



Berlin  
Center for Historical Research  
Polish Academy of Sciences



## CALL FOR PAPERS

Conference

***‘After every war someone has to clean up’ (W. Szymborska). The myth of ‘rubble women’ and ‘female reconstruction helpers’ and the actual contribution of women to both reconstruction and new beginnings after the end of armed conflicts***

**Organizer:** Centre for Historical Research Berlin of the Polish Academy of Sciences

**Date:** 20.09.2024

**Location:** Centre for Historical Research Berlin of the Polish Academy of Sciences Majakowskiring 47 13156 Berlin

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the air war over Berlin (the massive air raids began at the end of 1943). As a result of the bombing raids on German cities, the urban landscape was devastated, with large sections reduced to ruins. In the shared collective memory of both Germans and Austrians, the task of clearing the rubble both after the air raids and at the war’s end was primarily undertaken by women, the so-called ‘Trümmerfrauen’ or ‘Aufbauhelferinnen’, who became one of the most famous realms of memory in contemporary Germany. However, more recent, extensive research has shown that this image is largely an artificially created myth that was propagated and politically instrumentalised, especially in the GDR. However, this does not imply that women have not contributed and continue to contribute to the reconstruction of destroyed cities and the restoration of ‘normality’ after the end of wars, including the Second World War and all other armed conflicts.

The aim of this conference is twofold: to contribute to the demythologisation of the image of the ‘Trümmerfrauen’ and to describe the history and functioning of this myth. Additionally, it seeks to provide insight into the actual historical and contemporary contributions of women to post-war reconstruction and restoration of orderly life against the broadest possible background (not only in Germany and not only after the Second World War). We would like to explore the phenomenon

not only from historical and sociological perspectives, but also from an art-historical perspective, examining a wide variety of mediums including, posing photographs, monuments, sculptures, propaganda posters, stamps, and more. A visit to the outdoor sculpture ‘Aufbauhelferin’ by Königsberg-born artist Gertrud Classen, situated near the headquarters of the Centre for Historical Research Berlin of the Polish Academy of Sciences, will also contribute to our exploration.

Presentations, **with a maximum length of 30 minutes**, can be delivered in either **German or English**, depending on the speaker's preference. However, basic proficiency in both languages is expected since simultaneous translation will not be provided.

Researchers interested in applying for the conference with a presentation proposal are kindly requested to submit an **abstract of their paper, with a maximum length of 3,000 characters, along with a biographical note not exceeding 1,500 characters**. These files should be written in the language in which the candidate intends to deliver their speech and sent to the following email address: [joanna.szkolnicka@cbh.pan.pl](mailto:joanna.szkolnicka@cbh.pan.pl) by **July 15, 2024**.

If a presentation proposal is accepted, candidates will be notified by email, and the organizer will cover the costs of accommodation and meals. Additionally, partial reimbursement for travel expenses (up to approximately 100 euros) will be provided.

We invite you to submit your presentation proposals for the conference.