

Changing Perspectives on Resistance during the Second World War

Call for Papers – International Conference

18, 19 and 20 September 2024

University of Antwerp, Centre for Political History

Almost eighty years after the end of the Second World War and after the resistance to the fascist and nazi occupiers emerged from its shadows, this conference aims to unite the wealth of perspectives and insights generated by resistance historiography during these past decades. From 18 to 20 September 2024, the University of Antwerp will host an international conference on the history of resistance during the Second World War, exploring its conceptual and methodological evolutions.

Over the past eighty years of resistance historiography, many nations have struggled to create a sustainable and inclusive history of resistance to German occupation. Immediately after the war, the focus lay almost exclusively on resistance organisations and activities as they existed at the time of the liberation, and studies emphasized the professionalism of these organisations. Dutch historian Loe De Jong, in 1976, argued that resistance could only occur within organized contexts, sidelining individual activism and diverting research focus from the individual. This perspective characterized the first fifty years of resistance historiography. From the 1990s, there was a shift from an institutional history of resistance – organised by resistance group or type – to an **individual history of resistance**: Who were the men and women shaping the resistance? This approach prompted smaller-scale, bottom-up research, leading to **local resistance history**. While some historians now question the desirability of a **national resistance history**, this perspective remains relevant. In France, the 2019 publication *La Lutte clandestine en France. Une histoire de la Résistance 1940-1944* offered an innovative approach, shifting away from structures and organisations to focus on individuals. According to the authors, resistance is the history of men and women, not structures. Beyond national and local perspectives, historians today explore broader syntheses. Recent publications by Olivier Wieviorka (2017) and Halik Kochanski (2022) on a European level and by Ismee Tames and Robert Gildea (2020) on a **transnational level** reflect this trend.

What happens to the concept of resistance when perspectives change? The definition of resistance has broadened over recent decades, yet historians continue to stress that resistance was a minority concept. The shift to the individual level revealed a crucial aspect of resistance: it broke down social boundaries. This aspect raised questions about the role of **gender** and **class** in forming networks and developing resistance activities and led to the inclusion of **women** and **foreigners** in resistance history. How does incorporating the experiences of these groups alter our understanding of resistance? Since the 1970s, historians have depicted resistance as a core surrounded by a population more or less supportive of this resistance. The entrenchment of resistance in society raises questions about where resistance ends and "supporting the resistance" begins. What activities constitute this core? Alongside the geographical and sociological shifts in resistance research, historians increasingly acknowledge the importance of **chronology** and the variability of resistance over time. Even when traces of the past are found, resistance had yet to be invented during the first year of occupation, an aspect that remains underexplored. The earliest networks consisted of people who already knew each other, worked together, were friends, and shared the same values. However, these individuals had to

reinvent themselves to translate their desire to "do something" into clandestine action. Local resistance history brought the "**daily life**" of resistance into focus, exploring the meaning of living clandestinely, its practices, and the relationships running through this clandestine world. What was so particular about this world, functioning on the margins of society? The search for "the reality of resistance" revealed its elusive nature. Definitions and structures are necessary for meaningful and directed research, but how can we avoid falling into traditional categories? Or do we embrace the sentiment of Belgian resistance fighter William Ugeux in 1970: "There was almost as much resistance as there were resisters"?

During this conference, we aim to consolidate this variety of insights and examine how they can support and reinforce each other. We want to explore the perspectives and methodologies currently employed by resistance historians, emphasizing their interaction with the definition of resistance. Submissions may involve national, local or transnational research, encompass comparative studies and microhistory, and investigate the role of gender or class in the resistance, focusing on specific individuals, activities or events. We explicitly encourage paper proposals that go beyond these perspectives to examine the concept of resistance critically. Considering our objective to perceive the Second World War as a global conflict, we also encourage paper proposals addressing resistance outside German-occupied Europe, e.g., on the resistance against the Italian occupation of Albania or the Japanese occupation of Indonesia, or on internal resistance within these occupying powers against their fascist and nazi authorities.

Keynote speakers:

- Prof. Claire Andrieu (Sciences Po)
- Dr. Jelena Batinic (Stanford University)
- Prof. Emmanuel Debruyne (UCLouvain)
- Prof. em. Paula Schwartz (Middlebury College)
- Prof. Ismee Tames (Utrecht University)

Practicalities

- Submissions should include name, primary affiliation, paper title, a 250-400 words abstract, and a short bio.
- You can send your paper proposals to: conferenceresistance2024@gmail.com
- Final papers, not exceeding 5000 words, should be submitted in English.
- The papers will be made available to congress participants.
- Oral presentations of papers during the conference must not exceed 20 minutes.

Deadlines and dates

- Submission of paper proposals: 1 March 2024
- Notification of acceptance: 1 May 2024
- Submission of paper: 1 September 2024
- Conference: 18-20 September 2024

Organizing Committee

- Prof. Koen Aerts (Ghent University)
- Prof. Marnix Beyen (University of Antwerp)
- Michèle Corthals (University of Antwerp)

- Prof. Pieter Lagrou (Université libre de Bruxelles)
- Prof. Roschanack Shaery-Yazdi (University of Antwerp)
- Babette Weyns (Ghent University)
- Dr. Nico Wouters (State Archives of Belgium)