

Simone Erpel

"Perpetrators on Display" Nazi Dictatorship and WW II Perpetrators in Exhibitions

The Nazi crimes cannot be understood without taking a close look at the perpetrators. This comprehension has become generally accepted in the more than 20 years of renewed attention to the history of the Holocaust and its perpetrators. A growing interest in the topic has also been shown by women's and gender studies' research on National Socialism. Much of this research has found, and is finding, its way into Holocaust memorials' outreach and education programs, as well as into museums' education programs. Exhibitions in historical museums and at memorial sites are basic educational tools in this process.

In my paper I raise the question of how to represent Nazi perpetrators at a national historical museum, and how to represent them at a site of their crimes. Therefore, I would like to compare two historical exhibitions. On the one hand, I will examine the exhibition ""Hitler and The German. Nation and Crime" at the German Historical Museum in Berlin. On the other hand, I will analyze the permanent exhibition "The SS auxiliary". This exhibition focuses on female concentration camp wardens and is located at the Ravensbrück memorial site, 80 kilometers north of Berlin.

My study investigates the problems you are confronted with when representing Nazi dictatorship in a museum. Also, what are the challenges that occur by depicting perpetrators at a memorial site? At least, what are similarities and differences between exhibitions located in a museum and at a memorial site? For instance, in which way do such exhibitions work with artifacts, original objects or replicas? And why is it done in this way?

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