1958*, London et al. 2017 – reviewed by Kerstin Schulte in: *H-Soz-Kult*, 04.09.2017: <https://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/rezbuecher-27065> (21.06.2019); Susan L. Carruthers, *The Good Occupation: American Soldiers and the Hazards of Peace*, Cambridge et al. 2016. In a meaningful development, two of the most relevant conferences recently organized on the matter have led to the publication of a collective volume respectively, which fostered a broader diffusion of the newest and growingly variegated scholarly production in the field. Contributions to the 2016 conference „The Allied Occupation of Germany Revisited.“ – Conference report: Lena Eggers, *The Allied Occupation of Germany Revisited: New Research on the Western Zones of Occupation, 1945–49*, 29.09.2016–30.09.2016, London, in: *H-Soz-Kult*, 25.11.2016: <https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-6838> (21.06.2019) – thus flew into the collective volume by Camilo Erlichmann / Christopher Knowles (eds.), *Transforming Occupation in the Western Zones of Germany: Politics, Everyday Life and Social Interactions, 1945–55*, London et al. 2019. In the same manner, the recent book by Peter E. Fäßler / Andreas Neuwöhner / Florian Staffel (eds.), *Briten in Westfalen 1945–2017: Besatzer, Verbündete, Freunde*, Paderborn 2019, recollects contributions from the 2017 international conference „Britten in Westfalen“ – Conference report: David Merschjohann, *Britten in Westfalen*, 09.03.2017–11.03.2017, Paderborn, in: *H-Soz-Kult*, 29.06.2017: <https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-7225> (21.06.2019).

<sup>2</sup>First presented as a necessity to relocate troops towards extra-European theatres and later, in the wake of the financial crisis, as part of a broader restructuring of the UK defence budget, the withdraw affects around 20.000 British troops regularly stationed in Germany along with additional 23.000 civilian family members. See Benedict Brogan, *Tories to pull British forces out of Germany*, in: *The Daily Telegraph*, 20.11.2009: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/6617358/Tories-to-pull-British-forces-out-of-Germany.html> (21.06.2019); Nick Hopkins, *UK to withdraw 11,000 troops from Germany by 2016*, in: *The Guardian*, 05.03.2013: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/mar/05/uk-withdraw-troops-germany-2016> (21.06.2019). For an updated quantitative overview on the withdraw see Ministry of Defence, *Annual Location Statistics (ALS)*, 1 April 2019, p. 5: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/804440/ALS\\_-\\_April\\_2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/804440/ALS_-_April_2019.pdf) (21.06.2019).

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explanatory potential for acute present-day issues.

The workshop focused on the preparation, accomplishment and outcome of British occupation as a fluid historical process and thus aimed at re-locating the roots of the British Zone of Occupation in Germany within a time frame starting before 1945. In line with this, in their introduction DANIEL SIEMENS (Newcastle) and KERSTIN SCHULTE (Bielefeld) offered some preliminary reflections on analytical categories capable of addressing this thread within a broader framework of the British Zone of Occupation as a contact zone. They argued that it was especially the ambivalence between British expectations on the one hand and the reality produced by constant interaction with West German occupied society on the other hand that should be at the heart of new research. In particular the early years of Allied occupation saw a constant re-examining of the situation on both sides, which made previous ideas quickly obsolete but also offered ad hoc possibilities all sides were eager to explore.

By identifying the occupation's origins as a first, decisive moment of a triad composed by impacts and legacies, CHRISTOPHER KNOWLES (London) presented an ideal-typical definition of occupation. Starting from the assumption that occupation could be seen in itself as a peculiar political system of rule, he defined this system as lacking all sort of intrinsic legitimacy and depending, in the last resort, on the use or threat of force. Personal relationships, everyday life, socio-economic structures, power and sovereignty, he added, offer through their manifold appearances privileged viewpoints for reconstruction based on a generic theory of occupations.

SAMANTHA KNAPTON (Norwich/Newcastle), in turn, presented the results of her empirical research on Polish displaced persons (DPs) within the British sector. She demonstrated that relations between British administration and Polish DPs after the war were negatively shaped by the discordant consideration given to the Polish war effort and by the British difficulty in handling the extremely numerous and socially variegated contingent of Polish

DPs. Furthermore, the implementation of resettlements (as the short-lived Polish town Maczków in the Emsland) or repatriation-oriented welfare policies towards Poles („Operation Carrot“) often exacerbated tensions with the local German population. Through her case studies, Knapton emphasised the often-neglected influence of Polish DPs on the British occupation framework.

Maintaining a focus on the policies pursued by British administration, DAVID PHILLIPS (Oxford) analysed how education in Germany was shaped by the individual actors involved first in the wartime planning process and then in post-war decisions during occupation. Starting from the central role played by experts like E. R. Dodds in sketching the Nazi German education system, he then traced the influence of other individuals within the administration of the Education Branch or acting as external advisors. Phillips argued that the ultimate outcome of the policies was highly dependent on the individual actors. Building on personal-institutional relations, he proposed a periodization consisting of five phases: preparation, military administration, Control Commission administration, British veto right period, and German self-administration.

The issue of de-Nazification, highlighted by Phillips as the core of British and Allied re-education policies – especially after the Potsdam Agreement – was then examined in its legal and institutional aspects by KERSTIN SCHULTE (Bielefeld). In her talk on the function of the Review Boards, she stressed how an interest in these tribunals is neglected in the historiography, as they were often considered less relevant than the later *Spruchgerichte* in the process of de-Nazification. Indeed, as Schulte argued, it was quite the contrary. Since the Review Boards were established alongside prosecutions carried out at the Nuremberg Trials, they represented a fundamental bridging stage on the way to the later development of the *Spruchgerichte*.

CAROLINE SHARPLES (London) took the sentences of the Nuremberg, Belsen, and Dachau Trials as the starting point of her contribution. She focused on the events following the execution of Nazis sentenced to

death. The vicissitudes related to political-symbolical conflicts around the corpses allowed Sharples to reflect on society and memory culture in occupied West Germany. She witnessed a relevant difference between British and American practices in handling the dead bodies of former Nazis. While in the British Zone sentences were carried out with the corpses anonymously buried behind the walls of Hameln prison, thus obstructing pleas from family members to identify the bodies and conduct private funerals, the US-administration tended to treat corpses as individually identifiable. In some instances, they even permitted some families to retrieve the corpses of their executed relatives. The case of the former SS functionary Otto Ohlendorf demonstrated, however, that US-American expectations for private, non-political burials were not always fulfilled. At times, families and comrades turned the burial ceremonies into political manifestations.

Returning to the workshop's initial focus on the preparation and origins of British occupation, EMILY OLIVER (Coventry) analysed the influence and parallel development of the BBC German Service – founded after the Munich crisis in 1938 – and of the Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (NWDR). According to Oliver, the core difference between the uneven pervasiveness of the two rested in the fact that the Germans only perceived the latter, structured since its inception in 1945 as a home service for Germany under British control and broadcasting with a clear target on local post-war everyday life, as close to their needs. The London-based BBC German Service, on the contrary, remained through all its history first and foremost a somehow distant British voice for Germany.

Based on the findings of these papers, TIM KIRK (Newcastle) in his concluding remarks offered some reflections to further develop the scholarly debate. The contributions, he argued, had once again proven that the popular narrative of an alleged zero hour starting in 1945 in occupied Germany is misleading, as it excludes the possible continuities between a Nazi regime, an occupied and defeated nation, and a slowly emerging democratic West German society. He argued that it would be advisable to focus historiographical atten-

tion on how the perception of Nazis and their regime was handled differently by the Allies and by the locals. A further point addressed the idiosyncrasies emerging from conflicts between the official occupying policies and the expectations of the occupied Germans. Finally, Kirk pointed out that all occupations should be seen as an opportunity rather than a problem to cope with. This would be especially true for the numerous individuals who personally profited from an unexpected situation.

Taking up this point in the following discussion, Siemens argued that this would be especially evident in cases like the British Education Branch where individuals in leading positions often had great personal agency. Another point of the discussion focused on the gendered aspects of British occupation. The fact that the large majority of the British occupation forces was male is partly to be explained by the fact that the British administration was carried out via military structures. Yet, the discussants agreed that future empirical research should discuss the consequences of this gender imbalance more fully, as it decisively shaped everyday interactions between occupiers and occupied and influenced political concepts for post-war Germany. Consequently, the final discussion called for further studies on the history of British and Allied occupation in West Germany and suggested that research on the „prehistory“ of the occupation of 1945 would prove particularly fruitful. This framework would challenge reductive views based on the assumption of an immediate and sharp distinction between societies and individual experiences before and after May 1945. Moreover, this perspective promises to offer new insights into the centrality of planning in securing successful outcomes for decision-making and political processes in the long run. As Britain continues to disengage from Europe and the relationship deteriorates, such historical recognition can hardly be underestimated.

#### **Conference overview:**

Daniel Siemens (Newcastle University) / Kerstin Schulte (Bielefeld University): Welcome and introduction

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*Panel 1*

Christopher Knowles (King's College London): Reframing military occupation as a system of rule: Origins, impacts and legacies

Samantha Knapton (University of East Anglia/Newcastle University): Poles and DPs in the British Zone of Occupation, 1945–1951

*Panel 2*

David Phillips (University of Oxford): Planning and implementing education policy in the British Zone: People and policy

Kerstin Schulte (Bielefeld University): Classifying Nazis: Review Boards in the internment camps of the British Occupation Zone, 1946–1948

*Panel 3*

Caroline Sharples (University of Roehampton): Burying the past? Disposing of executed Nazi war criminals in the British and American Occupation Zones, 1945–51

Emily Oliver (University of Warwick): A home service for Germany: The BBC as model for German post-war broadcasting

Concluding remarks: Tim Kirk (Newcastle University)

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