



## Call for Papers

### Strategies of blockade.

#### Access to archive records in France and Germany in an international perspective

On 20<sup>th</sup> February this year, »Le Monde« published a lengthy article entitled *Guerre de tranchées sur l'accès aux archives*. Is there bureaucratic trench warfare in France between researchers, archivists and politicians for access to the archives? What is the situation in Germany and other European countries?

The situation in France is ambivalent. French President Emmanuel Macron maintains a rhetoric of historiographic openness even with regard to sensitive topics such as the Algerian War or the diplomatic and military intervention in Rwanda during the genocide of 1994. In both cases, historians were officially tasked with the preparation of reports, albeit with different objectives. In early 2021, Benjamin Stora submitted a report with recommendations on how to commemorate the events that took place in Algeria. Vincent Duclert, who had headed a commission that produced a report on research into genocide and mass crimes in 2018/19, was tasked with examining the role played by France in Rwanda; his report was submitted to the president in April 2021. In the latter case in particular, the remit came with unusual and exclusive rights to access the official records. This raises questions about the privileged access to archive materials in cases of state-sanctioned research. While the records examined should still be made available for research purposes, for the huge rest of the archives everything else remains the same, or access is made even more difficult.

A concrete case, which has prompted angry protests since last year, is the *Instruction générale interministérielle 1300* (IGI 1300). Researchers fear that the inter-ministerial ordinance, which regulates issues like secrecy, will fundamentally impede contemporary researchers' access to archives citing national security concerns, because the relatively liberal terms in archive law can be offset by complicated clearance procedures for classified documents. The access to documents that are already in the public domain and have been published in critical editions is even set to be revoked. The motivation behind the introduction of the »IGI 1300« is unclear, particularly as it appears to be on a collision course with the presidential politics of remembrance that have been pursued since François Hollande was in office.

Is the situation in France unique? Even just a cursory glance at other countries shows that the question of accessing archives is extremely topical. Media reactions go beyond research circles and, on the one hand, reflect a demand for transparency in modern society, while on the other hand highlighting the value of scientific and legal reappraisal of the past, which is not always free of conflict, and the politics of dealing with it in 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe. The last time such questions arose in Germany was when Stasi records were handed over to the German Federal Archive,

which prompted debate about its role. The French researcher Fabien Théofilakis, meanwhile, is suing the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution to gain access to the records of Adolf Eichmann.

The rise of illiberal democracies in eastern central Europe has allowed state-driven politics of memory to gradually become an instrument of power. Initially the exertion of influence was aimed at museums and at the promotion of academic institutions. As seen in Poland, historians have sometimes been forced to answer charges in court if their research produces unwanted results. However, more research is required to examine the extent to which access to archive materials is limited, whom it concerns and what topics are subject to such limitations. In western Europe it is mainly issues concerning how our colonial past and the associated demands for restitution and compensation are dealt with that raise the question of whether and to what extent it is possible to permit unlimited access to archives for the purpose of historical or journalistic research.

The examples cited above show that the archive landscapes have become unsettled in an increasingly fraught political atmosphere and that the changes that are currently ongoing must be recorded and analysed at various levels:

1. normative: explicit legislation and executive orders regulating archival access; political commitment (at the highest level), even if it is potentially at odds with the existing orders, i.e. by semi-official discourse and publicity, granting of privileged access to archive records;
2. administrative: limitation of archival access by means of legal provisions and procedures above and beyond archive laws and on the basis of competing rights that are worthy of protection and are usually subject to administrative decision-making (esp. the protection of confidentiality and of copyrights and rights of privacy);
3. practical: limitation of services in the archives (digitalisation, opening hours, provision of documents), staff reduction, etc.

The conference aims to discuss these questions in a comparative and interdisciplinary manner (historical sciences, archival science and practice, jurisprudence, etc.). In addition to the situations that exist in France and Germany, other countries within the EU will also be explored. Moreover, the conference will examine to what extent national experiences and practices can be the starting points for transnational transfer processes in how the past is dealt with and potentially also in preventing the past from being dealt with.

Please submit an abstract of no more than 500 words in one of the conference languages (French, German or English) to Agnieszka Wierzholska: [awierzholska@dhi-paris.fr](mailto:awierzholska@dhi-paris.fr); the deadline for submissions is **20<sup>th</sup> September 2021**.

**Date:** 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> January 2022

**Location:** German Historical Institute Paris

**Conference languages:** German, French, English

**Organisation committee:**

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