Borderlands. Ethnicity, Identity and Violence in the Shatter-Zone of Empires Since 1848

Veranstalter: Multi-year Research Project: „Borderlands: Ethnicity, Identity, and Violence in the Shatter Zone of Empires since 1848"
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Borderlands was a large scale interdisciplinary and international research project which began in 2003 with the purpose of exploring the origins and manifestations of ethnicity, identity, and inter-group violence in the borderlands regions of East Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, from the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century, through the Holocaust, and beyond. The project was centered at the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University in collaboration with the Institute for Global Studies at the University of Minnesota with additional cooperation from the Simon Dubnow Institute for Jewish Studies (SDI) at the University of Leipzig, Germany; the Borderlands Foundation (BF, „Pogranicze") in Sejny, Poland; the Institute for the History of the Present (Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent) in Paris, France; and Stanford University.

The Watson Center, the University of Minnesota Institute for Global Studies, and the Herder Institute jointly sponsored the final conference, which took place May 17-20, 2007, at the Herder Institute in Marburg, Germany. Participating were senior scholars as well as doctoral students from Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Croatia, Serbia, Ukraine, Israel, the United States, and Canada.

Dan Diner, professor of history at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and director of the Simon Dubnow Institute, opened the conference with a keynote address on „Modern Jewish History and Europe's Eastern Borderlands." Diner traced the changing legal status and social roles of Jews from the corporate structures of the early modern states through the rise of modern political and state structures in nineteenth century to the Holocaust as emblematic of the larger political and social transformations which took place from the eighteenth century to World War II.

The majority of the papers presented at the conference focused on episodes of ethnic violence during the twentieth century and analyzed problems of agency in ethnic conflict and violence and the influence and impact of government policies, competing ideologies, and popular beliefs. Regarding Tsarist Russia, Peter Holquist assessed the effects of changing national and international legal norms regarding ethnic minorities and minority questions during the half century before World War I, while Eric Lohr discussed current research on the causes and mechanisms for pogroms and other episodes of violence. Frithjof Benjamin Schenk offered new perspectives on Tsarist government efforts to consolidate its territories and assure security in ethnically diverse regions during the era of railroad construction.

Research on genocide and intergroup violence in East-Central Europe during World War II has greatly overshadowed study of World War I in recent years, but Christoph Mick, Alexander Prusin, and Kai Struve presented papers which offered significant new findings on major occurrences of ethnic violence and genocide in eastern Galicia and western Belarus during World War I and the years immediately following. All these papers demonstrated how since the early 1990s the opening of many archival collections and more wide-ranging public and scholarly debates over the war years has stimulated fresh, incisive research on ethnic violence. David Gaunt's paper examined local popular participation in the mass killings of Armenian and Assyrian populations in eastern Anatolia during World War I, drawing comparisons and contrasts with the participation of local populations in the extermination of Jews in East-Central Europe during World War II.

A number of papers presented at the conference analyzed the circumstances and mechanisms of genocide and other forms of intergroup violence during World War II. The large body of important new research on mass murder during the war in eastern Galicia, Volhynia, and Ukraine was well represented in papers by Karel Berkhoff, Marco Carynnyk, Johan Dietsch, Stephen Feinstein, Sofia Grachova, John-Paul Himka, Wilfried Jilge, and Piotr Wróbel. The complex and often controversial issues of historical memory regarding the war years in those territories drew particular attention in a number of papers. Berkhoff, Dietsch, Feinstein, Himka, Jilge, and Wróbel discussed with great insight how the legacy of official communist historical accounts, competing nationalist narratives, and competing victimologies continue to shape discussion, research, teaching, and even ar-

tistic representation of events during World War II in this region. Alexander Korb's paper, drawn from his dissertation project, highlighted the current status of research on the racial policies of Croatia's Ustaša government and how its complex relations with the Axis powers affected its policies toward minorities. Alexa Stiller's discussion of her dissertation research on the work of the Reichskommissariat für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums (RKFDV) in Western Poland, Alsace-Lorraine, and Slovenia stressed the leading role of the RKFDV in charting and carrying out Nazi racial policy in those territories. In contrast, the paper of Holly Case on Axis policies in the Transylvanian borderland during Word War II highlighted the ironies of the work of the German-Italian Officers' Commission to protect the rights of Hungarian and Romanian minorities in newly partitioned Transylvania.

Several of the papers presented at the conference analyzed relations among various ethnic groups in East-Central and Southeastern Europe over the longer term for the long nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These papers offered new insights on the development of citizenship, legal rights for ethnic groups, ideologies of nationalism, and loyalties to the state in the multinational empires before World War I. Fikret Adanir's richly detailed and nuanced paper traced the development of religious and national politics and government policies in Thrace and all of European Turkey from the 1850s to the aftermath of World War I, emphasizing how everyday social realities and government policies of religious and ethnic diversity gradually gave way to heightened nationalism and increasing pressures for cultural homogeneity. The examination of central state control in the Ottoman Empire's eastern provinces by Elke Hartmann elucidated the various efforts made under Sultan Abdul Hamid II to strengthen central control by adding new commissions and agencies. Eyal Ginio assessed the impact of the Balkan wars on the shifting and refocusing of Ottoman identities. Theofanis Stavrou cited the writings of Elias Venezis to show how the displaced Ionian Greeks constructed notions of their lost motherland and new homes.

The papers of Heidi Hein-Kircher and Gary Cohen examined relations between the Habsburg Monarchy's competing ethnic and national groups and various organs of the state. Hein-Kircher showed how the problems of religious and national coexistence and competition among the inhabitants of L'viv/Lvov/Lemberg became written into the city's system of local representation and voting during the second half of the nineteenth century despite the liberal Austrian constitutional provisions which did not recognize the nationalities as group political entities. Cohen's paper argued that citizens of Imperial Austria, despite the weakness or absence of an „Austrian" national identity, developed significant loyalties to the Austrian state as the source of important benefits and services, loyalties which nationalist politicians recognized and reaffirmed as most of them struggled to capture larger parts of the state for their own group benefit. Paul Hanebrink discussed how the multiple crises of the years just after World War I in Hungary saw the transformation of older Christian conservative traditions and the formation of a more militantly anti-liberal and anti-Semitic Christian nationalism among both Catholics and Protestants.

The conference concluded with summarizing statements from Omer Bartov, Peter Haslinger, and Eric Weitz, highlighting the important advances that were apparent in the papers with regard to research on ethnic group identification, evolving intergroup relations, government policies on ethnic diversity and minority rights, the origins and mechanisms of ethnic violence, and the historical memory of ethnic violence. Peter Haslinger pointed to the need for clarity in how the notion of borderland is used by scholars, whether in political, geographical, or cultural senses, and for sensitivity to the social and cultural ambiguities of people living in such zones, particularly the dynamic, contingent, and often ambiguous character of ethnic identification and ethnic differences. He also noted that the strong focus on studies of ethnic conflict and intergroup violence in the eras of World War I and World War II has meant that scholars have devoted much attention to political projects, or fantasies, of purification and the inhuman application of force under extraordinary circumstances. That emphasis in the scholarship, however valuable for achieving better understanding of the war years, leaves a need for more attention to developments and experience in the East-Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European borderlands during the post-war and post-holocaust eras.